
Franck Billé

Sinophobia

*Anxiety, Violence, and the
Making of Mongolian Identity*

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Introduction

In 2009, a video on YouTube went “viral” in Mongolia. It showed a young woman’s hair being shorn, a culpable-looking man sitting by her side, his head in his hands. The aim of the video, posted by the extreme nationalist group *Dayaar Mongol* (All Mongolia), was to publicly humiliate the young woman, who had allegedly had sexual relations with a Chinese man—presumably the man sitting next to her. While the video was extremely shocking for the majority of viewers, it did not come as a complete surprise. Over the previous couple of years, in a series of newspaper articles and press conferences, *Dayaar Mongol* had warned they would shave off the hair of any Mongolian woman found having sexual relations with foreign men (Jargal 2007)—though in practice the warnings specifically targeted Sino-Mongolian relations.

In recent years, Mongolian Sinophobic sentiments have been the subject of several articles published in international newspapers (see for instance Moxley 2009; Branigan 2010; Hamilton 2010; Song, Zhang, and Wang 2012; Genté 2013). Connections to other far-right movements across the postsocialist space have consistently been emphasized. As my argument makes explicit, these phenomena share more than a passing resemblance, and Mongolian xenophobic narratives are very much informed by notions directly traceable to the socialist period. But they are also a unique precipitate of particular histories and traditions. Thus, while countries such as Russia or Ukraine have seen the emergence of blanket xenophobia toward all kinds of (nonwhite) targets—including in fact Russian citizens from far eastern regions, such as Buryats—nationalist narratives in Mongolia have focused almost exclusively on China.

Making liberal use of photographs of swastikas (Branigan 2010) or Nazi uniforms (Moxley 2009), international press coverage has typically focused on violent, but fringe, nationalist discourse. Interpreted as symptomatic of broad feelings of marginalization and of enduring poverty, the rise in attacks against non-Mongols is commonly described as a new phenomenon. But these views are very reductive. Narratives inflected by Nazi symbolism and xenophobic speech focusing on genetic purity are certainly of recent origin, just as violent attacks against foreigners were practically unheard-of two decades ago. However, the discursive practices in which they are embedded have a much older genealogy. Anti-Chinese sentiments have pervaded Mongolian society for decades rather than years, and in fact go back to the late socialist period, if not earlier.

Similarly, if the causal link between anti-Chinese sentiments and the growing economic and political power of China is a reasonable assumption, it is in many ways an oversimplification. In 2007, when I carried out my field research, the concept of China's rise (or China's peaceful rise, *Zhongguo heping jueqi*) was starting to emerge but had not yet taken hold in Mongolia. The prevalent image of China at the time was still heavily inflected by socialist narratives. China was perceived—and in many ways still is—as socially and culturally backward, fundamentally at odds with modern Mongolian social and cultural values.

As I develop below, explanations offered by Mongols for the pervasive Sinophobic sentiments I met have been primarily historical rather than economic. These sentiments were unfailingly described to me as primordial and essentialist, quasi-biologically encoded. Interestingly, this was also the kind of reactions my inquiry elicited from non-Mongols when I began my research in 2004. The explanation for the emergence of ethnic conflicts throughout the former socialist block then prevalent in journalistic and academic circles was also grounded in history. For many analysts, ancient ethnic antagonisms, long suppressed by authoritarian governments, had merely been allowed to flare up again.

Six years later, economic explanations had firmly taken center stage. If they had not wholly supplanted historically grounded justifications, the growing economic disparities between a booming China and stagnant postsocialist peripheries were now seen as the prime engine driving ethnic hostilities. At this writing, yet new narratives are emerging. Following the discovery of vast gold–copper ore deposits in 2001 and the subsequent opening of the Oyu Tolgoi mine in the south Gobi, Mongolian anti-Chinese sentiments have increasingly been interpreted through the

prism of natural resources, extraction, and ecology. Dubbed “Minegolia” (HFW 2012), Mongolia is no longer peripheral to China’s rise. With its seemingly endless mineral resources—the world’s largest untapped coal deposits were discovered in Tavan Tolgoi, also in the south Gobi—its role has now become central. Hinting at the risks that Mongolia might become a mere resource appendage for China, an article in the *Economist* interprets these economic developments as a new source of anxiety for Mongols: “China provides a ready market, but the mining boom has exacerbated Mongolian fears of a Chinese takeover by commercial stealth” (“Mine, All Mine” 2012).

If these different historical, political, and economic factors bear on the discursive and structural violence directed at the Chinese, the continual recontextualization of xenophobic narratives over time underscores the inevitable limitations of “snapshot” ethnographies. While my own research is of course the product of a certain historical period, interviews were supplemented by material spanning the socialist and postsocialist periods. My aim was to look beyond immediate historical and economic aspects and to focus on the recurrent imagery and metaphors of depictions of the Chinese.

Thus the anti-Chinese rumors and stories described in this book weave together several aspects of the Sino-Mongolian interface. Some of these elements, such as mining and economics, are very much contemporary concerns, while others are distant echoes of older stories, plots, and menaces that have become sedimented into national histories. Yet despite their differences, a single thread runs through these various narratives. This thread, intimately concerned with the corporeal, also runs through my own narrative arc. In taking center stage in this study, this “archival body” (see Gopinath 2005) reveals the multitudinous ways in which anti-Chinese narratives remain intimately tied to the emergence of an urban corporeal modernity, to the destabilization of gender roles, and ultimately to the place of Mongols on the Euro-Asian social and ethnic continuum.

My central argument is that Sinophobia is intimately connected to Mongols’ desire to distance themselves from China and Asia as a whole, and that this ambition is problematic because Mongols appear, physically and “racially,” to be Asian. Mongolian national ideology eagerly stresses a lack of relatedness or even physical similarities between Mongols and the Chinese, so the fact that observable differences are largely cultural and contextual—focusing as they do on how people walk, dress, or speak—constitutes a strong anxiogenic factor. The spectral presence of China,

imagined to be everywhere and potentially in everyone, produces a climate of mistrust, suspicion, and paranoia. Sinophobia is thus less a discourse of resistance against the Chinese than against the Mongols' own temptation to actively engage with their southern neighbor. Indeed, as the chapters that follow clearly illustrate, while overtly about China, symbolic and discursive violence often targets Mongols themselves, most particularly women and queer subjects whose intimate aspirations directly challenge the prevailing values and ideological construction of Mongoliness predicated on absolute separation from Asia.

Encounters

I first went to Mongolia in 1998 as part of a Russian-language undergraduate degree at the University of Westminster in London. Nikita Mikhalkov's 1991 movie *Urga* having sparked a sudden interest in the country, I decided to go to Ulaanbaatar, rather than to Moscow, for the required semester of study abroad. My knowledge of Mongolia prior to this first visit was very limited and did not in fact extend much beyond the basic information provided by the Lonely Planet guidebook (Storey 1997). Of some concern to me was the mention that Russians were very unpopular in Mongolia and that some foreigners, unfortunate enough to look like Russians, had been attacked. While I was confident my Mediterranean origins would insulate me from such unwanted attention, the fact that Russian was the language I would be using to communicate with Mongols did worry me.

Fortunately, throughout my three-month stay, this issue never materialized. On the contrary, Mongols and Russians generally appeared to be on friendly terms, which seemed surprising given the Soviet Union's tight control over Mongolia throughout the seventy years of the socialist period, which had ended only eight years before. My surprise deepened when the Buryat family with whom I was staying recounted their suffering during the socialist era. "Many lamas and other important people were killed or sent to labor camps in Siberia," explained Bat, the twenty-six-year-old son. "In fact my grandfather also disappeared and was never heard from again. We Buryats suffered a lot during socialism."

Yet these accounts were not angry, and my conversations with Bat and others did not reveal the postsocialist resentment I had expected. Similarly, if the younger generation seemed less proficient in Russian than their elders, none of the people I interacted with seemed reluctant to use

Russian as a medium of communication. “Yes, Russians have made mistakes,” Bat told me, “but generally their presence was positive. They brought a lot of good things.”

In stark contrast to this serene and somewhat stoic attitude, a great deal of antipathy was directed at the Chinese. According to Bat, prior to the 1921 socialist revolution the Chinese had ruthlessly exploited the Mongols, charging enormous interest on loans and turning them into paupers. In fact, it was only thanks to Russian involvement that Mongolia had managed to gain and retain its independence. “Without them, Mongolia would now be part of China.” While he had calmly assessed Russian involvement in Mongolian affairs, his feelings about China were vigorous and brutal. “When Chingis Khan conquered China, we should have killed them all,” he argued. While other people I spoke to were not equally vociferous, anti-Chinese feelings seemed extremely widespread and surprisingly consistent. Others mentioned the same reasons for the Mongols’ hatred of their southern neighbor: the Chinese had exploited them and had never accepted Mongolia’s independence. It was only a matter of time before they tried to take it back.

This preliminary contact with Mongolia, starkly at odds with my expectations, aroused my interest even more. I could not fathom why the profound (and occasionally violent) political, social, and cultural transformations brought by the Soviets did not elicit the same anger as the allegedly unethical mercantile activities of the Chinese eighty years earlier. Why was there so much anger at the Chinese, who, after all, had never set out to shape Mongolian culture or undermine its cultural and religious traditions, and who were not making any political claims to Mongolia’s territory? And how had Mongols come to form such a coherent and uniform image of China when the two countries had been separate for so long, and when none of my interlocutors had visited China, knew Chinese people, or could speak the language?

It would be eight years before my second visit to Mongolia, but these unresolved questions planted the seed of the central theme of my research. Upon my return to Ulaanbaatar in September 2006, I found a far more cosmopolitan city. The streets of the capital, previously bare and empty, were now lined with foreign shops and restaurants, and jammed with imported cars. Hip-hop had become the predominant music style among the youth and was readily heard on the numerous local TV channels. Yet the anti-Chinese attitudes that I had witnessed on my first visit remained. Indeed, these sentiments suffused Mongolian society and

formed the theme of newspaper articles, urban legends, and rumors, as well as several very popular songs (see chapter 1). Anti-Chinese graffiti also dotted the urban landscape, violently calling for the removal (and sometimes murder) of Chinese people in Mongolia.

A Historical Issue?

If anti-Chinese sentiments are expressed in myriad ways in contemporary Mongolia, their rationalizations show a surprising coherence. Time and time again I heard that ultimately these negative feelings were the product of millennia of interaction between the two groups. As a result, Mongols had naturally evolved an innate antipathy for the Chinese: “it’s in the blood” (*tsusand baina*), I was routinely told. “We Mongols simply hate the Chinese.” Recognizing the pervasiveness of these sentiments, several Mongolists have also spoken of an unbridgeable divide in the traditional ways of life of the two ethnic groups (Lattimore 1962; Bulag 1998) and of “congenital suspicion” (Hyer 1978, 74).

I readily acknowledge the importance of history in shaping attitudes to neighbors and various Others. But all too often its weight proves to be strongly resistant to analysis and threatens to drag down the anthropologist with it. The preponderant role that ancient history is imagined to play in ethnic conflicts was cogently pointed out by Renata Salecl: “The media outdo one another in giving us lessons on the ethnic and religious background of the conflict; traumas hundreds of years old are being replayed and acted out, as if, in order to understand the roots of the conflict, one has to know not only the history of Yugoslavia but the entire history of the Balkans from mediaeval times” (1994, 13).

Such was the case whenever the issue of anti-Chinese sentiments was broached. I was consistently told that to understand the way Mongols relate to the Chinese, I needed to study the many hundred years of interaction between the two groups.

While the long history of antagonism between Mongolia and China undeniably colors much of their current relations, the ways in which this history is being taught and transmitted to subsequent generations deserves particular attention.¹ Centuries of warfare cannot, of themselves, account for present hostilities. If this were the case, we might expect even stronger anti-Mongolian sentiments among the Chinese, given that most of this historical violence has been directed against them.

It is also just as crucial not to assume an unbroken continuity between past and present enmity. My core argument is not that history does not matter, but that it is inherently fractured. Indeed, the more recent Mongolian history retraced here shows how dramatically Mongolian notions of identity, community, and belonging were transformed and recast over the course of the twentieth century. The seventy years (1921–1990) of the socialist era in particular, when political, social, and cultural life was deeply intertwined with Russia's, saw the internalization of Marxist ideas of progress and modernity, as well as many Russian cultural stereotypes concerning Asia. Contemporary Mongolian cultural and geopolitical views regarding China thus differ in fundamental ways from traditional, presocialist outlooks.

Part of this book's remit is also to challenge the limitations of functionalist explanations rooted in politics or economics. *Sinophobia* argues that the images of dirt and disease common in anti-Chinese narratives are not empty metaphors but are found at the core of the figure of China in the Mongolian national imaginary. In my analysis of the language of anti-Chinese speech, I focus on textual representations (such as newspapers, graffiti, songs, and films) but am also interested in the unsaid, in the beliefs and affects embedded in the texts. As such, this text is based as much on what was explicitly articulated (to me or to others) as on what was never said but expressed itself covertly or indirectly.

Anthropology places great onus on relating faithfully what informants have told us, indeed on quoting them at length verbatim. There is a widespread assumption that truth is found in vocal utterances, and that people mean what they say and say what they mean. But statements can be made for many reasons: they can be lies (Metcalf 2002), they can be politically motivated (including for reasons of political correctness), and they can also be cultural stock phrases employed at certain times but not reflected upon or consciously meant. The precedence of the spoken word means that we often pay too little attention to the unsaid (Billig 1999), as well as to nonvocalized utterances such as gestures, nods, gazes, winks, or smiles.

Yet the role of anthropology is not merely to reiterate what people tell us, but also to give voice to what “goes without saying” in a given culture, and to engage with it critically. Indeed, fusing ethnographic (“genuine”) voices with arcane theoretical knowledge constitutes one of the central dilemmas of anthropology. The general expectation remains that informants will recognize themselves in our texts; but this is not always

achievable given the analytic and highly interpretive nature of the discipline. This is especially the case with psychoanalytic theory, as used in this text, which by definition seeks to uncover particular mechanisms at work behind what is being stated explicitly.

In its narrative arc, *Sinophobia* speaks to several bodies of literature that span anthropology, history, social psychology, linguistics, and cultural studies. This vast literature is introduced piecemeal throughout the book in support of specific strands of the analysis. My argument is strongly inflected by Lacanian theory, most specifically by the Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis spearheaded by Slavoj Žižek (1989, 2005, 2008b), Mladen Dolar (1991), Renata Salecl (1994, 2004), and Alenka Zupančič (2003). It is therefore located in close dialogue with the work of Lacanian-minded anthropologists such as Henrietta Moore (2007) and Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002, 2012). It is particularly indebted to Marilyn Ivy's (1995) groundbreaking book *Discourses of the Vanishing*, whose focus on the anxieties and social dislocations produced by the emergence of modernity in Japan strongly resonates with my core argument. This book also engages with the work of other scholars of emotionality and affect, both in anthropology (Lutz 1988, 2002; Abu-Lughod 1990; Aretxaga 1995, 1999, 2003; Das 2000, 2001, 2007) and in cognate disciplines (Massumi 2002; Probyn 2000; Ngai 2005).

I argue that studies that seek to analyze highly volatile and emotional topics from the point of view of politics and socioeconomics cannot fully account for the violence that accompanies these processes. In contrast, psychoanalysis can usefully supplement anthropological analysis by bringing to the fore the mechanisms of subjectivity and affect that inform and shape national identities and allegiances. Indeed, the sentiments voiced by Mongols with respect to self and Others cannot be explicated by political structures and economic developments alone, without also taking into account the emotions and affect that are invested in them. Equally crucial is to understand how these notions then become embodied, practiced, and subverted.

Another important issue concerns representativeness. In their attempt to provide a description of the field, ethnographies inevitably tend to flatten the multivocality inherent to any culture to make it audible and graspable. Despite my best attempts, this criticism may be applicable to this text as well, insofar as it homogenizes the multitudinous discourses that are heard in Mongolia. This, unfortunately, is the outcome of producing a coherent description, lest polyphony turn into cacophony. Indeed, it is

arguable whether any ethnography can make a claim to representativeness. Any reference to that phantom collective called “most people” (Cooper 2007, 135) is essentially an illusion since no single model of the person ever exists. Nonetheless, as Henrietta Moore (1994) has noted, although discourses are often multiple and coexist side by side, some dominate over others. Thus “in the case of discourses on the person and the self, what appear as dominant models may actually turn out to be relatively divorced from everyday life and experience” (Moore 1994, 136). This is particularly visible in urban Mongols’ conceptualizations of a Mongolianness defined by nomadic traditions and life on the steppe.

Mongolian writer Erdembileg (2007, 36) has argued that the image of China has consistently been used as a political tool for scaring the Mongolian population into obedience. He gives as examples the inflated numbers of Chinese men rumored to be working illegally in Mongolia or the Mongolian government’s political use of the “China threat” specter. While this explanation is somewhat functionalist and does not account for the readiness of most Mongols to engage with it, it does speak to the power differential between social groups. Indeed, as I develop in this book, Russian-educated elites and academics have had a preponderant role in the formation and circulation of the images and stereotypes of China currently prevalent in contemporary Mongolia. Differences between intellectuals and workers, men and women, or young and old do exist; nonetheless, the figure of China in contemporary Mongolia forms a very consistent and coherent image. It is to such a dominant model, or “master narrative,” that I refer with the term “ideology.” Some scholars prefer to use this term in the plural, to account for the many competing worldviews that inevitably coexist side by side. However, not all these views have the same import and resonance. Using ideology in the singular emphasizes the prevalence and force of the Mongols’ antipathy toward China, as well as its resistance to change. If, as I illustrate in chapter 7, not all Mongols relate in the same way to this fear and hatred of China, not all forms of resistance materialize as ideologies.

The seven chapters explore various intersections of the Sino-Mongolian interface, focusing in particular on excess and corporeality, which are recurrent themes in anti-Chinese speech. The interrelated yet different vantage point of each chapter reflects the multiplicity of contexts in which these voices find expression, as well as my own explorations. Indeed, the path followed by a researcher is rarely as clear and defined as it appears in the final text. The numerous questions, doubts, backtrackings, chance

meetings, and occurrences, which in so many ways define the course and trajectory of the research, fade into the background to present a linear, thought-out process. Similarly, the process of making sense of the heterogeneous data collected was both lengthy and occasionally overwhelming. This final text represents in this sense the outcome of this circuitous progression.

The book opens with an overview of the numerous narratives heard in contemporary Mongolia and of the discursive violence commonly attached to them. If the neo-Nazi violence showcased in media reports does not represent Mongolian attitudes, it is not wholly divorced from daily practices either. Drawing a distinction between “extreme” and “mainstream” Mongolian politics turns acts of violence into peripheral and abnormal phenomena that can be overlooked. By contrast, a focus on the very multiplicity of anti-Chinese discourse—including injurious speech but also rumors and complicit silences—foregrounds the narrative arc into which isolated acts of violence then become embedded and comprehensible.

If Sinophobia—understood as the intersection of fear *and* hatred of China—is currently imagined to be hundreds of years old, I suggest on the contrary that it is largely the outcome of a lack of contact and knowledge, and that its dynamics are intricately enmeshed with the emergence of modernity. Using a Lacanian interpretation, I argue in chapter 2 that the figure of China in contemporary Mongolian culture acts in fact as a catchall category for ideas about Asia as a whole. Narratives may be overtly about China, but they in fact relate to an idea of China that stands as synecdoche for Asia as a whole. Thus narratives against the Chinese frequently extend seamlessly to other Asian groups such as the Koreans or the Japanese, who come to be described as “Chinese-like.”

As I illustrate in chapter 3, the Mongols’ visions of China qua Asia echo to a large extent stereotypes of “the Oriental” in European culture, suggesting that many of the preceding socialist and Russian narratives have been internalized and are now routinely projected onto previous incarnations of self, as well as onto Asian Others. In socialist political culture, Asia was coded as feudal, backward, and immobile while ideas of progress were associated with European intellectual culture; as such, Asian elements within Mongolian culture have regularly been perceived with considerable ambivalence. The continued existence of Mongolia as a modern polity has thus remained contingent on an alignment on Western ideals and on vehemently expunging all cultural associations with Asia.

Traditional aspects of Mongolian culture that differ from both Asian practices and Western modernity are examined in chapter 4, where I focus on contemporary imaginings of autochthonous culture, and particularly on the disconnect between its urban and rural forms. Urban Mongols' conceptualizations of traditional life on the steppe illustrate the inherent tension in contemporary Mongolian culture between, on the one hand, a form of modernity closely aligned on European models, and, on the other, the idealized countryside as both repository of genuine Mongolianness and undeveloped backwater.

The complex history of the socialist period, when new techniques such as medical and hygienic practices were introduced to Mongols, forms the backbone of chapter 5. The processes whereby new sartorial, medical, or hygienic practices came to be seen as benchmarks of modernity highlight the Mongols' gradual internalization of many—though not all—Russian values and subsequent projection onto other Asian groups. To a degree this transformation replicated the manner in which Russia had sought to demarcate itself from its own internal Asianness (Lukin 2003; Tsygankov 2009). The relationship between Russia and Mongolia has thus not been simply a matter of Westernization but a more complex negotiation process within a broader East-West spectrum.

Taking some distance from the overt claims and statements of anti-Chinese speech, the two final chapters explore the role of Sinophobia as a vector for ideas of modernity as well as a sense of *communitas*. I suggest that Sinophobia essentially constitutes an intraethnic discourse, acting in fact as a cipher for an excess of Asianness in the Mongols themselves. Chapter 6 examines the force of this anti-Chinese discourse as a policing tool. Despite the considerable discursive violence against the Chinese in the media, I show that the actual victims of this violence are largely the Mongols themselves. Chapter 7, with its ethnographic focus on people at the margin, illustrates the continual violence inflicted upon those “bad subjects” who do not align with socially sanctioned desires and behaviors. These voices, which find themselves at variance with dominant narratives, importantly point to the existence of a multivocality not easily expressed in the dominant media.

Methodology

When it came to selecting a field site to carry out my research, Ulaanbaatar seemed the natural choice. I briefly considered going to Zamyn Üüd, a

Mongolian town at the border with China, in order to observe Sino-Mongolian interaction closely, but finally decided against it since all border trade with China is carried out at Ereen (Ch. Erlian 二连), a couple of miles away from Zamyn Üüd on the Chinese side. Another critical factor in my decision was the position of Ulaanbaatar as central symbol of national autonomy and independence. As the capital city, the seat of government and where close to half of the country's population resides, Ulaanbaatar is home to about 200 Chinese families,² and many more Chinese citizens pass through as businessmen, language teachers, or construction workers. In practical terms, Ulaanbaatar is also where the majority of newspapers are published and are easily available. This was crucial for my research as it focused on monitoring the types of discourse that circulate in the national media about the Chinese.

Clearly, the fact that my research was carried out in an urban setting, among informants who were predominantly urban themselves, had a formative bearing on the types of discourse about Self and Other that are related here. The descriptions of "traditional culture as it is found in the countryside" that I was given are largely urban constructs and, as such, do not necessarily reflect the reality of life on the steppe. Nonetheless, the predominance of the urban over the rural in this book does reflect the power exerted by Ulaanbaatarites in shaping national ideas about both Mongolianness and Chineseness.

My research methodology essentially adhered to the participant observation method pioneered by Malinowski, yet significantly departed from conventional anthropological methods. I discovered early on that direct interviews were not suited to collecting information on how Mongols related to the Chinese. Interviewees remained guarded and self-conscious, uneasy about voicing sentiments they perceived as negative and ugly. Opinions were modulated for political correctness and were also frequently projected onto the Mongols as a group. Thus people hardly ever used the first person singular to voice anti-Chinese sentiments but claimed that "Mongols" hated the Chinese or that "Mongols" believed that China wanted to take over the country.

The very focus of my research, sentiments and affect, undeniably made the use of interviews difficult and poorly suited to my objectives. Feelings are not defined through facts and statements. They are experienced as very real but are highly contingent and variable. They emerge violently in response to certain stimuli, become sedimented or fade away, and can be elicited and mimicked. For this reason, attempts at getting to the "truth"

of sentiments through interviews were invariably doomed. I found it preferable to focus on observation of the multiple ways in which these affects found unmediated expression in public discourse. In this sense, the media represented an entextualization of anti-Chinese sentiments that, as affect, were by nature fleeting and transitory.

During my one-year stay in Ulaanbaatar, I read a wide selection of newspapers daily. I bought all the “respected” publications such as *Önөөдөр*, *Niigmiin Tol*, *Öдрийн Сонин*, and *Үнен*, but also the tabloids or “yellow press” (*shar sonin*) such as *Mash Nuuts*, whose approach was often more direct and argumentative. The media I monitored in the course of my research included other cultural modes of expression such as films, graffiti, songs, and music videos. The ways in which Mongols both created and received these messages were far more instructive than interviews had been, and I found Mongols generally forthcoming and candid in these forums, insofar as such media are frequently imagined to be intraethnic. Indeed, the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) that is addressed through newspapers rarely extends to foreigners; it is a public sphere but not an international one.³ This is particularly true when the exchange takes place in a language such as Mongolian with limited reach beyond the national borders. As such, what is said in Mongolian frequently differs (in tonality if not in essence) from what is expressed in Russian or English to foreign audiences. But while articles in the Mongolian-language press were less modulated by political correctness, many stories were also relayed through cultural narratives and metaphoric constellations that were not always immediately evident to outsiders. For this reason, the importance of having a cultural translator drawing my attention to the many signs, connotations, and silences not readily decoded by a non-Mongol was paramount. In this, I was very fortunate in having an excellent research assistant who was both culturally competent and attuned to these covert messages and metaphors. Otgonhüü was very interested in my project and frequently drew my attention to an article or a TV program. She also had a knack for putting people immediately at ease and was very skilled at steering conversations with informants in fertile directions.

If interviews focusing specifically on sentiments about the Chinese were largely unproductive and abandoned early on, we nonetheless carried out a number of “indirect” interviews on particular aspects tangentially related to my main theme, such as education, medicine, or prostitution. This approach enabled me to gain insight into numerous practices at

odds with mainstream narratives, while covering a wide spectrum of ages, occupations, genders, ethnic groups, and education levels. Overtly, the themes of these interviews were not about the Chinese, but opinions and thoughts about them could generally be teased out fairly effortlessly. In fact, the data obtained through such interviews frequently differed from popular opinions, highlighting the multivocal dimension of anti-Chinese discourse as well as the numerous discrepancies between discourse and practice.

The people interviewed in the course of my research, whether on my own or in Otgonhüü's presence,⁴ are occasionally referred to as informants, though I avoid this term whenever possible. I share with Metcalf a certain uneasiness in using a term that both lacks precision and posits the respondent as resource. As he convincingly argues, "So bland a word has always made ethnographers uneasy; it sweeps far too much under the rug. This is problem enough, but, as it happens, the accident of a shared Latin root causes another: the unsettling confusion between our good-natured informant, cheerfully helping science forward, and the sinister figure of the informer" (Metcalf 2002, 43).

In the rare instances when this term was employed, it was in association with the word "friend," with the explicit aim of challenging the emotional detachment exhibited by social scientists keen to appear "objective" and professional. Long-term residence inevitably creates emotional ties and connections that, I believe, are essential to making good ethnographies. Some of the people I encountered in the field became good friends. They formed a vital support network and shared their views and knowledge with me. To protect their anonymity as well as that of other people I spoke to, all names have been changed. The only exception is for Otgonhüü, who is happy for me to use her real name. In a few cases, I created composite characters when background information provided through vignettes would have made it easy to guess an individual's identity. This was important in the case of the gay men I interviewed, for whom anonymity was vital.

While the principal language of my research has been Mongolian, I also occasionally used other languages, particularly in the initial stage, when my knowledge of Mongolian was too basic to conduct conversations. For the first couple of months of my fieldwork I lived with Bolor and her mother, in the Thirteenth District. I had met Bolor the previous year when we both studied Chinese at the Inner Mongolia University (Neimenggu Daxue) in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia. When she heard I was

going to be living in Ulaanbaatar for a year, she kindly suggested I stay with her until I find alternative accommodations. This made things very easy for me—too easy, in fact. Because Bolor spent the first fifteen years of her life in Tuva, she speaks fluent Russian, as does her mother. As a result, we always conversed in Russian, something that was certainly helpful initially to find my bearings but which soon proved to be a handicap in acquiring Mongolian. I therefore decided to move to an apartment in the center of the city and to try to mix with monolingual Mongols as much as possible.

If doing fieldwork in a capital city where a large number of people are conversant in foreign languages can pose difficulties for learning the local language, it can also have practical advantages. It gave me the opportunity to start conversing with people and collecting data from the very outset, before acquiring sufficient Mongolian to be socially functional. Anthropology insists on learning the language of one's interlocutors, and for good reason. Being able to understand one's informants without resorting to translators or linguistic intermediaries is essential for preserving the authenticity of the message relayed. But what if these interlocutors have more than one language?

As a cosmopolitan capital city, Ulaanbaatar has many bilingual residents. In fact, most well-educated Mongols over the age of forty-five usually speak excellent Russian and are often equally at ease in both Mongolian and Russian. When talking to these individuals, I felt it made more sense to converse freely in Russian than to use my halting Mongolian or to use a translator. A similar situation occurred with Batsaihan, whom I met in the first weeks of my stay through a common acquaintance living in Höhhot. Initially, all our conversations were in Chinese, but they gradually included more and more Mongolian as my knowledge of the language improved. By the end of my fieldwork, we usually conversed in a mixture of Chinese and Mongolian, switching from one to the other depending on who else was with us, which word came to mind first, or, in my case, gaps in linguistic knowledge.

Using three languages to carry out my research has meant having to use three different transcription systems in the text, from Mongolian, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese. For Chinese, I adhered to the pinyin spelling system. I haven't indicated the tones, but the ideographic form used in the People's Republic of China, that is, in their "simplified form" (*jianti hanzi* 简体汉字), is occasionally given as well, particularly in case of homophony.

For Russian and Mongolian, two transcription systems were used, despite the common alphabet shared by these languages. For Russian, the ALA-LC (American Library Association and Library of Congress) system was adhered to, since it is the most commonly used transliteration method. This system sometimes includes a number of diacritics as well as two-letter tie characters, such as ĩ or $\widehat{\text{ia}}$ (for letters й and я respectively), but for reasons of legibility and simplicity I decided to omit them.

For Mongolian, no standard transliteration system exists. While French and German scholars frequently use a Slavic-based system for transcribing Mongolian, using a caron to transcribe sounds such as sh (š), ch (č), or zh (ž), British and American scholars tend to favor a system with fewer diacritics. Since this is the system that Mongol scholars also predominantly use, I have followed the latter.

Acronyms and Mongolian words such as *erliiz*, *bichig*, or *höb tolbo* that reoccur throughout the book are only translated when they are first introduced. A short glossary is also provided. Finally, unless otherwise specified, all translations given are mine, for the three principal languages of research as well as for all other sources in French, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, German, Italian, and Hungarian.

Coda

The danger as seen in this discourse was not of a heroic confrontation with a masculine other, but that the feminine other would completely dissolve the masculine self of the Sikh. “With such an enemy,” said one warning, “even your story will be wiped out from the face of the earth.”

Veena Das, *Life and Words*

In the spring of 2010, my friend Otgonhüü came to the United Kingdom to visit her brother who lives and works in London. As we chatted over coffee one afternoon, she recounted to me a family incident that had occurred a few days earlier. Her five-year-old nephew had come back from school and told his parents someone had called him Chinese. Very upset, he had proudly responded that he was not Chinese, he was Mongolian! Otgonhüü had been somewhat surprised by the force of her nephew’s reaction. “My brother and his wife haven’t taught him to think badly of the Chinese, so I’m not sure where he picked this up. Maybe it’s true—maybe Mongols do have these anti-Chinese feelings in the blood!” She smiled. Although she was being facetious, her comments articulated the widespread opinion among Mongols that having such feelings about the Chinese is an essential attribute, indeed is constitutive, of what it means to be a Mongol.

While the idea that such national sentiments are innate (to the extent that they precede socialization) is highly contentious, it runs parallel to Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. If, as discussed in chapter 2, individuation is contingent on linguistic acquisition, language nonetheless precedes the individual insofar as a child already has available the verbal and cultural building blocks necessary to socialization even before she is able to express herself (Fink 1995; Chiesa 2007). A child does not need to receive formal instruction to internalize the particular values that are central to a given group or community; indeed, knowledge is also imparted through discursive mechanisms, including corporeal language but also silences (Billig 1999, 261). According to Billig (1997, 139–140), phenomena that traditional psychological theories have treated as “inner pro-

cesses” emerge in fact through social and discursive activity. In this sense, Sinophobia can be said to indeed precede the Mongolian subject.

I have argued that one of the principal factors facilitating the prevalence of Sinophobia in contemporary Mongolia is a profound lack of knowledge about China. Indeed, from the late 1930s up until 1990, Mongols had virtually no contact with their southern neighbor. Since the advent of the “age of the market” (*zah zeeliin üye*), Mongols have resumed cultural and commercial exchanges with China, and they have increasingly been studying Chinese as well. Indeed, if Russian schools remain popular in the capital, Chinese is rapidly gaining ground and looks set to supplant Russian soon as second most popular foreign language after English.¹ It seems likely that these increased contacts and greater knowledge of China will have an enduring impact on the ways in which Mongols relate to the Chinese, thereby challenging some of the existing stereotypes. Indeed, these schools not only teach in a different language, they also teach Chinese history and culture, thus imparting to pupils a specific worldview. While throughout the socialist period the Soviet view was the only one available, education in postsocialist Mongolia is no longer univocal.

In a fascinating article on the evangelical Christian Crusade apology movement, Nick Megoran (2010) has pointed out the capacity of extended contacts to challenge existing stereotypes and to promote peaceful coexistence between groups. He shows in particular how “being there” can have a transformative effect and create a very real possibility for peace. His argument finds a certain resonance in Mongolia. Data obtained through interviews suggest that poorer Mongols with limited direct experience of China tend to remain staunchly anti-Chinese, while affluent Mongols who travel extensively to destinations such as Shanghai or Singapore make anti-Chinese comments far less frequently. Nonetheless, the ideas that circulated throughout the socialist period, namely the assumption that China has imperialistic designs on Mongolia, have proved highly resistant.

I argued earlier that contemporary Mongolianness is contingent on the expulsion of all cultural associations with Asia, insofar as modernity is conceptualized as coextensive with the West. Mongolianness is thus defined in terms of what it stands for, as much as by what it has relinquished, and this is crucial for understanding the central place that the figure of China consistently plays in Mongolian national narratives. However, the excess of emotion (see Navaro-Yashin 2002, 201) as well as the occasional

violence that suffuses national attachments, cannot be attributed solely to manipulation by elites, even if it does constitute an important factor. What must be acknowledged, argues Salecl, “is that the people cannot be deceived unless they *want to be deceived*, unless they articulate their desire in this deception” (1994, 63; emphasis in the original).

This link between ideology and personal experience is cogently addressed by Žižek (1989) in the context of Nazi Germany. He argues that the existence of friendly Jewish neighbors did not threaten a Nazi ideology that depicted the Jews as evil incarnate: “an ideology is really ‘holding us’ only when we do not feel any opposition between it and reality—that is, when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience of reality itself” (Žižek 1989, 49). Indeed, the very discrepancy between ideology and direct experience becomes constitutive of anti-Semitism: the friendly face turns into a mask of deceit and treachery, and this duplicity comes to constitute a fundamental characteristic of the Other.

In a similar way, what my data suggest is that new experiences of China tend to be apprehended by Mongols through an existing interpretive prism. My many discussions with Mongolian students studying at the University of Inner Mongolia (Neimenggu Daxue) in Höhhot revealed the enduring impact of this socialization. In spite of extended daily contact with Chinese people, sometimes for several years, as well as a good command of the language and cultural mores, friendly attitudes were consistently perceived as symptomatic of a general propensity for duplicity and treachery.

This particular reluctance to relinquish certain beliefs in order to accommodate new experiential data was initially studied by social psychologist Leon Festinger. In *When Prophecy Fails*, a book published in 1956, he introduced the concept of “cognitive dissonance,” which he defined as the unnerving coexistence of incompatible sets of beliefs. He argued that individuals possess a strong motivational drive to reduce this dissonance and that they would rather retrofit and tweak existing beliefs than abandon them altogether. Curious about what would happen to an individual’s beliefs if they happened to be proved wrong, he carried out an ethnographic study of a group who believed the end of the world was imminent. Given the emotional investment of the members of this group, some of whom had left their jobs and given away all their earthly possessions, Festinger surmised, correctly as it turned out, that the failure of the prophecy would not lead to the abandonment of the beliefs but on the

contrary to their reinforcement (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 2008 [1956]; see also Cooper 2007).

The theory of cognitive dissonance may be useful here to understand Mongols' formulaic statements about China's "evil designs" on the country. As discussed in chapter 1, part of the power exerted by Moscow during the socialist period was rationalized as defense against China. As an employee of the Russian embassy told me in an interview (August 8, 2007), "We [Russians] often reminded Mongols that it was thanks to Russia that Mongolia was able to retain its independence. Without Russia, Mongolia would now certainly be part of China." This statement was important as it reiterated verbatim what I had heard from Mongols throughout my fieldwork. Indeed, the Soviet doctrine of "the lesser evil" appears to have greatly facilitated the cultural and social transformation during the socialist period, as well as the acceptance of, indeed the request for, Russian military presence in Mongolia. Yet when Soviet troops left the country and Mongolia no longer benefited from Russian protection, the impending threat failed to materialize.

Paralleling the case described by Festinger, it would appear that the lack of a Chinese takeover of Mongolia led to the emergence of a state of cognitive dissonance. The notion that China had designs on the country, which had motivated Russian presence for decades, could not be easily relinquished. As a result, Chinese activities in the postsocialist period have tended to be interpreted in ways coherent with these beliefs. Thus the foreign aid and soft loans from China are consistently construed as a symptom of long-term political designs on the country and of attempts at "spontaneous sinicization" (*ayandaa hyatadchlah*, Iderhangai 2007), in stark contrast to the aid offered by Russia or the European Union, which is generally perceived as a sign of goodwill. Although cognitive dissonance can of course also be alleviated by abandoning previously held beliefs, this can prove difficult when the emotional investment is high. As Serge Moscovici (1987, 163) has noted in this regard, "the fact that one rejects every opposing argument and is impervious to evidence, indicates that the bias is based on profound affects, deeply rooted in the past of the individual and of the group."

The persistence of anti-Chinese sentiments also constitutes a factor of social stability insofar as the loss of the enemy threatens the very mirroring relationship between "friend" and "foe" and, more importantly, between "self" and "other." Based on projective identifications and repudiations, this stability is paramount. As an example of such a collapse, Kenneth

Reinhard (2005, 17) mentions post-Cold War America, a country “desperately unsure about both its enemies and its friends, and hence deeply uncertain about itself.” If, as I argued in this book, Mongolia’s existence remains contingent on absolute separation from China, it is no less dependent on the continued existence of China itself. The notion of *ressentiment* against a historical injury on which contemporary Mongolianness largely articulates (see chapter 1) is reactive by its very nature; as a result, it “needs a hostile external world in order to exist at all” (Brown 1995, 44).

A second and equally important component of this continued hostility is what Lacan has referred to as “enjoyment” or *jouissance*. Noting that, despite interpretation, the symptom failed to dissolve itself, he argued that the subject comes to enjoy his symptom and that this very symptom becomes “what distinguishes him from others, what gives him meaning and consistency in life” (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 160). I drew attention to this particular aspect of anti-Chinese discourse in chapter 6, where I underlined the participative dimension of rumors and the capacity of “hate speech” in eliciting a sense of belonging and *communitas*. But *jouissance* is also visible in the ways in which Mongols imagine their country to constitute an irresistible lure for foreigners, notably for the Chinese. The narratives of attempted poisoning, ruthless extractive practices, or dilution of the Mongolian gene pool coalesce into the idea that Mongolia is a country possessing unique characteristics worth preserving and fighting for. As well as eliciting a sense of collective narcissism, it turns Mongols into survivors and heroes, capable of resisting and overcoming the various threats originating from China.

Anti-Chinese speech is also heavily gendered insofar as Mongolian women, invariably described as tall, slender, and good looking, are perceived to be especially vulnerable and requiring male protection. Indeed, anti-Chinese rhetoric appears to be tied to specific masculine roles, and ideas of patriotism are melded to the defense of the nation and womanhood through bodily strength, the ability to fight, or the (over)consumption of alcohol. While this association is not limited to Mongolia, it has a particular resonance in Mongolian society where hypermasculinity enjoys high social capital. This gendered dimension should not be construed however as simply an oppression of Mongolian women by Mongolian men. Even if many Mongolian women are indeed subject to domestic violence, it would be overly facile to imagine all of them to be victims of patriarchal authority and, conversely, to think of all men as oppressors. In interviews and conversations, Mongolian women frequently vocalized a

noted preference for specific traits such as assertiveness, bodily strength, and muscularity in romantic and sexual partners, suggesting that ideals of masculinity are not just a matter of interest to men.

More importantly, gendered aspects of the Sino-Mongolian interface also come into play at the national level, insofar as China's threat tends to be coded as feminine, while the responses it elicits are essentially male. Thus the hortatory messages discussed in chapter 6, warning Mongols to remain aware of the seductive appeal of the "Chinese who call you 'my good friend,'" exhort their audience to engage in acts of violence. In response to the soft female embrace of China, always threatening to swallow the country into oblivion, Mongolia's existence remains dependent on forceful separation, or more precisely, *excorporation*. Despite the widespread tendency to conceptualize it as a breakdown in relations, violence can instead be seen as seeking to produce difference (see chapter 6; Harrison 1989, 584). In this sense, the Mongols' discursive violence against China constitutes essentially a show of force: not a response to Chinese acts of violence but, rather, resistance against a quotidian inexorable peace.

Chapter 7 sought to highlight dimensions of the Sino-Mongolian interface that are not easily vocalized and are frequently suppressed from mainstream discourse. But while some groups, such as women or gay men, tend to position themselves differently from the majority, it is important to bear in mind that this majority is essentially a construct and that individuals cannot be neatly divided into opposing factions. Rather than attempting to separate Mongolian society into gradations of attitudes toward China, it may be more productive to appeal to Naomi Zack's (1995) notion of microdiversity. While her use of the term refers specifically to the reality of racial difference within single individuals (Zack 1995, ix), the concept can be fruitfully applied to other contexts as well. Thus negative perceptions of the Chinese were also audible in informants holding liberal views, while, conversely, declarations by staunchly anti-Chinese informants were often laced with concerns about China's seductive potential.

In fact, the multitudinous cultural practices outlined in the book consistently undercut and complicate the seemingly linear and formulaic arguments overtly put forward by Mongols. Thus in spite of vociferous claims of similarity with the West with regard to physical constitution or outspokenness, many cultural features anchor Mongolia firmly in the "East." The medical practices discussed in chapter 5, but also Mongolian cultural traits such as respect for the elderly or the centrality of kin-based

networks, are pivotal features of the societies of China and Japan, but do not rank particularly high in contemporary Western communities. Preliminary observations also suggest that Mongols residing in Europe and America tend to gravitate toward Mongolian-based communities but also frequently form friendships with other Asians rather than Europeans. This apparent incoherence with their professed cultural and emotional allegiances to the West recalls some of the disparities noted earlier between discourse and practice, notably the popularity of Chinese restaurants despite the negative rumors circulating about these establishments.

In a Chinese article published online in June 2008, interviews with Inner Mongolian volunteers, most of them Chinese language teachers, underscored the many dangers faced by Chinese residents working in Ulaanbaatar (“Zai Mengguguo de jianwen” 2008). While for female staff the situation was still relatively safe, male teachers reported a great deal of provocation (*tiaoxin* 挑衅) from the locals. As a result, many of them indicated they did not dare venture outside after dark and that they preferred to remain within the safe confines of the school perimeter. However, the multiplicities inherent to Mongolian society also revealed a significant slippage between discourse and practice, as well as unexpected bonds of friendship and acts of solidarity:

[My informants] related one thing that had really touched them, following the Sichuan earthquake [in May 2008]. They had thought, deep down, that the Mongols wouldn’t care. However, as it turned out, they were surprised to see so many Mongols coming to the [Chinese] consulate every day to express their sympathy and to make donations. An elderly Mongol entered the consulate and, having located Sichuan on the map that hung on the wall, immediately knelt to the ground. (“Zai Mengguguo de jianwen” 2008)

These voices, acts, and behaviors are important insofar as they demarcate the limitations of anti-Chinese speech. Though not always easily expressible in the current context, acts of solidarity reveal the multitudinous and polyphonic nature of sentiments toward the Chinese. The above quote represents in this sense an excellent illustration of the many practices that fracture the apparent cohesiveness and formulaic nature of anti-Chinese speech. It also opens a window onto the many positive bonds and interactions that exist between the two groups and, as such, represents a fitting and hopeful concluding note.

Notes

Introduction

1. Just as important is to examine state technologies of forgetting and their implementation (Buyandelger 2013, 69).

2. The exact number of Chinese residents in Mongolia is difficult to establish, as some long-term residents have taken on Mongolian citizenship but continue to be perceived as Chinese. Many Chinese are suspected to be living in Mongolia illegally, and newspaper reports of the numbers of Chinese citizens present tend to reflect these fears.

3. Mongolian news items in the English-language press (such as the *Mongol Messenger*) offered a perspective that frequently contrasted with articles published in Mongolian.

4. In one instance, Otgonhüü also met an informant on her own. The interviewee was a young sex worker in one of Ulaanbaatar's saunas. She was willing to speak with Otgonhüü about her experience but reluctant to speak to a male researcher.

Chapter 1 Rumors, Anxiety, Violence

1. A Chinese commercial firm from Shanxi Province boasted 300 years of uninterrupted presence in Urga (Ma 1949 [1932], 74).

2. Presocialist Mongolian society was very religious, and a large number of men were lamas. Numbers have been consistently exaggerated by socialist sources, with Maiskii (1921, 127), for instance, reporting a total of 50 percent of the male population. In reality less than a fifth of those (i.e., 7 percent of the population) were monastic lamas. The remainder—the lay lamas—lived like the average Mongol and usually married (Murphy 1966, 42).

3. In the first years following the October Revolution, the Soviet government was openly critical of prerevolutionary Russian practices that had oppressed non-Russian minorities, in what was termed by Lenin the “prison of the peoples” (*tyur'ma narodov*). However, a shift was witnessed in 1937 when the doctrine of “the lesser evil”

(*men'shee zlo*) was propagated. Essentially the doctrine recognized that prerevolutionary contact between Russians and minorities had not been wholly positive, but argued that it had been far preferable to its alternatives, that is, China in the case of Mongolia, and Britain or the Islamic world in Central Asia (see Wheeler 1960, 41–42).

4. The trends and concerns identified in this chapter remain very much current as the book goes to press.

5. These fears have in fact long “derailed” the construction of a railway linking Oyuu Tolgoi, the largest mine in southern Mongolia, to China, merely fifty miles away. Instead, public opinion put pressure on the government to build a railway line that would connect the mine to Russia, 700 miles away.

6. Also called a yurt, the *ger* is the traditional felt-covered tent of the Mongols and other central Asian peoples.

7. “Ninja” is the local name given to Mongols who carry out illegal mining activities. The term is said to have emerged as a facetious comment on the green plastic pans they carry on their backs, reminiscent of the Japanese cartoon characters Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

8. While for example stories about poisoned (*hortoi*) or bad-quality (*chanargüi*) fruit and vegetables were a recurrent theme in newspapers and the media throughout my time in Mongolia, I never came across rumors about Chinese milk. On the contrary, Mengniu (蒙牛, commercialized as Mönmilk in Mongolia) was a very popular brand, more widely available than its local counterparts (see Billé 2009a). The image of Chinese milk was later tarnished following the milk scandal that affected Inner Mongolia’s two dairy giants, Mengniu and Yili, in September 2008.

9. Children of prostitutes, with unknown fathers, were called *zolbin* (strays).

10. The concept of *hürliiz* is very blurry for many Mongols. Bolor, half Mongolian and half Tuvan, was told by a classmate that she was a *hürliiz* because she was mixed with another Asian group. Like her classmate, she wasn’t quite sure what a *hürliiz* actually was and had to look it up.

11. This concerns essentially the Halh, the main ethnic group in Mongolia, and is not necessarily true of all Mongols, such as the Buryats (Humphrey, personal communication 2008).

12. My use of the word “girl” rather than “woman” is intentional; it reflects a Mongolian preference of the terms *ohin* and *hüüben* over *emegtei* in such contexts, emphasizing a position of victim articulating on youth (see Bulag 1998, 145).

13. When I read about the group’s press conference in the papers, I immediately recalled stories of France’s liberation in 1945, when French women guilty of having had sexual relations with German soldiers were publicly tattooed and had their hair shorn. Byambatulga, stand-in leader of Dayaar Mongol (the leader, Enhbat, is serving a jail sentence for murder) confirmed the connection.

14. In the 1990s, a research project carried out in the Gobi by a Japanese professor from Shiga University caused the emergence of the rumor that ground was being prepared for Japanese resettlement (Bulag, personal communication 2010).

15. The Vietnamese occupy a very specific niche as car mechanics. Said to be the best ones in town (Otgonjargal 2007), they are found in the northeast of Ulaanbaatar, where they provide car parts and repair services.

16. Recently the Japanese appear to have indeed lost their comparatively advantageous position after Dolgorsürengiin Dagvadorj, the first Mongol to reach sumo’s

highest ranks, had to retire in February 2010 following allegations that he assaulted a man outside a Tokyo nightclub. The decision to exclude him was largely seen in Mongolia as Japan's attempt to guarantee Japanese supremacy in later competitions.

17. Dayaar Mongol claim that they never resorted to violence and that they were victims of a slandering campaign by the media. "Our guys are all well-educated (*Manai zaluuchuud biigdeeree deed bolovsroltoi*). They don't do things like that" (interview with Byambatulga, October 5, 2007).

18. Conversely, as Buyandelger (2013, 180) notes, the Soviets were represented in the arts and cinema as the saviors of a population on the verge of extinction (*ustaj baisan*).

19. Note in this regard the lyrics of the song "Hujaa" by the singer Tsetse: "We will endure, the poison in toxic foods is not strong enough / The Mongolian blood is strong, these Chinese cunts are weak."

20. Sometimes the line between journalism and explicit support is significantly blurry. An article published in one of the dailies about efforts by Dayaar Mongol to raise money for their cause, while not explicitly supportive, candidly gave bank information where people could donate, as well as a contact number for the group's leader (Hajidmaa 2007).

21. For a counterargument, see Wang (2005).

22. Interestingly, this idea appears to be shared by both Mongolian and foreign scholars, as well as by ordinary Mongols. The interpretations discussed in this section are thus widely prevalent in Mongolian, Russian, and Western literature, and were also frequently voiced by interlocutors during conversations and interviews.

23. Lactose intolerance develops when milk and other dairy products are not consumed regularly after weaning. While traditionally the Chinese did not, and as a result could not digest such foods, urban Chinese are now avid consumers of milk, yogurt, and other dairy products (Billé 2009a).

24. See also Roberts (1903, 81–82) and Cable and French (1942, 157–158).

25. About 15,000 Chinese artisans lived in Outer Mongolia, and while they were sometimes despised for being "different," they were not particularly unpopular. Their presence caused no political problems either (Murphy 1966, 45). They tend to remain invisible in historical and popular representations of the period.

26. Tang is quoting Andrei Boloban, an agent for the Russian Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Mongolia, who was dispatched to Mongolia by St. Petersburg at the request of Russian merchants who complained about renewed Chinese commercial activity (Rupen 1964, 77).

27. The Bogd Gegeen, also known as Bogd Khan, was the last Khan of Mongolia, and spiritual leader of Outer Mongolia's Tibetan Buddhism.

28. While there may have been a few discrepancies and gaps between Russian and Mongolian versions of history during the socialist period, Mongols had very little influence over the historical accounts written about Mongolia. For reasons of space I am treating the two as essentially identical here.

29. Propaganda plays were staged throughout Mongolia in the 1920s and 1930s as a way to educate politically the largely illiterate population (see chapter 5).

30. Contemporary postsocialist ideas of market moralities have been strongly shaped by socialist ideas of trade. The idea of exploitation (*möljläg*) is central to socialist morality. Trade is by definition a parasitic activity insofar as it does not produce

anything. The Chinese who lived in Urga in prerevolutionary Mongolia are described in history books of the socialist period as traders who sent all their profits home and who did not contribute to the growth of a Mongolian economy. By contrast, Russians are credited with reinvesting large sums in the country's development and developing Ulaanbaatar's infrastructure.

31. A number of articles and edited volumes have focused on the shifting meanings of commerce and property in Mongolia and other postsocialist regions. See for example Humphrey (1997, 2002), Mandel and Humphrey (2002), Humphrey and Verdery (2004), and Wheeler (2004).

32. Owen Lattimore proposed the term "satellite" as a framework of analysis to define the position of Mongolia vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Others, including some of my Mongolian interlocutors, defined these relations more candidly as colonial.

33. I emphasize that this argument applies to the Republic of Mongolia, formerly known as Outer Mongolia, only. The situation in Inner Mongolia differs radically in this regard.

34. A few cases of attacks and looting of Chinese shops are known, but it is unclear whether they were motivated by racial hatred or if they targeted specific establishments.

35. It is likely that Manchu restrictive policies were also motivated, at least in part, by the desire to protect Mongolian nomadic culture, perceived as similar to Manchu traditions, from the cultural influence of the Chinese (see Crossley 1990; Janhunen 1996; Elliott 2001; Di Cosmo and Bao 2003; Elverskog 2006).

36. Bulag (1998, 79) has made a point germane to this argument. He argues that the tiny size of Mongolia's population is a source of anxiety for Mongols but that it also positions them as a rare resource to be valued and protected.

37. The term "paranoia" is not used here in its habitual psychiatric definition, but rather as a processual device. Richard Hofstadter (1971) was one of the first scholars to use the term in his delineation of a certain operative mode in politics. For more recent applications outside the psychoanalytic context, see Marcus (1999), Humphrey (2003), Ichinnorov (2007), Paradis (2007), and Freeman and Freeman (2008).

38. I am thinking in particular about autarchic polities such as Albania or Burma, although these nations do not hold a monopoly on paranoid narratives: rumors about willful poisonings also abound in Turkey (about genetically modified foods from the European Union) or China (about the French supermarket Carrefour). On similar rumors in France and Italy, see Campion-Vincent (2005) and Toselli (1994) respectively.

39. Following the US involvement in Iraq, Mongolia sent over a hundred soldiers as a token of its support. The fear that al-Qaeda might attack Ulaanbaatar was seen as a direct retribution for Mongolian presence there.

Chapter 2 Sinophobia and Excess

1. Conversely, a locale furnished with Soviet regalia can be imagined in the context of western Europe but it would be far more problematic in Mongolia or Russia, where its meaning would be construed very differently.

2. This desire of Mongols to be part of the international community was particularly evident in the early part of the twentieth century, when they lobbied relentlessly

for the establishment of diplomatic ties with European states. Russia obstructed all these attempts, and Mongolia was able to establish diplomatic ties only with Tannu-Tuva (Friters 1951, 131).

3. Lattimore (1962, 206–207) draws attention to the ambivalence in the word “exploitation” in English. Applied to an environmental resource such as a mine, “exploitation” has positive connotations; by contrast, “exploitation” of an individual or group is morally reprehensible. In Mongolian, this semantic tension is absent: to exploit in the sense of a mine or resource is *ashiglab*, which also means to make use of; to exploit an individual, in the Marxist sense, is translated as *oron möljih*, which literally signifies “to drag toward oneself and gnaw like a bone.”

4. This reductive metaphor was politicized by Thomas Ewing (1980) as “the anvil and the hammer.”

5. Bulag (1998) and Kaplonski (2004, 36–37) noted considerable anti-Russian sentiments in the years that followed the end of the socialist regime. Outbursts of anger directed at the erstwhile “big brother” were also reported by a number of travel writers in Mongolia during that period (Storey 1997; Middleton 1998) but abated after a few years (Sneath 2003, 48). Fifteen years on, this momentary flurry of anti-Russian sentiments appears to have been largely forgotten.

6. Hatred for the Chinese appears to have been whipped up by the brutally repressive measures taken by Chinese General Hsü in 1919. Had the Chinese adopted a more conciliatory approach, the final outcome may have been very different (Tang 1959, 360–366; see also Andrews 1921, 26).

7. Uka, the Russian *erliiz*, has regularly been the lead singer for the band. Like Namuna, the black *erliiz*, she is essential to the band’s image. By contrast, the (fully) Mongolian girl is less central and was in fact substituted for another after a falling out.

8. While overall I found a marked difference in the treatment of “Asian” and “European” foreigners, the popularity of Europeans was far from being a given. I was verbally harassed a couple of times in Ulaanbaatar, as have been several European male friends, particularly when accompanied by Mongolian female friends.

9. This was made very explicit to me when I was looking for an apartment in Ulaanbaatar. The landlady was well educated: she had graduated from a university in Bulgaria and spoke fluent Russian. As soon as she heard I was French, the apartment was mine if I wanted it. Without asking for a deposit or seeing a copy of my passport, she gave me the keys. She appeared very trusting, yet the previous lodger had been a cheat. A Russian con man (*moshennik*), he had left the apartment a mess, owing her a couple of months’ rent. Her laid-back attitude and willingness to see the good in people did not extend to all nationalities, however. Four or five people called before I did, she explained. “But they were Chinese and Koreans—no way I would rent the apartment to them! They bring women in and the food they cook is smelly.”

10. *Oros* is Mongolian for “Russian” and *mestny* is Russian for “local.” Strictly speaking, the term refers to the so-called White Russians who fled Russia after the 1917 Revolution and settled in Mongolia. However, the term is commonly used to refer to all Russians who have settled in Mongolia permanently.

11. Many eyewitnesses who lived or traveled in Mongolia prior to, or shortly after, the socialist revolution of 1921 confirm that overindulgence did not emerge as a consequence of Russian practices and that the Bogd Gegeen himself was an alcoholic

(Bawden 1968). However, it is likely that the situation was considerably worsened by the introduction of vodka and other potent liquors.

12. Indeed, the situation is somewhat different in Inner Mongolia, where contemporary traits are attributed to the Chinese. Some of these traits are negative, like the overconsumption of alcohol, but also positive, like learning the value of work ethics and thrift (Haas 2012).

13. The early 1990s witnessed a strong interest in reinstating the *Mongol bichig* that was replaced by Cyrillic in 1945. Students started learning it in school, but eventually the project was abandoned, as a change of script would have been costly both financially and socially, leading to a large swath of the population becoming illiterate. The Cyrillic script was also felt to be more practical (a horizontal script being more compatible with international information technology systems) and “modern” (Billé 2010).

14. Paula Haas, personal communication 2008. While these off-the-cuff interviews are not necessarily representative of what Mongols on the whole aspire to, their results make a stark contrast with attitudes toward China.

15. This reading parallels that of the figure of the Jew in Europe (see Žižek 1989, 49; 2008a, 57).

16. An article published in the Turkish newspaper *Referans* provoked outrage in Mongolia. The Turkish journalist claimed that the aim of the imminent visit to Ankara by Mongolian Minister for Nature and Tourism L. Gansukh was to discuss the importation of Turkish men to help Mongolia’s declining population (Özgentürk 2010). Worried that it might be misinterpreted by the general public at home, the Mongolian government decided to cancel the visit (Shinebayar 2010).

17. The verb *davrah* means to go too far, to be uncontrolled.

18. Also quoted in Humphrey (1987, 46).

19. The Chinese often associate noise (and heat) with positive liveliness, as witness the word for “lively”: *renao* (热闹), literally “hot quarrel.”

20. This saying does not imply that the Chinese are more intelligent than the Mongols, although this dimension can also be present. What the numbers index is the complex and multiple nature of the Chinese, in contrast to the Mongols, who perceive themselves as simple, innocent folks who always express themselves unambiguously. For a detailed discussion, see Haas (2012).

21. Importantly, this externalization of practices that are perceived to be at odds with ideas of Mongolianness means that the Chinese can also become conduits for those Mongols who wish to carry out “non-Mongolian” activities. Bulag (1998, 25) relates, for instance, being approached by several local men who asked him to “smuggle them to Inner Mongolia where they could sell [their products] for better prices than on the Ulaanbaatar black market.” This is particularly remarkable when so much anti-Chinese discourse focuses precisely on the Chinese spiriting away Mongolia’s natural resources. The use of Chinese as conduits was also seen in the prerevolutionary period when Chinese were hired to substitute for Mongols whenever cultural taboos prevented or restricted certain actions (Jagchid and Hyer 1979, 157).

22. The “a” stands for *autre* (“other” in French); the lowercase contrasts it with *Autre*, the Big Other, while the italics indicate that it pertains to the realm of the Imaginary. The Imaginary does not denote something illusory but designates the way in which the subject perceives herself through others, others she considers to be like

herself for a variety of reasons (Fink 1995, 84). I return to this particular aspect in chapter 4.

23. “Khutuktu” is the older spelling for “hutagt,” the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia.

Chapter 3 *The Spectral Figure of the Chinese*

1. Linguists Tserenpil and Kullmann (2005, 72) facetiously remarked in this regard that while the plural suffix *nar* traditionally denoted intelligent beings, the usual plural in *-uud* for *oyuutan* (students) should not be construed as any judgment on their mental capacities.

2. Interestingly, the term *mangaa* (ogre) mentioned earlier was used by Mongols in the early twentieth century to refer to Europeans, notably those who, like anthropologist Ethel Lindgren-Utsi, were especially tall (Humphrey, personal communication 2009).

3. *Laohan* literally means “old man,” but it is also used as a self-referential pronoun, equivalent to *wo* (I, me).

4. For more information on the term *danjaad*, see Bawden (1968, 97).

5. This expression was given to me by one of my interlocutors but does not appear to be particularly well known or understood.

6. The many Mongolian groups living in China also differ in significant ways from each other in terms of history, worldviews, and the form of Mongolian they speak. However, Mongols in Mongolia tend to view them as a unitary group and do not usually differentiate between them, nor, indeed, between the Chinese and most minorities (*shaoshu minzu*). Only Tibetans are perceived as a group distinct from the Chinese.

7. For a discussion of racist representations of the Chinese in European and American films, see also Clegg (1994) and Marchetti (1993). On Western stereotypes of the Chinese as weak and effeminate (also a common Mongolian view), see Heinrich and Martin (2006, 4) and Heinrich (2008).

8. Recall for instance *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, in which Mickey Rooney, in his portrayal of the Japanese character, wore a set of false buck teeth.

9. The term also gained currency in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century following Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese war (Laruelle 2007, 19; Dyatlov 2012). On the history of the Yellow Peril, see also *Yellow Peril!* (Tchen and Yeats 2013) and *Serial Fu Manchu* (Mayer 2014).

10. Some of my interlocutors described the Chinese as brown (*bor*) while the Mongols themselves are white (*tsagaan*). Mongols often refer to Russians as yellow (*shar hün*) because of their hair. Hamayon (1978, 232–233) notes that *bor*, being neither black nor white, is often associated with negative qualities such as mediocrity or dullness. It is also regularly used as a euphemism for “dirt.”

11. It is important to remember that just as the Chinese are “Chinese qua Asians,” Russians tend to be positioned as representatives of European values.

12. I'm assuming for the sake of the argument that there is such a thing as a “representative Mongol.”

13. 心口不一, literally, “their heart and mouth are not the same.”

14. In English the term “Han” is occasionally used to refer to ethnic Chinese, but the distinction is rarely made in normal speech.

15. By contrast, in IMAR Mongols distinguish between *hyatad* (ethnic Chinese) and *āund uls* (Chinese national), the latter a loan translation of the Chinese *zhongguo* (中国, China, literally “middle country”).

16. Deed Mongols are a Mongolian group living in the Chinese province of Qinghai (in Mongolian *Höhnuur*), in a region ethnically dominated by Tibetans.

17. The reverse is also true and many in IMAR consider Mongols in Mongolia to have become Europeanized.

18. Considerable political and academic resources were mobilized to create a distinction in ethnic groups that straddled the border. Thus the partition process between Buryats and Mongols was witnessed elsewhere: Tajiks versus Iranians, Moldovans versus Romanians, and so on.

19. Compared to Buryats, Inner Mongols have retained the traditional Mongolian alphabet, are generally more proficient in Mongolian, and are given the opportunity to school their children in Mongolian.

20. Urianhai is also a Mongolian clan name, thus making the issue even more complex (Lars Højer, personal communication November 2010).

21. Stories circulated in the news in the early 1990s about Tuvsans stealing horses and driving them across the border into the Russian Federation. Humphrey (1993a, 16) notes that cattle theft is endemic on the Tuvan–Mongolian border and that people have even taken human hostages in order to get their animals back.

22. *Yanhan* comes from the Chinese *yanghan* (养汉), which is used in reference to a woman and means to commit adultery, to have an illicit affair with a man. It is the standard word for “prostitute” in modern Mongolian.

23. This term is given in Bawden (1997, 734). A more common term is *tembiüü*.

24. Interestingly, the suspicion attached to vegetables does not usually extend to fruits, however exotic they may be, and whatever their country of origin. This may be partly because vegetables, extracted from the soil, tend to remain associated with notions of dirt and excrement (Bulag 1998, 194, 210).

25. During the socialist period, orders were occasionally given to increase the consumption of vegetables (Marsh 2009, 51).

26. She did find the idea of eating green salad amusing, joking with me that she was like a goat (R. *ya kak koza!*), but there was none of the anxiety frequently associated with having a meal at a Chinese restaurant.

27. At least this is the case for Chinese dishes that have not become Mongolized. A number of Mongolian dishes such as *tsuivan* are Chinese in origin, but they have been fully Mongolized to the extent that their genealogy is not commonly known.

28. The Chinese themselves recognize this culinary versatility and readily joke about it. As the saying goes, “Chinese people eat everything with wings except airplanes and everything with legs except tables and chairs” (中国人什么都吃, 只要有翅膀的〔除了飞机〕和有腿的〔除了桌椅〕).

29. In stark contrast to this male-dominated China, Mongolia is seen as lacking in men. According to many media sources, there is only one Mongolian man for every three women, a differential generally explained by the heavy migration to South Korea. Significantly, this problem is seen to affect the Gobi most drastically, the region immediately adjacent to China (Bulag 1998, 109).

30. Because of this sudden withdrawal, a number of key construction projects ground to an immediate halt. This affected in particular the railroad line connecting

Mongolia to China. As a result, the Mongolian rail revenues “shrank by 75 percent from 1960 to 1963, causing budgetary difficulties” (Radchenko 2006, 99).

31. The character of Bayarmaa is played by a male actor. This is done primarily for comedic effect, but it can also be understood as a drag performance, highlighting the scripted and (re)enactable nature of Mongolianness.

32. When the two fathers have a disagreement on where the wedding party is to take place, they both insist it should be held at their place (*manaih*). The subtext of the disagreement, clear for the Mongolian viewership, articulates competing territorial claims made by the Mongol and the Chinese fathers.

Chapter 4 *Metaphors and Immanent Tensions*

1. A third term is *gegeerel*, literally meaning “enlightenment.” On the etymology and history of this term, see Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006, 28).

2. His use of the term “biology” relates to the realm of the corporeal in general rather than to biology as a field of specialization. It is also the way in which I use it in this text.

3. I’m thinking here of the conceptual vessel of blood, but also, increasingly, that of genes. In 2008, during the American presidential campaign, Cindy McCain exclaimed, “It’s written in our national DNA.”

4. Genetic research carried out on East Asian populations has shown a particular Y-chromosomal lineage present at high frequency among men, with around 8 percent of the men in this region carrying it. The pattern of variation within the lineage points to an origin in Mongolia around a thousand years ago and suggests a link to Chingis Khan and his male descendants (Zerjal et al. 2003).

5. As an indication of Gumilev’s popularity, a university bearing his name was erected in Astana, the new Kazakh capital. For a close reading and analysis of Gumilev’s ideas, see Shnirel’man and Panarin (2001). On the political use of Gumilev’s ideas in Kyrgyzstan, see Gullette (2008).

6. Existing data suggest the figure is around 90 percent (Bulag 1998, 81). The disappearance of the spot by the age of five corresponds to the age when, in traditional Mongolian culture, the soul (*siins*) enters the body and children become fully human.

7. In 1932 an attempt was made to launch an investigative project on a global scale when the French government, at the request of Professor Rivet, authorized research to be carried out in all its colonies (Champion 1937, 80).

8. Linguists have established connections between Mongolian and other languages such as Japanese (Miller 1996), Korean (Li 1991), Turkish (Sydykov 1983), and Hungarian (Kara 1992; Marcantonio 2002).

9. Interestingly, the blue spot elicits very little interest in Inner Mongolia. Since the birthmark is in fact distributed across both Mongolian and Han populations, its symbolic value as ethnic marker is limited.

10. Sakha nationalists have claimed Chingis Khan as a national Sakha hero. See for instance the film by Andrei Borisov, *The Secret of Chingis Khan (Taina Chingis Khaana)* and the interview of the director in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* (Naranlenkova 2009).

11. It is called *mōkohan* in Japanese, *mong-go banjeom* in Korean, *mengguban* in Chinese, *moğol lekisi* in Turkish, *mongol’skoe pyatno* in Russian, to name but a few,

that is, a direct translation of “Mongolian spot.” The earliest recorded description by a Westerner was that of Father Gumilla, in 1745 (Cordova 1981), but of course, centuries prior to that date, the occurrence of the spot had already been studied by others, namely the Japanese (see Brennemann 1907).

12. According to anthropologist Shen Haimei (personal communication 2007).

13. Numerous Chinese websites also discuss the question of the spot (“Baobao weishenme hui zhang mengguban?” 2009; “Jiekai chusheng ying’er 10 da shenmi” 2009; “Taiji shi ruhe xingcheng de” 2009). Research does not specify, however, whether the birthmark occurs in all regions. Further, due to a lack of comparative research, it is not clear whether all sources actually discuss the same phenomenon. In Mongolia or Japan, what is referred to as “blue spot” is a mark on the sacrolumbar region of the newborn. By contrast, in China the term tends to be used for a mark “that can be found on any part of the baby’s body, though more often on the lower back” (see “Baobao weishenme hui zhang mengguban?” 2009).

14. A similar situation exists in South Korea, where the incidence of the blue spot in Japan is read as a graphic confirmation that the Japanese (and their culture) had their origin on the Korean peninsula.

15. It is for instance sometimes seen as a mark of reincarnation of deceased relatives. This is closely related to the practice of placing a mark on a dead person’s body that will then reappear as a birthmark on the body of a child into which the departing soul has reincarnated (Empson 2007, 69–70).

16. Often used as shorthand for “Mongol,” the color blue has notably been appropriated by the nationalist group *Höh Mongol* (i.e., Blue Mongolia).

17. It is important to remember, however, that these descriptions are somewhat misleading and that the Mongolian diet is far from being limited to meat and dairy products. According to a survey carried out by the National Research Centre, 56 percent of the total average daily energy intake comes from flour products, while the remaining food groups divide as follows: 15.4 percent from meat and meat products, 15.2 percent from butter, 7.7 percent from milk and milk products, 1.7 percent from rice, 1.5 percent from potatoes, and 1.3 percent from sugar (Enkhtaivan Gombosuren 2003, data for the years 1993–1996). The inflated representation of the share of meat (and of dairy products) is due to the higher status of these foods over “non-Mongolian” foods such as flour-based products (bread, noodles, etc.) and is connected to what in the group’s consciousness constitutes a meal.

18. This is seen particularly in the dietary limitations imposed on pregnant women. Lacaze (2003) notes that all foods of foreign origin, such as cereals or spices, are, in theory at least, forbidden. The only sanctioned foods are those produced by the nomadic pastoral economy, namely dairy products and livestock meat.

19. Somewhat confusing for outsiders, these points relate to both absolute and relative orientation.

20. The *ger*, also known in English under its Turkic name, yurt, is the traditional round felt tent used by Mongols and other nomads of Inner Asia, such as the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Even if, increasingly, Mongols live in permanent structures, the use of the word *ger* has been extended to include any kind of home. Park (1999, 49) notes that *gers* are occasionally placed in front of Soviet buildings because people believe a person should be born and die in a *ger*. The south-facing orientation has been used for a few centuries by the Halh, the main ethnic group in Mongolia. The doors of Mongolian *gers* were originally oriented eastward and it was only later that they were re-

oriented southward. Inhabitants of the southern Altai region, like the majority of Turkic nomads, follow an east-west axis (Zhukovskaya 1988, 17).

21. Delaplace (2008, 108–109) reports a similar color patterning in coffins: the bottom part is lined with green cloth, the top part with blue.

22. In his work, Gaby Bamana has noted that the *ger* is also metaphorically linked to a human body. Its division into left and right sides mirrors the primary division of the human body (Bamana 2008, 138; cf. Needham 1974), while the hearth (*gal golomt*) symbolizes the navel (*hüüs*) (Bamana 2009).

23. In fact, just like the landscape, the traditional vertical alphabet is also anthropomorphized. Thus the strokes that make up the script are given a bodily referent: tooth (*shüüd*), tail (*süül*), belly (*gedes*), shin (*shilbe*), and so on. The bodily referent is even given to the noun “alphabet” itself: *tsagaan tolgoi*, meaning “white head.”

24. We are dealing here of course with an imaginary of nomadic life. Such comments voiced by predominantly urban Mongols do not mirror actual practices. Herders do make sure to keep a certain distance from each other to ensure their herds do not get mixed up (Bamana 2008, 46).

25. The Chinese, ridiculing the “filth of the Mongols,” argued that it was their odor that scared away the wolf (Roberts 1903, 87).

26. It is also natural by opposition to other languages, particularly Chinese, which is imagined to lack clarity. Thus a history teacher at one of Ulaanbaatar’s universities told me that because of its tonal structure, Chinese is not clear like Mongolian, which is why the Chinese have to speak so loudly.

27. This constitutes an idealized category system, which inevitably includes numerous exceptions.

28. Sławoj Szynkiewicz (1993, 165) sees this as a symptom of the decomposition of Mongolian kinship structures. He notes for instance that traditional patrilineal affiliations loosened during the socialist period in favor of close links to the families of both spouses.

29. See for instance the Russian film *Ya Lyublyu Tebya* (2004), in which the Mongolian (Kalmyk) character stands as the “untamed”: he is impulsive, genuine, and innocent, in stark contrast to the Russian protagonists, who are both intellectuals and “overthink.”

30. The Mongols occasionally call themselves the people of the five animals (*tavan hoshuu mal*), in reference to the central position of horses, sheep, camels, goats, and cows in traditional Mongolian culture.

31. The Mongols’ habit of not washing was due, in part, to water scarcity (Humphrey 1974), but also to the belief that it polluted the water spirits (*lus*) and was therefore ritually wrong. Maiskii (1921) also noted that Mongols occasionally rinsed their faces, but “never washed their bodies, their clothes, or their dishes, because washing away dirt was to wash away good luck” (in Cheney 1968, 65).

32. This process was examined by journalist Gian Antonio Stella (2002) in the context of Italy. He noted the close parallels between the ways in which Italian immigrants were imagined and talked about in the United States in the early twentieth century, and the position of the Albanian in contemporary Italy.

33. Note also the reversal of discourses concerning housing structures. Contemporary Mongols frequently speak derogatorily of Chinese adobe (mud) houses, but before 1921, these permanent structures were perceived by both Chinese and Russians as more “civilized” than Mongolian *gers*.

Chapter 5 Corporeal Revolutions

1. The verb *ünseh* in Mongolian means both “to kiss” and “to sniff.” Davenport (1977, 129) discusses a similar custom in Oceania, where the European way of kissing was seen as disgusting.

2. One particular obstacle to modernization was Mongolia’s nomadic mobility, compounded by a very low density. The introduction of internal passports was supplemented by a system of registration (*bürtgel*), essentially borrowed from the Russian *propiska* system, which had been introduced in December 1932 in an effort to control the flight of hungry peasants to the cities (Fitzpatrick 1999, 43). The registration system was later adopted by the People’s Republic of China as well under the name *bukou* [户口].

3. I intend here Mongolia as well as the Soviet Union. I draw occasional comparisons in this chapter with Siberia—whose leadership was in constant communication with Mongols (Sneath 2003, 40)—and also with Central Asia, given the similarities witnessed in the political and cultural realms.

4. A joke even circulated among Russian diplomats in the form of a riddle: “Which is the most neutral country in the world?” The answer: “Mongolia, because it doesn’t even interfere in its own internal affairs.”

5. The relationship with Mongolia changed significantly after the installation of a communist government in China in 1949 (see Bulag 2010).

6. For a similar argument, see Buyandelger (2013, 73).

7. Sneath (2003, 41) notes that the Soviets contributed to around 30 percent of the Mongolian national GDP.

8. Among related terms we also find *surtal nevtrüüleg* (propagation of ideas, teachings) and *surtal uhuulga* (agitation and propaganda, “agitprop”).

9. The situation is similar in Chinese, where *xuanchuan* (宣传) can mean both “propaganda” and “publicity.”

10. If illiteracy levels were not as low as socialist historians later claimed, illiteracy constituted nonetheless a serious problem for the state, where, in 1925, around 50 percent of the party members could neither read nor write (Haggard 1965, 94).

11. One such early play staged in Urga in 1925 was called *The Trickster Lama* (*Lama-obmanshchik*) (Malakshanov 1974; Pubaev 1983, 9).

12. Ma Hetian, who visited Urga in 1925–1926, writes that Chinese merchants living in Mongolia at the time were forced to attend the plays that were set up in every banner (i.e., administrative unit, district) and to pay thirty bricks of tea for the privilege. Failure to attend resulted in a fine of sixty dollars (Ma 1949 [1932], 20).

13. This in fact remains the case to an extent in postsocialist Mongolia, where the permanent buildings of the capital are surrounded by *ger* districts (*ger horoolol*).

14. At other points of its history, the capital was also known as Ih Hüree or Da Hüree, *hüree* meaning “camp” and *ib* and *da* meaning “big” in Mongolian and Chinese respectively. Outside of Mongolia it has also been called Urga, its Russian name, believed to be a deformation of *örgöö*, a prince’s residence. More recently, because of the level of pollution, Ulaanbaatar has been nicknamed “Utaanbaatar” (from *utaa* “smoke”).

15. A similar process was described by architect Doreen Bernáth in the context of contemporary China. She notes that Chinese architectural projects are frequently vi-

sualized and realized on the basis of highly effective computer renderings, while plans, sections, and elevations become a posterior exercise of “fitting into the picture” (Bernáth 2010).

16. This practice has endured beyond the socialist period and is occasionally witnessed in remote parts of rural Mongolia (Delaplace 2008).

17. Russians understood culture (*kultura*) in the restricted sense of “high culture,” that is, encompassing literature, opera, and ballet, but excluding most cultural practices that existed in Mongolia. Under their influence, the Mongolian term for “culture,” *soyol*, came to adopt the same semantic contours. Note for instance the derivative *soyolt* meaning “cultured, cultivated, civilized.”

18. As Rogaski (2004, 5) notes in the context of China, the creation of a “hygienically modern” nation was seen as crucial to counter the specter of national deficiency: “by the twentieth century, *weisheng* [hygiene] was deployed as a discourse of Chinese deficiency: a gauge that measured the distance that lay between China and a foreign-defined modernity.”

19. Importantly, Mongolian voices reclaiming this prerevolutionary past are increasingly being heard.

20. More importantly, the issue for Mongols articulated less on privacy than on the position of the person with respect to the *ger*. Reflecting the cosmological divisions that quarter the domestic space into zones, Mongolian men and women go in different directions to relieve themselves, and no one goes to the north (or “top”) of the *ger*.

21. In fact, the practice whereby a class monitor (similar to an assistant teacher) appoints a student to check the clothes and general cleanliness of other students continues to be found at all levels of the Mongolian educational system (Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006, 115–116).

22. The term *shaabai* comes from the Shaanxi dialect for “small shoes,” called *xiaoxie* in Mandarin (Bulag, personal communication 2008).

23. In fact, it does not appear to be particularly important in Inner Mongolia.

24. Hutchinson (1990, xv) proposes the neologism “healthification” as a translation for the Russian word *ozdorovlenie*, which also carried the idea of “putting things into proper order.”

25. By contrast, pictures of Mongols and Mongolia in the postsocialist period consistently depict rural scenes.

26. Following their encounter with Western medicine, lamas in Mongolia explained their ignorance concerning the treatment of venereal diseases with the claim that the ancient scientific books dealing with such diseases had all been lost (Forbáth 1934, 71).

27. Medical anthropologists Hruschka and Kohrt (2004, 860) provide the example of the concept of *yadargaa*, which, as a culturally bound illness, does not easily dovetail with European classifications. Literally translated as “tiredness” and “weakness of the organism” (Bayarsaihan 2009), it is a specific Mongolian idiom frequently denoting alienation and demoralization.

28. The social role of shamans extends, of course, well beyond medical treatments. In fact, many if not most Mongolian shamans do not consider themselves healers or medicine men and women of any kind (Buyandelger 2013).

29. The last two terms are notably difficult to translate. Pedersen and Højer (2008) propose “life force” for *süld* and “fortune” for *hiimor*.

30. Any distinction between Western and Eastern medicine is often an oversimplification as the two traditions have extensively borrowed from each other. The therapy called “cupping” (Mong. *bumba*; Ch. *baguan* 拔罐), whereby hot cups are applied to the skin and “suck up” the skin as they cool down, is very popular in China and is routinely offered by Chinese hospitals in Ulaanbaatar. Yet it was also popular in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and up until the mid-twentieth century, and it remains popular in Russia and Kazakhstan (Michaels 2003, 34). In fact, the treatments offered by Chinese hospitals in Mongolia are frequently a synthesis of Western and modernized Chinese medicine (Atwood 2004, 346).

31. *Hutaagt* (sometimes transliterated as *khutuktu*) is a religious title that was conferred on high-status reincarnated lamas.

Chapter 6 Communitas and Performativity

1. *Za* is notably difficult to translate and can have different meanings depending on the context. Here it denotes assent and can be translated as “yes.”

2. A similar argument was made by Bourdieu (1972), namely that practice, including linguistic practice, is more often rooted in embodied repetition than in deliberate action.

3. This approaches the theory of “discursive psychology” advanced by Michael Billig (1997, 139–140). Billig argues that phenomena that traditional psychological theories have treated as “inner processes” are in fact constituted through social and discursive activity.

4. At least this is the case for “textbook performatives” such as the seminal examples given earlier. The class of performatives can be extended to include other utterances that do not conform to this limited structure.

5. This is germane to Jakobson’s (1960) “phatic” aspect of language, which is concerned less with the transmission of an actual message than with the technical function of language to maintain social relations. Through the phatic function, “the addresser and the addressee check whether they are using the same code” (Žižek 2008b, 67).

6. By “paranationalist” I mean relating to discourses and practices that are connected to, but not necessarily part of, nationalist ideologies and the national project.

7. With the term “ritual” here I follow Butler (1993) rather than evoke the vast anthropological literature on the subject (see for instance Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Bell 1997). In her discussion of performativity, Butler (1993, 95) employs it as a virtual synonym of repeated actions. However, “ritual” often suggests a high level of formality, and even when it does not, it contrasts implicitly with a nonritualized counterpart (Bell 1997, 220, in Hollywood 2006, 267) and as such is not a fruitful term for the discussion at hand beyond a superficial comparison.

8. In practice this is not always the case, as for the Buryat singer Amarhüü (chapter 3).

9. As the saying goes, “One Mongol is good, two Mongols will drink alcohol, three Mongols will fight” (*Neg mongol ih sain, boyor mongol arhi uuna, gурvan mongol zodoldono*).

10. According to the legend, she had five sons who were constantly fighting with each other. One day she gathered them around the hearth fire and gave them an arrow each. She told them to break it, which they did with ease. Then she tied five arrows together and told them to break the bundle. None of them could. She told her sons, “Brothers who work separately, like a single arrow shaft, can be easily broken, but brothers who stand together against the world, like a bundle of arrows, cannot be broken.”

11. Mongols have also consistently faced dangers in the environment, such as *zud*, which are natural disasters linked to excessive droughts or snow.

12. For example “A good wife must be beaten three times a day” (*Sain ebneriig ödört gurav gövöh yostoi*). See also Buyandelger (2013, 179). A survey carried out by the National Centre against Violence in 1998 estimated that one woman in three experiences domestic violence (Centre for Human Rights 2000).

13. Thus Batsaihan heard his Mongolian waitresses address his Chinese cook as “stupid Chink” (*teneg bujaa*), but only when they thought Batsaihan was not around.

14. This is a likely assumption, as I looked just like one of the numerous tourists who suddenly become omnipresent during the summer months.

15. Note in this regard that the video by L.A. Face discussed in chapter 1, while overtly attacking the Chinese, opens with the statement “For Mongols only” (*zövhön Mongolchuudad zoriulav*).

16. My exclusion of lesbians in this discussion is not a methodological choice but merely the unfortunate consequence of not having had the opportunity to talk to any gay-identified Mongolian women.

17. My use of the term “dissident” is also germane to Gopinath’s (2005) “impossible subjects.”

Chapter 7 *Bodies at the Margin*

1. As of 2002, female-headed households constituted more than 10.5 percent of all households, a 24 percent increase since 1995 (Rossabi 2005b, 153).

2. But not always. In fact, “while women would appreciate having men do more around the house, they comment that what men and women do is natural and reasonable” (Pasternak and Salaff 1993, 162). I was also admonished by the elderly mother in the household in which I initially lived, every time I attempted to help with dishes or cleaning. “I don’t like seeing a man work in the kitchen,” she would insist. “It’s not nice” (R: *eto ne krasivo*).

3. Women received a fixed annual sum after a certain number of children: four children, 400 tugrik; five children, 750 Tg; six children, 1,200 Tg; seven children, 1,750 Tg; eight children, 2,400 Tg; nine children, 3,150 Tg (Dugarjav 1976, 103).

4. And up to 4.5 if calculated only for women who have had abortions (Remennick 1993, 51).

5. The gender imbalance in unions between Mongols and foreigners appears to be more than a simple question of visibility. In Mongolia, just as in the Russian Far East, more local women than local men enter into relationships with Chinese individuals. In fact I never encountered, in person or in print, a Mongolian man in a relationship with a Chinese woman. This appears to be due to a number of factors including availability, gender ideologies, and established cultural norms.

6. The *bagana* is the supporting wooden pole in the *ger*, while *bos* means “a pair.” The name thus evokes the complementarity and shared responsibilities of the two partners in the household.

7. Benwell’s work also suggests that women are routinely discriminated against in the job market and encounter difficulties in finding work “if they do not have good connections, are young, or are considered beautiful” (2006, 118).

8. She also sees herself as quasi-godmother for the eleven children born from these successful unions.

9. To the extent that the couple chooses to live in Mongolia. Such binational couples frequently prefer to live in China where they are less visible and not subject to social opprobrium.

10. To my surprise, she didn’t use the Mongolian name of the main border town with China, Ereen.

11. Tsedenbal argued, for instance, that without the intrusive presence of Lamaism in Mongolia, there would have been a population in excess of ten million by the late 1970s (Tsagaanhiüü 1976, 40).

12. Law No. 48 stated that homosexuality was not conducive to the growth of the Mongol Empire: it reduced combat effectiveness and affected future generations of Mongols (Legal and Sociological Research Institute of Inner Mongolia 2007).

13. One gay bar, managed by a Russian couple, opened some years ago, but soon became unpopular, allegedly because of its prohibitive prices.

14. It is not clear whether Ganbush is a transvestite or a transsexual, and Mongols’ discussions betray considerable confusion between the two concepts. Because Mongolian does not differentiate pronouns in terms of gender, *ter* means both “he” and “she.” Friends and informants speaking to me in languages other than Mongolian (namely Russian and English) used the masculine pronoun (*on*, he) and I have followed their practice here. Because I am not aware of Ganbush’s own positioning with respect to gender, the perspective imposed by English grammar should be construed precisely in this way—as a grammatical constraint, not as an assumption or implied judgment on my part.

15. Ganbush has also worked as a TV show host; see MongolianVideo (2010).

16. This propensity also surfaces through historical accounts. Thus the introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia in the sixteenth century was allegedly encouraged by the Manchus, who hoped it would subdue the fighting spirit of the Mongols.

17. In the 1940s some attempts were made to adapt the Naadam in order for both men and women to be included and glorified as national heroes, but they were unsuccessful and were rapidly abandoned (Lacaze 2006, 100).

18. Here “we” and “they” refer to the speakers of the two forms of Mongolian spoken in the Republic of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, respectively. The primary meanings for these slang terms are “to release” (*tavih*) and “to shoot” (*barvah*). Neither of the terms carry the secondary, sexual meaning outside of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, respectively.

19. While homosexuality, as a practice and identity, is attributed to influences from abroad, nonconforming gender roles, particularly in children, are explained differently. They are sometimes understood to be linked to reincarnation (see Empson 2007, 71–72). They can also be explained as a result of contact: my friend and assistant Otgonhiüü told me that when she was a child there was a boy living in her

neighborhood who was very much like a girl. He played with girls only, confided in them, acted like one of them. She heard from older people that when his mother was pregnant the baby must have been switched with another unborn child. This is the reason why pregnant women do not greet each other or touch each other at Tsagaan Sar (the lunar New Year), because their babies' identities might get switched.

20. The situation in Mongolia differs from Boellstorff's ethnographic context to the extent that homosexuality in Mongolia is not associated with religious notions of sin and is not explicitly or legally proscribed. Incommensurability between Mongolians and homosexuality operates fundamentally on the cultural assumption that Mongolian men are inherently both masculine and heterosexual.

21. This term is a translation of the Chinese term *yun yu* (云雨), introduced through the Mongolian version of "Dream of the Red Chamber" (红楼梦) (Bulag, personal communication 2011).

22. Given the close contact between Russia and Mongolia (and the numerous Russian-language channels on TV) it is not surprising that people have become familiar with *goluboi*. It is not a Mongolian word, but it does crop up occasionally, in particular when people become inebriated and lapse into Russian. Several Mongolian friends have pointed out this tendency, which I have also observed firsthand on numerous occasions. Lesbians are coded as "pink" (*rozovyye*), a term that in all likelihood has emerged as a "gender-appropriate" counterpart to "blue."

23. Part of the aim of the exhibition was to attract the attention of the Mongolian public to the plight of gay Mongols. While it attracted predominantly the expatriate community, it also led to a number of TV programs and debates on the issue of homosexuality.

24. Despite the lack of community feelings, some gay and lesbian advocacy groups have emerged in Mongolia. Tavilan (Mongolian for "destiny"), created in 1999, established contacts with LGBT groups abroad, namely in Europe and the United States. In the last few years, some NGOs as well as public and private groups such as the Global Fund (www.theglobalfund.org) have funded campaigns for the prevention of HIV/AIDS (HDHV/DOH) and tuberculosis (*siir'gee*). Is it usually through such channels that parties are organized and that informative brochures are distributed. For more information on the work carried out by the Global Fund in Mongolia, see www.aids.mn (in Mongolian).

25. These accounts also tend to portray the customers of these sex workers as foreign, thereby eliding the existence of Mongols who actively participate in the sex industry as clientele and facilitators (madams).

26. The inclusion of Chinese men in the pool of potential partners is not necessarily to be construed as a preference, and in fact none of my interlocutors ever made a claim to this effect.

Coda

1. According to data issued by the national statistics office for the 2005–2006 academic year, at least six schools offered Russian as language of instruction, and seven others Chinese. Because the statistics did not always break down information and sometimes indicated simply "foreign language," numbers may be significantly

higher. Based on two dozen phone calls to schools and half a dozen follow-up interviews, the general picture is that Chinese is rapidly gaining importance as a foreign language. The most common (and sought-after) language remains English, but several schools also offer instruction in Japanese, Turkish, Korean, and German, making Ulaanbaatar a very cosmopolitan city in spite of its relatively small size.

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About the Author

Franck Billé is a research associate in the Division of Social Anthropology and member of the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at the University of Cambridge. He is the coordinator of a research project (2012–2015) titled *Where Rising Powers Meet: China and Russia at Their North Asian Border*, and his current project focuses on representation and mimicry in the twin cities of Heihe and Blagoveshchensk, on the Sino-Russian border. He is working on a new book manuscript provisionally titled *Epidermic Nations: Cartography, Geobodies, Bodily Integrity*.