Discovering Epic, Constructing Culture:
Culture-Politics on China's Western Frontier

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Degree Committee.

The total length of the dissertation is 79,990 words.

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Abstract

This thesis is the result of 1.5 years of participant observation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, PRC, and analyses Chinese 'Cultural Construction' policies among Xinjiang's 'Torghut Mongols'. It explores the complex social and political negotiations that transformed an officially recognized 'epic' (The Heroic Epic Jangar) as cultural product into the representative 'culture' of Mongol dominated Hoboksar County—but 'culture' understood within the narrow officialized discourses of Chinese culture-politics and policy. This dissertation engages 'anthropology of policy', arguing that 'policy' and authoritative political discourses in China may be productively analyzed as aspects of 'ritualization'. This thesis attempts to bring ritual theory in anthropology into intercourse with topics as diverse as genre theory, rhetoric, exemplarity, and performance, arguing that Chinese political discourse is far more than mere sloganeering. Instead, this thesis attempts to show how these discourses act as mechanisms to shape space for autonomous action.

Specifically, this dissertation illustrates how a long-form narrative poem, now known as the 'The Heroic Epic Jangar' is discursively constructed as a central aspect of 'local traditional culture' among some Hoboksar residents. The first part of this thesis provides ethnographic context and theoretical parameters by examining local narratives surrounding the 'epic' and the historically implicated 'sensitivity' of the region and its social and political consequences. Here, this thesis proposes that authoritative political discourses work as border-producing mechanisms through which highly strategic ritualized deployments of political set-phrases shape space for autonomous action. The second part begins by describing the complex intertextual generic relations between set political formulations that produce a 'scientific' outlook, and 'objective' research and analysis relating to the Xinjiang Mongol 'Heroic Epic Jangar' that at once constructs an 'epic', but also situates it within acceptable official narratives of the natural progression of a unified socialist state. It then examines the processes by which Jangar comes to be deployed as a central aspect of Hoboksar's developmental agendas through the uniquely Chinese interpretations of 'Cultural Heritage' politics. Informed by the theoretical discussions developed throughout this thesis, this dissertation concludes by describing how a rigid normative regime has developed that both informs and restricts the environment in which practices and performances of Hoboksar's Jangar as 'cultural heritage' are articulated. Here, this dissertation shows how such work facilitates both national and local goals by way of creative, yet often confusing and 'formalistic' means by elaborating on the complex negotiations of 'correct' political practice 'in form', and how through a perceived responsibility to properly reproduce set scripts of speech and behavior regarding 'culture' and 'cultural development', the 'cultural spirit' of Jangar becomes an 'awkward exemplar' as it is forcefully discursively connected to numerous and often contradictory cultural narratives and political interests.

Acknowledgements

The anthropological project is necessarily a collaborative project. As anthropologists, we are implicated not only in the fields we work but also the vast networks of relations that make our research and studies possible. As an ethnographer, I will never be able to fully repay the generosity of the people of Hoboksar County and the numerous friends and acquaintances I met along the way.

My project was a complicated one, and therefore a full list of those deserving acknowledgment is not possible here. But my deepest thanks must go out to my Chinese hosting institution, Renmin University of China. There, Professor Oyunbilig's support as my Mongolian studies mentor proved invaluable. Additionally, I owe a debt of gratitude to RUC's Dr Catharine Jing for all of her tireless support. My research received financial support from the China CCSP fellowship program, hosted by RUC, without which this thesis would not have been possible. A special thanks also goes out to the fellowship's support officer, Mr Wang Xinsheng, for his patience and encouragement in what were often quite difficult circumstances.

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Yet, I must also acknowledge that through this nearly half-decade process I have been an absentee family member. During the past five years I've spent at Cambridge and in the field, my brothers have brought five wonderful children into the world. I have not given you love and attention you deserve. This thesis is in part dedicated to you. I would also like to thank all of the unnamed who have who have played such an important part in my studies and who have been there for me and with me throughout. And lastly, my heartfelt gratitude to my husband, Tsutomu Teramoto, who has always encouraged me to follow my dreams and intellectual curiosities. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

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A Note on Language and the Transcription of Terms

Xinjiang Oirat Mongols, including Hoboksar's Torghut Mongols, speak a distinct regional dialect and have historically used a unique written alphabet known as 'clear script' (*tod bichig*) that differs substantially from both 'old script' (*hudum/huuchin bichig*) utilized in Inner Mongolia and the Cyrillic alphabet used in Mongolia. However, other than where explicitly noted, for Mongolian words and phrases I have attempted to use standard Mongolian transcription of the Cyrillic spellings since this generally matches contemporary pronunciation better than the older scripts. When citing Mongol authors of works written or translated into Chinese, for consistency, I have used standard Chinese *pinyin* of the authors' Chinese names from the book/article/document, etc. cited. For Chinese terms, I have used the *pinyin* romanization of Modern Standard Chinese (*putonghua*). All Chinese and Mongolian language terms and phrases are italicized throughout.

Personal names and some places have been anonymized.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Xinjiang I returned to in 2016 was not the Xinjiang I left behind just a few short years before. Its magnificent mountain, oasis, and steppe sceneries brighten its animated social landscapes—but it has changed. As with the rest of the People's Republic, through its rapid economic development, with every visit it seems Xinjiang's built landscapes are again transformed. But also, in light of the recent sudden replacement of a comparatively 'moderate' Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian with the former Tibetan Autonomous Region Party hardliner Chen Quanguo in mid-2016, what was already a fairly uneasy, hyper-politicized social atmosphere among minorities in the region suddenly deteriorated to its worst point in decades. But life here still goes on.

Walking down the dusty streets of Hoboksar toward the local horse racetrack, the anxiety is palpable. Even in this small, Mongol dominated Autonomous County of barely 60,000 inhabitants, every few hundred meters armed police guardhouses dot the town's sidewalks. Approaching the racetrack's security checkpoint, an armed SWAT member (*tejing*) clad in black body-armour waved me toward an airport-style security check where two female guards opened my bags and examined my video-camera. After scrutinizing the bag's contents, they ushered me toward a walk-through metal detector as my bag was set on a conveyor to pass through yet another layer of security—an X-ray machine. Several Mongol and Kazakh

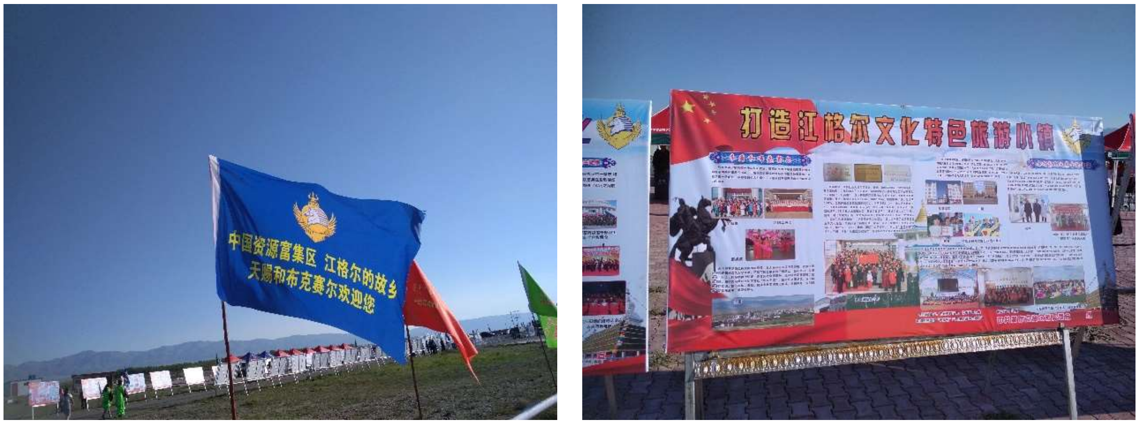

Figure 1: (Left), an example of the 'Jangar Logo' flag flying in front of a row of propaganda posters. (Right) an example of a propaganda poster promoting 'Construct a Jangar Culture Tourism Town'

nationality (*minzu*)[1] youth with sun-burned faces point and giggle at me while a disinterested guard ordered me to lift my arms, grabbed me uncomfortably by the groin, and robotically patted down my legs before finally waving me through to enjoy the afternoon festivities. This week Hoboksar celebrates the central Mongol summer-festival *nadaam*, and today is the opening ceremony. However, in light of a decade long 'cultural' branding effort, the official county *nadaam* festival has been renamed 'The Jangar Culture and Tourism Festival and *Nadaam* Festival' to suit local developmental interests.

While making my way to the main arena, I recorded the textual contents of some of the hundreds of banners and posters lining the path that seemed to blur the boundaries between 'cultural' advertising and political propaganda. And though some of the displays were widely recognized political slogans unrelated to the event, such as 'Construct a Foundation for Internet Security to Successfully Realize the Dream of Becoming an Internet Super-Power' etc., most were in some way consciously connected to local 'cultural' interests. 'China's Concentrated Resource Region and Jangar's Hometown—Heavenly Hoboksar Welcomes You!' read the red and blue flags protruding from the razor wire fences surrounding the fairgrounds. One prominently displayed poster-title declared, 'Carry Forward the Core Socialist Values (*shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhuguan*)[2] and Transmit Jangar Culture' underneath which it proudly announces that "[we must] guide the people of all nationalities (*minzu*) through Jangar Culture." Another poster demanded, 'Strengthen organizational leadership to strengthen cultural propaganda,' and connected ‘Jangar Culture’ and local ‘cultural development’ to a key tenant of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s governing theory by stating:

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[1] Translated 'nationality', 'ethnicity', 'people' etc., leading to an emphasis on the relative ambiguity of the concept, see Gladney (1991:85); Dikötter (1994:406); Bovingdon (2010:15).

[2] The 'Core Socialist Values' are composed of 12 broad ideological terms that define President Xi's vision of a healthy Socialist Spiritual Society (described below) and categorized under National Core Socialist Values (prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony); Societal Core Socialist Values (freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law); and individual (patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship). See Michael Gow (2017).

> ‘Cultural Confidence’ (*wenhua zixin*) is to realize the powerful source of cultural development and prosperity. It is founded on the basis of ideological and culture-work and bears the heavy responsibility of propaganda education to the masses, of connecting the hearts of Party and people, and enriching the cultural lives of the masses. Identifying Cultural Confidence cultivates national spirit (*minzu jingshen*), congeals national power […] and elevates cultural soft-power.[3]

Yet despite the near-constant reference to ‘Jangar Culture’ among the displays, for those curious as to what ‘Jangar’ might mean the only clue was to be found in the small print of a poster advertising the town’s ‘urbanization’ (*chengzhenhua*) in a section regarding a planned ‘Jangar Culture Industrial Park’ (*jiangge’er wenhua chanye yuan*) that read:

> ‘Jangar’ together with ‘Gesar’ and ‘Manas’ make up The Three Great Nationality Epics [of China] (*san da minzu shishi*), and Hoboksar County is the birthplace of ‘Jangar Culture’. There have been outstanding achievements in the collection, revision, and research [of the epic]. [Hoboksar] successfully applied to become the ‘Jangar’ Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Base, and [is now] constructing the Jangar Culture Industrial Park.

Despite the lack of context, the prominence of ‘Jangar Culture’ throughout the displays seems to not only explicitly connect nearly all officially recognized local manifestations of ‘folk-culture’, such as local dance, song, medicine, etc., under the broad rubric of ‘Jangar Culture’, but also to numerous political, economic, developmental, and even ideological programmes executed throughout the county. Even the display praising the recent successes in local ‘Party Construction’—that is to say Communist Party recruitment, ideological study, propaganda etc.—was implicitly associated with ‘Jangar Culture’ by being superimposed upon a backdrop of not only the Chinese flag, but a bronze statue prominently labelled ‘Jangar Khan’ and the town’s trademarked ‘Jangar Logo’.

I continued on, passing the drink and snack stands set-up in front of an Armoured Personnel Vehicle guarding the entrance. The arena stands were already filling up.

For the past year, I had been embedded in the local Culture Bureau, and at events such as these, I would usually sit with local culture-cadres to discuss the programme. However, in that this is the County’s largest event of the year, all cadres were already preoccupied and unavailable to join me. Yet as I walked into the stadium, I spotted a family with whom I had become quite friendly. As I climbed the arena stairs, the son—home from university to join the festivities—welcomed me in his regional Mongolian dialect: "*Ta sain baina ta!*"[4] He exclaimed, then immediately switched to Mandarin Chinese. "We got the good seats, right behind the VIP section!" I sat down beside him to chat as we waited for the event to begin.

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

As with nearly all public events in this town, the occasion began with its obligatory political speeches. Layer upon layer of political set-phrases and formulations strung together to describe political theories and economic plans entirely unrelated to the event in question are generally the subjects of choice—and this event is no different. Other than the occasional passing reference, the local Mongol Propaganda Department official and Han Chinese Party Committee member delivering the speeches barely mentioned *nadaam* or even 'Jangar Culture'. Yet after a flowery ideological commentary on Hoboksar's place in the region and its developmental successes, the speeches concluded by discussing the centrality of 'constructing' Jangar Culture in Hoboksar's development and in connecting the County 'cultural' interests to the broader regional and national political agendas when the official stated:

> [We must] accelerate Cultural Construction and build the dream paradise of Bumba depicted in the [Jangar] epic, and step by step work to make this become a reality. Friends, today Hoboksar has become a hot-spot for investment and construction in national development. Today, the people of all nationality groups (*minzu*) in Hoboksar seek to achieve the 'Prosperous Society' (*xiaokang shehui*)[5] […] [We must] actively construct a National Level Jangar Culture and Tourism Brand [to achieve these goals].

I leaned toward the family next to me. "How does one 'construct culture'?" I asked somewhat sarcastically, to which the family laughed. The son replied, "It really is politicized (*zhengzhi hua*). But I think it's good." His mother nodded vigorously, then he added, "If it weren't for the government, who would care about our local culture, especially Jangar?" Reflecting upon an oft-repeated local complaint, he explained to me that before the government's support for 'cultural development', few considered local 'nationality culture' (*minzu wenhua*) important anymore—particularly young people. I rephrased my question, asking him how he understood this 'cultural construction' policy. He thought for a moment, then responded in a somewhat clumsy, but remarkably 'official' fashion that to his mind, 'Cultural Construction' is related to the development of 'civilized' society (*wenming [de] shehui*). His mother again nodded in agreement, then pointed to the track as the parade displaying local 'intangible cultural heritage' began.

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[4] Though standard Mongolian would end this sentence with the particle '*uu'* (e.g. *sain baina uu*), in the Torghut dialect when greeting someone older or of higher 'rank', the phrase ends with the honorific '*ta*'.

[5] 'Prosperous Society' is developmentally focused political formulation introduced by Supreme Leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 derived from the Chinese classic canonical text the Book of Poems, that calls for an expanded middle class and subsequently expanded by following administrations as a 'guiding ideology'. For a concise discussion regarding 'Prosperous Society' see Lu Hanlong (2010).

I. Civilizing Culture

This dissertation is not a typical work of 'Mongolian Studies', nor is it a critique of Chinese state policy at its 'western frontier' of Xinjiang—though I hope that this dissertation may contribute to Mongolian studies, studies of the region, and of China more broadly. It is a study of not only Xinjiang's 'minority among minorities', the Oirat Mongols, but also an attempt to problematize conceptions of the 'Chinese state' more generally. This is an exploration of the processes of Cultural Construction within a body of people recognized as Xinjiang's 'Oirat Torghut Mongols', but *Chinese* Torghuts first and foremost—Chinese citizens who are discursively produced as an important constituent part of the regional and national social, political, and cultural ecology. Far from being relegated to the margins of the state, through complex social, economic, and political negotiations that penetrate interpersonal and ritualized relations with the state, members of Xinjiang's minority populations constitute active participants in the production and reproduction of the Chinese state-imaginary (Gladney 1991; Mackerras 1994; Harrell 1995; Fei 1999).

This dissertation presents a case study of the processual 'development', and indeed 'construction', of what would come to be called the Oirat 'Heroic Epic Jangar' and what is now referred to as a distinctive regional 'Jangar Culture'. Yet while 'Jangar' has been described as 'folk-literature' this is not a study of a 'Jangar Epic' as literature—though the process by which Jangar came to be conceived of as 'Great National Literature' will be discussed in Chapter 4. Nor is this a study of Jangar as 'folklore' or 'folk-performance'—though this will also be addressed in subsequent chapters. Instead, this dissertation is an investigation of the complex social and political negotiations that have come to transform Jangar into the representative 'culture' of Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County—but 'culture' understood within the narrow officialised discourses of Chinese culture-politics and policy. Indeed, it was not long after beginning my fieldwork at the Culture Bureau that I discovered that within this county-level work-unit 'culture' (*wenhua*) was being discursively constructed and practiced in ways utterly alien to me. Although, as a concept, 'culture' superficially remained fairly recognizable, it quickly became obvious to me that this institutionalized notion of 'culture' differed greatly from its popular understanding—with serious social, political, and economic consequences. I would find that it was through the complicated historical processes and practices of making national, regional, and local culture-policy workable at the local-level that an officially recognized 'culture' took form. Further, it should be noted that the focus on *wenhua* rather than the Mongolian term for 'culture', *soyol*, is deliberate. Though, the term *soyol* is rooted in its own sociolinguistic and historical contexts, in terms of 'culture' as policy discourse, *soyol* is implicated in, and subject to, the same (translated) genre of socialist theory, ideology, and literature—a genre that is expected to adhere to a linguistic register anchored in Chinese.[6]

Often misunderstood or even overlooked in anthropological studies, government policy and the authoritative political discourses that guide their implementation are inescapable in Hoboksar public and private life. Shore and Wright propose that anthropological approaches to 'policy' should explore such highly socialized phenomenon as "an organizing principle of society" and "a social and political space articulated through relations of power and governance." (Shore & Wright 2005:14-15) Importantly, they propose doing this in part by analysing policy documents and discourses as "cultural texts" (ibid.:6). Indeed, though documents are often considered "the most despised of ethnographic objects" (Latour 1990:54), it is important to recognize that historically, and indeed today, Chinese governance is very much a document-based apparatus, where written texts are almost always more consequential than oral speech (Lawrence & Martin 2013:10). Through circulation, the collection of signatures and/or stamps, and transmission from superiors to subordinates, documents come to symbolize political consensus and have the potential to transform behaviour (Das 2004; Cody 2009). In China perhaps more than anywhere else, documents are not simply tools of bureaucrats but rather "are constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes, and even the organizations themselves." (Hull 2012:253).

In a later work, Shore and Wright (2011) argue that policies as 'cultural texts' are necessarily decontextualized and recontextualized, interpreted and rearticulated to suit contemporary practical situations. An 'anthropology of policy' allows for a means to engage with these otherwise invisible "micro-physics of disciplinary power" (ibid.:17) so as to investigate "the reflexive capacities of political subjects" that blur the boundaries between state institutions and public life (ibid:18). Certainly evident in Hoboksar's culture-work, as policy discourses enter into relations with actors and institutions, it is through these mechanisms that they are implicated in the construction of new lived realities 'as objects of power', but executed in ways that are often incoherent and ‘messy’, with results that are at times unpredictable even to the bureaucrats themselves.

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[6] For example, Ines Stolpe (2008) presents a fascinating discussion regarding the introduction of "a new concept of culture" in Mongolian in the early 20th-century through attempts to standardize a concept of 'culture' to adhere to socialist ideology. See also Caroline Pegg's (2001) description of the destructive influences of socialist redefinitions of 'culture' on vernacular 'cultural' practices in Mongolia.

In a similar way, this dissertation explores the process of ‘Cultural Construction’ (*wenhua jianshe*) and in doing so illuminates aspects of the changing notion of ‘culture’ in officialised discourse in post-Reform China by describing the forty-year ‘development’ of Jangar, reflecting an important element of much larger Chinese state culture-policy programmes known as ‘Cultural Construction’ and/or ‘cultural development’ (*wenhua fazhan*). Broadly speaking, officially ‘Cultural Construction’ refers to “the development of various cultural undertakings […] and all programmes that improve people’s knowledge-levels […] and improve the people’s ideological consciousness and moral-levels” and is “developed under the guidance of Communist ideology.” (ZGGCDXWW 1982; cf. Feuchtwang & Wang 1991). Since its designation as a central aspect of Chinese cultural governance in the Reform and Opening (*gaige kaifang*) era of 1978 onward, Jangar would become deeply imbedded within this centralized programme to both systematize and implement a civilizational project by harmonizing culture-work throughout the county toward specific ideological ends. Yet likely due in part to its existing as a highly abstract, amorphous governing theory and policy practice with diffuse institutional authority, remarkably little has been written anthropologically regarding this massive, decades-long state-centred project for social engineering.[7]

Nevertheless, the development of officialised discourse surrounding ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ in contemporary Chinese politics is consequential for understanding how this small border county has attempted to construct a distinct ‘Jangar Culture’ as it is understood today. The following sections outline the basic concepts that will be developed throughout this dissertation. I begin with a description of the highly politicized and ideologically informed ‘narrow’ official definition of ‘culture’ and its articulation into Hoboksar’s culture-work. Illustrative of the deeply contextualized and ideologically implicated technocratic nature of Chinese policy implementation, this is done through a detailed engagement with an interview conducted with a Bureau ‘leader’ in which I attempt to ‘unpack’ the complex, otherwise hidden scripts in official narratives of County culture-work and illustrate how the development of officialised discourse in national culture-policy has come to inform and transform conceptualizations of ‘culture’, its ‘development’, and indeed its ‘use’. This is followed by a brief introduction to the power of political discourse in Chinese social life with a specific emphasis on how such discourses shape behaviours, especially among government officials. In this section, I attempt to outline a ‘broad’ understanding of ‘ritual’ since I argue that the reproduction of such discourses becomes institutionally ‘ritualized’ as a governing mechanism for harmonizing conduct toward set goals. Parts II and III conclude with a brief description of the field and an outline of the arguments to be developed in the chapters that follow.

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[7] One notable exception can be found in Feuchtwang and Wang (1991).

I begin this journey on the second floor of the Hoboksar Culture Bureau, in the messy office of an influential local culture-cadre.

a. A Narrow Definition of Culture

Beckoning me inside, Mr Turgen, Hoboksar’s oldest and most experienced culture-cadre (*wenhua ganbu*), gestured that I be seated. Behind his large, cluttered desk in this temporary office space, he finished jotting down some notes in what appeared to be Mongolian ‘Clear Script’ (*tod bichig*)—a distinct regional script once dominant among Oirat literati now disappearing due to the standardization of Mongolian in China into ‘Old Script’ (*hudum bichig*) dominant in Inner Mongolia and the subsequent imposition of Mandarin Chinese in public life (cf. Beckett & Postiglione 2012; Leibold & Chen 2014). Originally a poet locally held in high regard, Mr Turgen joined the Culture Bureau more than a decade ago after an inter-bureau transfer to set-up the County Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre in 2006. Since then, Turgen has risen through the ranks to become a Bureau ‘leader’ (*lingdao*) and has overseen and executed most of Hoboksar’s ‘Jangar Cultural Development’ programmes.

I began this session by asking about County ‘Cultural Construction’ in ‘Jangar Development’ and the relationship between ‘culture’ and ‘theory’ in County culture-work. For, in Chinese state practice, new administrations are expected to promote vague concepts in the form of rigid set-phrases or political formulations that guide policy execution at lower levels. The most consequential of these formulations shape globalizing ‘ideology’ (*sixiang*) or ‘theories’ (*lilun*) understood as innovations upon the ideology/theory of previous administrations to which they are discursively genealogically connected (cf. Schoenhals 1992). ‘Culture’ and ‘culture-work’ in China have historically received disproportionate attention in this regard.

After considering the question, Turgen responded: “I don’t think that culture can be ‘constructed’ [but] ‘civilization’ can be constructed.” For Turgen, ‘culture’ is a complex issue, particularly in relation to ‘culture-work’ and Cultural Construction in the county. To explain exactly to what ‘culture’ refers in relation to County ‘culture-work’, Turgen compares his ‘broad’ (*guangyi*) vernacular understanding of ‘culture’ to a ‘narrow’ (*xiayi*)[8] officialised one outlined in important speeches that define the governing philosophy of culture-work in the PRC. He singles out a series of important speeches delivered at the 18th National Congress in 2012 to make his point:

> During the 18th National Congress of the CCP, ‘culture’ was emphasized. But what we’re talking about here is the actual situation of our ‘local culture’ and its connection to this 18th Congress’s [abstract notion of] ‘culture’. We can have this ‘broad’ (*guangyi*) concept [of culture] and connect its elements [to theory]. But regarding Hoboksar, Jangar development puts [the cultural theory of] the 18th Congress into action. It is the process of making [theory] workable.[9]

Indeed, as with Mr Turgen, for many Chinese political theorists this ‘broad’ understanding of culture is not far removed from a classic Euro-American understanding of the term, covering anything from material traces of human labour (e.g. White 1949; Marx 1965; Harris 1979) to general social patterns or shared symbols among and between defined groups (e.g. Benedict 1971; Geertz 1993). In fact, Chinese academic work in relation to a ‘broad’ understanding of culture consciously draws on classic Western anthropological literature in its definitions (e.g. Li 1988; Chen 2001). However, much in the same way contemporary anthropology has at times come to question ‘culture’ as an analytical term (cf. Kuper 1999:245-246), though by no means disregarding a ‘broad’ understand of culture as illegitimate, Chinese theorists claim that it is nevertheless ‘unscientific’ and therefore unsatisfactory (Liu 1987:33; Yang & Wang 2006:68). Instead, in regard to ‘culture-work’ in the local context, Turgen draws on an official, fairly well-defined ‘narrow’ definition of ‘culture’ that has undergone decades of domestic theoretical development. In the post-1978 Reform era China, it would be through specific theoretical debates regarding the relationship between ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ that an institutionalized ‘narrow’ definition of culture would be articulated and instantiated as the foundation for ‘culture-work’ nationwide (cf. Xie 2006).

Founded in Supreme Leader Deng Xiaoping ‘two civilizations’ theory (*liang ge wenming*), this specific form of civilizational rhetoric postulates a binary framework in which a ‘material civilization’ based in developmental accomplishments of humanity exists in relation to a moral ‘spiritual’ one. Though conceptually distinct, both are conceived as interdependent and co-

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[8] Chinese political theory in relation to ‘culture’ often deploys similar rhetoric regarding the ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ definitions of culture. For a concise discussion of the ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ definitions reproduced often word-for-word throughout related literature, see Li Zong (1988) widely cited overview in “An Outline of Chinese Culture” (*zhongguo wenhua gailun*).

[9] This conversation took place in February 2017, eight months before 19th National Congress held that year. Turgen’s interpretation and opinions expressed here are therefore based on his understanding of national culture-policy prior to the unveiling of the 19th Congress’ priorities.

constituting, and without sufficient attention to one, the other will inevitably be impacted (Wang & Niu 1988:1; Dynon 2014:26; cf. ZGGCDXW 1982).

Asserting a genealogical link between this new theory and Mao Thought and Marxism, following Chairman Mao's death in 1976, the 'two civilizations' theory afforded an ideologically acceptable framework for the Party to articulate a new policy direction during a time of radical structural renegotiation that at once allowed for Deng's post-Maoist modernist, and arguably technocratic or even 'bourgeois' agenda, while placating the ideologically conservative party elites (Dynon 2008:86). As one scholar notes:

> "The two civilizations became necessary halves of a discursive coin, a unifying narrative representing the management of a multi-layered struggle between economic and moral progress, materialism and ideology, reform and conservatism, globalization and nationalism, cultural dissolution and the positive repackaging of China's cultural traditions." (ibid.:84)

Following its inauguration, and particularly after its forceful reinforcement in the 1986 'Decision of the Central Committee of the CCP on the Guidelines for the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization', Chinese political theorists would begin refining this civilizational theory, basing it in large part on a Chinese reinterpretation Marxist materialist conception of history firmly grounded in rigid Morganian social-evolutionism and nature-culture dualism.[10] Civilization, they hypothesized, is universal and absolute and the result of mankind's domination over nature, constituting the aggregation of humanity's progressive development within a framework of 'irreversible' unilinear continuity (Lin & Hao 1986:10-11; cf. Yang 1988; Lin 2012).

Political theorist Li Quanshi in his *On the Construction of Spiritual Civilization* published by a Central Committee of the CCP managed publishing house, Red Flag Publishing—best known for its contribution to propagating political-economic theory—summarized this emerging official civilizational ideology:

> So-called civilization, is the product of social practice in transforming the world. It is the sum of material and spiritual wealth created by human beings through practical labour, and is a symbol of humanity becoming civilized, progressing, and developing […]
>
> So-called material civilization, refers to the civilization of material production and the material life of all human beings. It is the result of human beings transforming the natural

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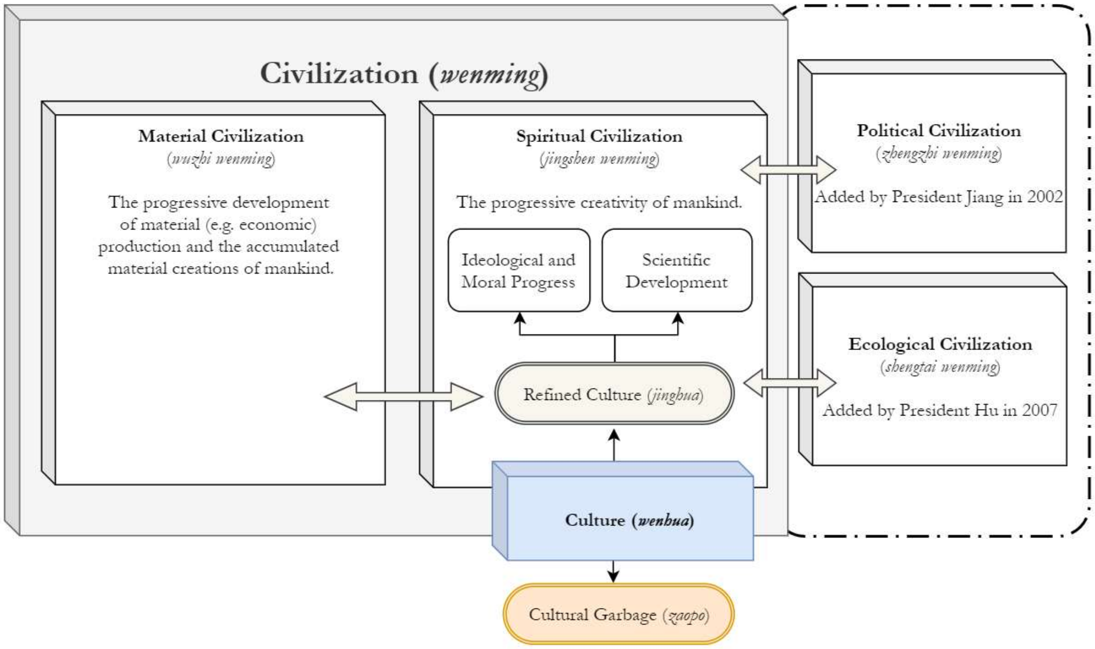
[10] In fact, adhering to a strict politically correct script with very little variation between authors, most political theorist who outline a 'scientific' definition of 'culture' and 'civilization' draw almost exclusively from identical official collections of Mao, Marx and Engels, and Lenin—and even today rarely cite other works in their definitions. The official works are: The People's Publishing House's *Selected Works of Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong xuanji)*; *Selected Works of Marx and Engels (Makesi Engesi xuanji)*; and *Selected Works of Lenin (Liening xuanji)* (editions vary depending on the period).



Civilization (wenming)
Material Civilization
(wuzhi wenming)
The progressive development of material (e.g. economic) production and the accumulated material creations of mankind.
Spiritual Civilization
(jingshen wenming)
The progressive creativity of mankind.
Ideological and Moral Progress
Scientific Development
Refined Culture (jinghua)
Culture (wenhua)
Cultural Garbage (zaopo)
Political Civilization
(zhengzhi wenming)
Added by President Jiang in 2002
Ecological Civilization
(shengtai wenming)
Added by President Hu in 2007

Figure 2: The role of 'culture' in the Two Civilizations Theory

> world. It mainly represents the progressive improvement of tools, technology, and growth of material wealth [...]
>
> So-called spiritual civilization, refers to the civilization of human spiritual production and spiritual life. It is the collective achievement of human beings in spiritual production and spiritual life through the transformation of the objective world. Spiritual civilization can be divided roughly into two categories: one is the cultural, the other is the ideological […] (1987:3-4)

Most importantly, any politically correct definition of 'civilization', be it 'material' or 'spiritual', understands 'civilization' to be the aggregation of all *positive* and *progressive* aspects of human development and necessarily excludes anything deemed 'backward' (*luohou*) or 'garbage' (*zaopo*) (Yang and Wang 2006:72; cf. Cai 1987:44; regarding '*zaopo*' see also Chapter 4). And while, due to its neglect, Chinese material civilization was perceived to lag behind a more-developed West, 'Socialist Spiritual Civilization' is nevertheless understood to be the 'newest' and 'highest form' of human spiritual civilization and therefore must be propagated throughout the population so as to inform the 'balanced' construction of Chinese civilization (Li 1987:15; Yang 1988:21). What drives the 'two civilizations' toward progressive development, then, is founded in the human creative capacities manifest in 'culture' and 'ideology'.

For most Chinese political theorists ‘civilization’, ‘culture’, and ‘ideology’ is to be understood ‘scientifically’ as a specific reflection of historical political-economic developmental realities (Mao 1971[1940], 1971[1942]; cf. Liu 1987; Jiang 2015); yet while ‘civilization’ consists only of the positive and progressive aspects of human development, ‘culture’ and ‘ideology’ can indeed include ‘backwardness’ and cultural ‘garbage’ that threaten to hold a nation back on the civilizational evolutionary scale (Lin 2012:22; cf. Chapter 4).

In this theoretical reckoning, ideology ‘guides culture’ which is itself conceived as a manifestation of ideology in relation to prior material realities, which in turn again informs further ideological development (Liu 1987:33; Jiang 2015:5). The positive and progressive aspects of this co-constitutive process then construct a ‘spiritual civilization’ and its scientific development. However, though spiritual civilization constructs material civilization and vice-versa, the two civilizations remain conceptually isolated. It is only through the bridge provided by ‘culture-in-practice’ that the two are united, and civilizational progression is possible (see fig. 2). That is to say, it is the ‘spirit’ of civilization, founded upon an existing material civilization, its resources and restraints, that allows for the development of tools, letters, art, etc. that are the catalysts for civilizational development (Lin & Hao 1986:18). And though ‘culture’ is multiform and relative, civilization is absolute and measured in degree.

It should be obvious that this official understanding of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ in relation to culture-work differs substantially from any Western academic notions of the terms. Indeed, some have even come to question whether or not the Chinese term *wenming* understood in this way can even be translated as ‘civilization’ (e.g. Boutonnet 2011:80; see also Chapter 7), and in this sense, such a suspicion could be equally applied to an officialised view regarding *wenhua* as ‘culture’. Nonetheless, from this perspective, Mr Turgen’s understanding that ‘civilization’ can be ‘constructed’ but ‘culture’ cannot is well in line with the official understanding of ‘culture’ in culture-work. Instead, the call for ‘constructing’ culture in national culture-policy is not a question of constructing ‘culture’ per se, but rather constructing the infrastructure and platform needed to positively guide ‘culture’ and its production through proper ideological direction while deemphasizing, ignoring, or even eliminating aspects deemed negative. In relation to the ‘development’ of Jangar Culture, Turgen notes:

> We can look at it from this perspective […] ‘Jangar cultural’ [development] is mostly an issue of building a ‘Jangar Brand’. But ‘Jangar development’ is the development of the epic […] So when you look at it like this, Hoboksar’s ‘Jangar [cultural] development’ isn’t the development of the epic’s content. Yet the content does include a lot of ‘cultural spirit’.

> We could call this an issue of ‘cultural spirit’ (*wenhua jingshen*) versus ‘cultural system’ (*wenhua tizhi*).

This is to say, in relation to Jangar ‘development’, the County’s Cultural Construction work is not a question of developing Jangar as a literary ‘epic’, but rather of constructing and reinforcing a ‘system’ for Jangar Culture’s propagation and transmission as product—mostly through the construction of a ‘Jangar Brand’—but also its positive and progressive ‘cultural spirit’. For in an official Chinese reckoning, ‘traditional culture’ such as Jangar is intimately connected to civilizational moral and ideological construction in the present and therefore must be discursively connected to a strict contemporary notion of ‘socialist values’ (cf. Chapter 2). As political theorist Zhou Anbo notes, ‘Traditional culture’ is to be “scientifically excavated (*fajue*) and used (*liyong*) […] to construct and service a Socialist Spiritual Civilization with Chinese Characteristics.” (1999:4-5). Under the guidance of Party leadership in determining ‘excellent elements’ of ‘traditional culture’, by strategically ‘excavating’ aspects of ‘traditional culture’ understood to be compatible with contemporary Chinese modernist political ideology, ‘culture’ comes to be recognized as ‘excellent’, ‘progressive’, and a contribution to a unique officialised understanding civilizational development (ibid.:16-17). Especially in the case of an artefact of Mongol ‘traditional culture’ nationally recognized as one of the ‘Three Great Epics of China’ (*san da shishi*) (cf. Mao 1983) and singled out by President Xi Jinping himself as a great contribution to ‘Chinese National Culture’ (*zhonghua wenhua*) (Xi 2015), Jangar is intimately bound-up in this calculated re-narration of ‘Jangar Culture’ within a complex network of interlacing interests and defined through specific, often non-negotiable political set-phrases and formulations.

Regarding the development of Jangar as ‘excellent traditional culture’ (*youxiu chuantong wenhua*), Turgen identifies the main areas Jangar culture ‘connects’ (*guashang*) to official ‘theory’ and is ‘used’ in county culture-work:

> Jangar has a lot of culture, harmonious culture, heroism [pause] many kinds of culture. People mentioned long ago that Jangar is the shell of Mongol politics, economics, and history. [The story] includes a lot of patriotism, and a lot regarding Nationality Unity (*minzu tuanjie*).[11] It also includes a lot regarding justice and good-governance. All of these things make up its ‘cultural spirit’. And all this can become propaganda education. Because of

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[11] Nationality Unity, or *minzu tuanjie*, is a key ideological and policy concept that understands China’s 56 recognized nationalities as distinct but united as a single Chinese Nation (*zhonghua minzu*) (Bulag 2002; Gladney 2004). In multi-national Xinjiang, Nationality Unity has been given priority and emphasis over all other social policies and is directly connected to the now paramount regional set-phrases ‘Maintain Stability’ (*weihu wending*) and ‘Lasting Order and Peace’ (*chang zhi jiu an*).

> these things, to the people of Hoboksar Jangar already have these ideas! So, if you mention these ideas [from the story], it's very good for education. If all of these [government] documents arrived from above, they're empty, they're [abstract] literary things. They're not concrete. To primary school students, to the average rural person, these things are difficult to use to educate people. They are all empty theoretical concepts. But if you can bring in Jangar, it becomes very concrete.

My interview with Mr Turgen lasted more than an hour and touched on a number of interesting topics in county culture-work. Nevertheless, it was in this short section of our conversation interspersed throughout the above discussion that would force me to re-evaluate my own worldview and analytical position regarding 'culture' in my field and required me to 'study-up' so as to better comprehend this theoretically informed, highly technocratic professional environment (Nader 1974; Gusterson 1997). Here, this 'narrow' definition 'culture' became at once an ethnographic term, but also an 'indigenous' analytical one implicated in a complex historical and sociopolitical context. Though officially defined as a product emanating from 'below', 'culture' in this sense indicates an exceedingly hierarchical process of becoming through practice within specific, and in some cases almost indisputable, authoritative ideological frames. Indeed, this understanding of 'culture' comes to redefine for the people taking part the very nature of 'authenticity', 'objectivity', and even 'reality' through its own authoritative self-referentiality (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 & 6).

Yet, though this section has attempted to summarize an 'official' Chinese civilizational outlook in relation to a unique understanding of 'culture', this by no means suggests that academic views of 'culture' and 'civilization' are monolithic and lack variation and dynamism (e.g. Wang 2005; Feuchtwang et al. 2008; Liang 2012). Indeed, there was, and still is, great diversity in Chinese public discourse regarding what exactly constitutes 'culture', often contradicting this 'official' outlook (e.g. Gan 2006). Furthermore, over time even this 'official' outlook has itself been subject to flexible interpretation and change. For example, although throughout the 1980s Deng Xiaoping emphasized constructing 'material civilization' over the 'spiritual', under President Jiang emphasis would be placed on 'spiritual civilization' through mass propaganda efforts and political movements, and by adding a third civilization in 2002—'political civilization'. And reflecting an official recognition of the importance of environmental conservation, in 2007 President Hu would introduce his own theoretical innovation that worked to deemphasize humanity's domination over nature in favour of 'harmonious' developmental relations between 'people, nature, and society' in a fourth 'ecological civilization' (Kong

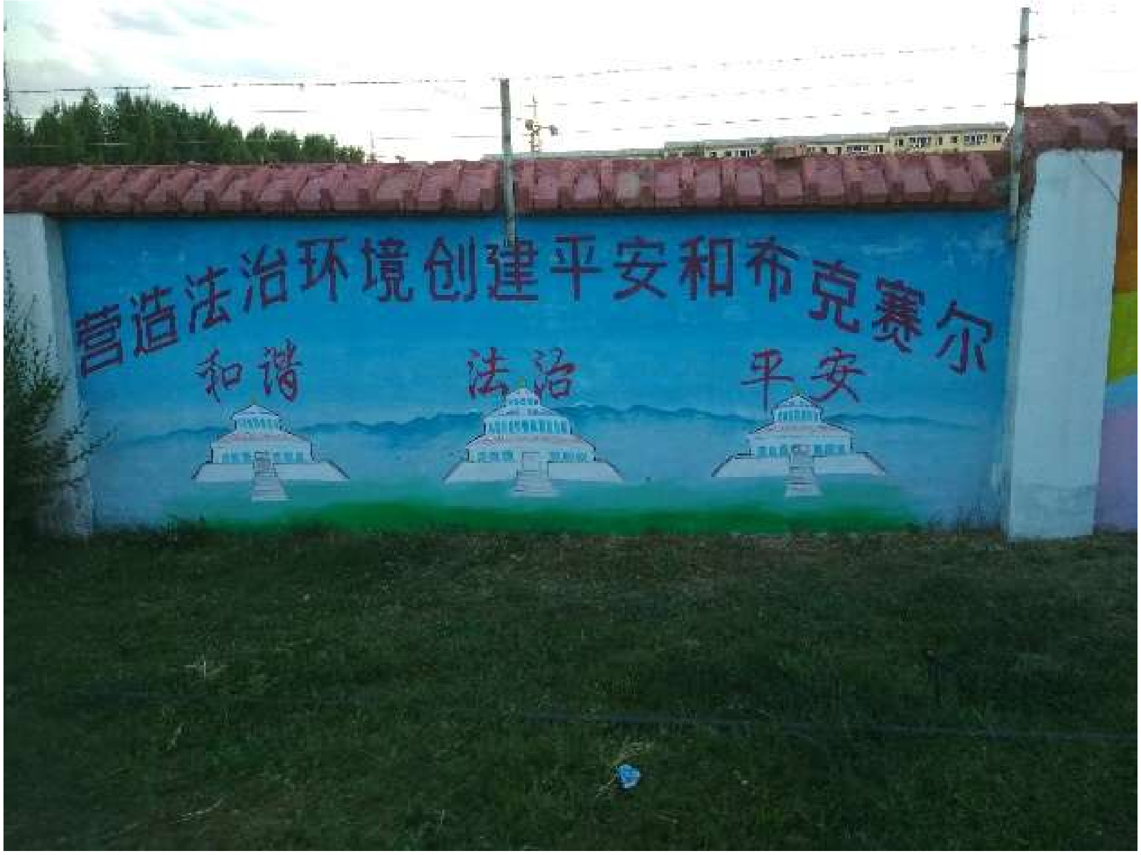

Figure 3: This is an example of the 'localization' of national ideology by directly associating the local Jangar museum and Jangar Culture with the construction of President Xi Jinping's so-called 'Core Socialist Values' guiding ideology.

2015:13; cf. Ji 2007). Yet even in light of these fairly radical changes, the foundational theoretical arguments and logics of this official outlook have remained relatively stable throughout (Lin 2012). And though it is uncertain exactly to what extent this 'official' understanding of 'culture' in culture-work seeps into popular discourse regarding 'Jangar Culture' or even 'culture' generally, as illustrated in the case of the Mongol family described above, it is nevertheless clear that there has been an adoption of specific language and at least tacit understanding of this officialised civilizational discourses in relation to 'culture'. But more importantly, it is in the correct practices and performances of this officialised discourse that County culture-work is executed, and a 'distinctive' regional 'culture' is constructed and developed.

b. A Broad Definition of Ritual

As in the rest of Xinjiang, propaganda is a ubiquitous presence in Hoboksar. Though propaganda is not exclusively 'civilizational' in content, nevertheless 'civilization' propaganda posters and banners cover nearly any flat surface in public spaces; civilization propaganda music and announcements blast over loudspeakers throughout the town; civilization propaganda notices and fliers are even found on shop walls, restaurant tables, bathroom stalls, etc. Discussing anything from love of county and Nationality Unity to the minutia of everyday life—such as proper street crossing or spitting in public—civilizational propaganda is everywhere. In fact, civilization propaganda is often so prevalent that Wang Jian, an employee of the Urumqi Propaganda Department's 'Civilization Office' (*wenming ban*) in Xinjiang's capital, described it to me as a programme to "flood the citizens senses" (*chongji laobaixing de ganguan*) and as a question of insinuating educational materials in the form of political slogans into even aspects of citizens' private lives.

Furthermore, when I inquired as to whether it is realistic to expect citizens to 'believe' (*xin*) these highly sanitized, standardized, and often contradictory narratives, I was surprised by his candour when he answered with a definitive 'no'. To Mr Wang, though it would be preferable for citizens to come to 'believe' in the 'values' espoused in propaganda, to him what is most important is that people 'behave' properly—that they 'cooperate' (*peihe*). According to his own innovative interpretation of 'Spiritual Civilization Construction' policies (*jingshen wenming jianshe*), he conceptually separates the notion of 'spirit', or *jingshen*, from 'civilization', or *wenming*, and claims that *jingshen* could be understood as a 'model' (*mofan*) for correct behaviour, whereas *wenming* might be best understood as correct 'spirit' in practice (*wenming xingwei*). He elaborated with an example of *wenming* street-crossing and emphasized that it is unimportant if people 'believe' that, or even understand why one should wait in an orderly fashion before crossing on a green light. Rather, what is critical is that people follow the procedure. More importantly, though, he intimates the perdurable nature of this 'civilizing' programme when he concludes that 'civilization' is not so much about 'rules', but rather in perhaps a slightly exaggerated manner claims that 'after accumulated practice across generations' (*yi dai yi dai de*) people will eventually be disciplined in such a way as to behave without thinking about rules:

> They won't think 'oh, if I cross the street [on red] I'll get in trouble' or 'oh, across the street, people will stare at me'. They will just think that what they're doing is the normal flow of life (*shunqi ziran*). [The government] wants to turn this all into natural habit (*xiguan*).

This not-so-subtle 'governmental' phenomenon (Scott 1995:202; Foucault 1997:82), though often exaggerated to an extreme in Xinjiang, is hardly unique to it (see Kipnis 2001, 2006, 2007, 2009; Anagnost 1997, 2004).

For example, in his ethnography of Chinese residential governance, Luigi Tomba (2014) illustrates how urban residential communities become sites of intense localized governing executed in part through civilization construction policies. Tomba illustrates how these propaganda mechanisms assist in cultivating active political engagement between 'state and society' where residents are inculcated into regimes of 'self-regulation' by reproducing officialised discourses and scripted practices. By participating in such activities, citizens are expected to "implement practices derived from government slogans" in constructing 'civilized' spaces (2014:142). Furthermore, Tomba insists that participants implicated in this civilizing programme "play their role actively, espousing the late socialist state's objective of civilizing China's population and embodying the model of a modern and responsible citizen." (ibid.:143). Similarly, Anders Hanson in his ethnography of university students' 'ritual' reproduction of what he calls 'official-speak', or *guanhua*, describes how the ritualized practice of correctly reproducing political discourse on university campuses comes to shape behaviours and dispositions among even a 'disinterested', but nevertheless 'supportive' student public (2017:37).[12]

Cultural Construction and cultural development are intimately connected to aspects of 'Spiritual Civilization Construction' described above. However, as illustrative as these examples may be, Tomba and Hanson do not devote specific attention to the 'cultural' mechanisms at work in 'localizing' these materials—or in Turgen's terms, the underlying 'system' supporting this work. In fact, in general, the studies that recognize the significance of officialised civilizational discourse to Chinese political and social life have tended to concentrate attention on overt, more direct aspects of these movements through the materialization of civilization propaganda-work (e.g. Anagnost 1997; Bakken 2000; Thøgersen 2003; Grant 2018). Yet what is frequently underappreciated is the implicit spillover of this propaganda work into other key areas—such as culture-work. For while culture-work is often not explicitly connected to Spiritual Civilization Construction policy, as discussed above, spiritual civilization as a governing theory nevertheless helps to define an official understanding of 'culture' and 'culture-work' in the PRC and is therefore implicated in the same genres of political discourse throughout.

In this regard, this dissertation is an attempt to engage with an arguably more foundational aspect of the Chinese ideological apparatus—the transformative power of the authoritative ideological discourses themselves through their ritualized reproduction in practice. That is to say, this thesis attempts to illustrate the changing notion of 'culture' in state discourses both in Xinjiang and China more broadly, but also illuminate the carefully choreographed performances that produce both a uniquely Chinese understanding of 'culture', and indeed the Chinese 'state' itself. Indeed, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries, the ritualization of correct political performance has been a historical hallmark of Chinese political socialization (e.g.

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[12] In relation to the social and emotional complexity of youth displays of overt politicism as 'filial nationalism', see Fong (2004).

Whyte 1974; Bell 1992; Feuchtwang & Wang 2001; Feuchtwang 2002; Tomba 2014; DeMare 2015). And though the significance of the 'two civilizations' rhetoric in defining an officialised 'cultural' narrative cannot be understated, it is merely one aspect of a far more pervasive ideological apparatus that permeates Chinese social and political life. Through the case study of the 'development' and 'construction' of Jangar as a cultural artefact in Xinjiang, the primary argument developed in the coming chapters is that through the perceived 'correct' and highly 'ritualized' deployments of ideologically informed political set-phrases and formulations, articulation of Jangar as politically correct 'culture' becomes implicated in a more globalizing programme of national construction and regime legitimization. Yet this is an aspect of 'ritual' and 'ritualization' that diverges somewhat from a classical anthropological understanding of the term. Indeed, 'ritual' as an analytical term has, at times, been a fairly controversial concept in anthropology (e.g. Goody 1977), and therefore requires specification and elaboration.

c. Ritual and an 'Anthropology of Policy'

In one of the most famous definitions of 'ritual' to date, Geertz understands ritual as located within totalizing schemes of symbolic reference that give actions meaning to ritual participants (1993:112). For Geertz, rituals contain semantic content and are communicative of specific interior dispositions assumed to be shared amongst and between ritual participants. However, through his critical investigation of medieval Christian rituality, Talal Asad effectively argues that, at least in this case of medieval monastics, 'ritual' was not an expression of specific 'beliefs' but rather a 'disciplinary' practice in cultivating specific Christian virtues (1993:77-79). For Asad, Geertz's definition of ritual is a 'privatized Christian' one, that "emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than constituting an activity in the world." (ibid.:47) Indeed, following Asad's important critique, anthropologist William Sax notes, "To analyse rituals as 'expressing' inner states of feelings and emotion, or 'symbolizing' […] ideas or social relations, or 'representing' psychological states of the human organism, is to neglect the question of how they might be instrumental, how they might actually *do* things." (2010:6, emphasis in original)

A key argument developed in the following chapters is that to better understand Chinese state-led domestic cultural and political construction practices, it is critical that we first take seriously Chinese political and ideological discourses. Contrary to studies that tend to emphasize the disingenuousness and 'insincerity' of ritually reproduced language and practices in authoritarian states (e.g. Bakken 2000; Yurchak 2003, 2006; Rasanayagam 2011; Weeden 2015), this dissertation argues that it is precisely due to the fact that authoritative political set-phrases and formulation are not necessarily designed to be 'believed' but rather 'practiced' that these genres of political speech become effective (cf. Bruckerman & Feuchtwang 2016:208)—an argument elaborated at length in Chapters 3 and 4.

Following such critiques, this thesis engages with the growing number of anthropologists who have attempted to reconceptualize ritual through its performed actions as *doing* something—as product of 'ritualization' (Bell 1992:88)—rather than through ritual's presumed 'meaning'. An important theoretical development lies in Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw's (1994) ethnography of Jane *puja* ritual worship in the northwest Indian state of Rajasthan. There the authors present a challenge to previous theoretical accounts of ritual that tended to argue ritualized actions to be necessarily teleological or contain causal reasoning by painstakingly recounting a range of ritual practitioner activities and their identities, such as 'anointing the limbs of the statue' (*anga puja*, ibid.114), 'placing of flowers on the statue' (*pushpa puja*, ibid.119), etc. The authors discovered that the narratives individuals ascribed to their ritual actions were unconnected from 'intentionalities' and so diverse that attempts to identify 'meaning' and 'intent' from the ritual itself became 'impossible' (ibid.:101). Instead, they claim that "ritualization severs the link […] between the 'intentional meaning' of the agent and the identity of the act which he or she performs." (ibid.:2) Yet, the authors nevertheless presume that, at least in the case of the *puja*, even if ritual itself is not necessarily *communicative* of meaning, ritualized activities may indeed be given meaning by ritual participants (ibid.:6).

Although this may indeed be the case for *puja* ritual worship, this thesis nevertheless proposes that while ritualized action may contain 'meaning' for practitioners, this need not necessarily *always* be the case. Indeed, I agrue that at least in regard to the cases explored in the chapters that follow, in China much ritualized behaviour that helps to organize activities such as 'cultural' construction and development, both interpersonal but also structural, need not contain semantic reference. As I will argue in Chapter 3, ritualized behaviour as a governing principle of particular performances often retains its great power precisely due to the fact that it may *lack* semantic reference and is distanced from the subject (Bloch 1975; cf. Kuipers 1990), rather than as being understood as an expression of pre-existing organizing experiences as described by Geertz.

An innovative argument for a renewed emphasis in the study of 'ritual as action' can be found in the collaborative work of Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Bennett (2008) in *Ritual and its Consequences* and does so in part through the indigenous Chinese vocabulary of *li*. Translated into English, *li* is often understood as 'ritual' or 'rite'—but it is indeed far more, subsuming potentially all social behaviour. From ritual to etiquette, from the conscious to unconscious, *li* is the productive power that allows for socially patterned order, and it is what transforms a 'raw' human form into a *human being* (Fingarette 1974:34; see also Zito 1996; Ames 2011). For Seligman et al., 'ritual' understood in these terms offers an orientation to action pertinent to understanding human behaviour.

They describe the notion that actions should contain 'meaning' as markers of 'internal processes' as 'sincerity'—effectively essences within the subject and shared throughout society (2008:4). Where ritual can contain within it aspects of 'sincerity', 'sincere' acts are often also ritualized—but they nevertheless insist ritual is not necessarily sincere. Through a comparative analysis of what they call the 'two ideal types' of ritual and sincerity, they attempt to understand ritual as existing beyond the 'sacred' (ibid.:3). They stress that in ritual: "Getting it right is not a matter of making outer acts conform to inner beliefs. Getting it right is doing it again and again and again—it is an act of world construction." (ibid.:24) For Seligman et al., ritual creates worlds of the 'subjunctive'—illusory plays where everyone has a role, and where the plot becomes a coinhabited world of 'as if' reality. Through ritual, we act 'as if' what we do represents reality. And though this subjective world of 'as ifs' is indeed illusory, they stress that it is by no means disingenuous. They write, "Illusions are not lies—they are a form of the subjunctive… Not true yet not deceptive." (ibid.:22) This world is a social world, shared among all of those with a given role. When all share in their roles, actions and words are in this way patterned and ordered, and behaviour transforms into an illusion of shared authenticity (cf. Puett 2010).

This dissertation, then, claims that 'ritual' as a process of 'ritualization' is not necessarily an activity clearly distinguished from daily life, but rather, following Humphrey and Laidlaw that "ritual is a distinctive way in which an action, probably any action, may be performed." (1994:3; cf. Sax 2010; Stasch 2011) This, of course, includes the ritualization of political discourses and their associated behavioural scripts. That is to say, in some contexts and under certain circumstances, the recognition of the appropriateness of certain linguistic propriety becomes an aspect of ritualization that assumes the priority of correct practice over 'sincere' beliefs (cf. Steinmüller 2010, 2013, 2016). In the context of proper ritualized deployments of ideologically informed political texts, language is transformed and itself becomes transformative. Indeed, in the chapters that follow, this dissertation will illustrate how the ritualized reproduction of political discourse constrains and manipulates behaviour through several processes: by shaping the space for autonomous action (Chapter 3); by constructing indisputable *a priori* regarding what is and is not 'scientific' and 'objective'; and thereby defining 'correct' interpretations of ‘culture’ (Chapter 4). As a result, such ritualized discourses have the power to produce tangible results.

In this regard, as illustrated in the cases of reproducing scripted behaviours derived from slogans described by Tomba, and the ‘disinterested’ participation in reproducing political discourse in Hanson’s account, although partaking in these activities *may* be meaningful to participants, what is important is not that participants ‘believe’ in or even understand what is being ritually enacted. Rather what is crucial is that participants ‘cooperate’ and do so together, over and over again. The goal is to reach a fixed purpose in one’s infinite multitude of performances through repeated study, where a canon of practices can potentially be followed by all. When viewed in this light, it is not good enough to simply *be* a citizen or a cadre, one must *act* like it. In this sense, this ‘broad’ definition of ‘ritual’ in relation to an anthropology of policy in some ways becomes ‘formalized action’ in everyday life—a concept that is put into ethnographic context in Chapters 5 and 6.

Yet Seligman et al. argue that human beings simultaneously existing in both the disorderly world of everyday life *and* the orderly illusory subjunctive worlds of ritualized performance, and it is the blurred boundary between these worlds that serves to at once separate but also unite them (cf. Puett 2010:97). And where ritualized systems of social order are often criticized for restricting individual autonomy, they argue that ritual, in fact, allows room for autonomous action. While ritualized behaviour can be understood to limit conduct in one way or another, it is in the tension between the subjunctive world and the world of everyday life that opens the subject to autonomous, creative behaviour. For example, in the case of Mr Turgen, it was through the correct deployments of ideologically informed set-language that he was able to narrate Jangar Culture and County culture-work within the context of broader national, regional, and local interests as ‘excellent culture’ with practical ‘use’. As for the Civilization Office cadre, it was through his own innovative negotiation of spiritual civilization as a concept that he was able to articulate his own work, its responsibilities, and expected results. These cases illustrate how reflexive navigation of authoritative political discourses’ ritualized enactments are “constantly subject to renovation, which is innovation that insists it is restoration and which preserves an obligatory sequence of actions.” (Feuchtwang & Rowlands 2019:43) However, as I attempt to show in Chapter 3, as the borders between these two worlds begin to solidify, the room for negotiated action also begins to diminish.

In sum, ritualized action as understood through this particular Chinese vernacular and informed by anthropological theory is an act of world construction, and in the accumulation of countless repetitive performances from child to teacher, from citizen to cadre, from bureaucrat to leader, from leader to people, and all constitute the constant and complex network of performances that construct the performance of the state. And though it has become fashionable in some circles to de-emphasize the key role of historically taken-for-granted social principles of exemplarity in favour of some 'sincere', yet vaguely defined 'popular consciousness' or 'mentalité' of a 'people' as cultural form (e.g. Chartier 1988; cf. Holland et al. 2003), it will be alternatively argued that key concepts and behaviours of specific historical personalities—real or imaginary—have played an important role in informing contemporary socio-political behaviours regardless of nationality (*minzu*) or ethnicity (*zuqun*) (Bary 1996:21; see also Humphrey 1997; Bulag 1998). For while Hoboksar's Torghut Mongols may not trace the same moral genealogies as those of, say, Beijing 'Han Chinese', they do exist within a distinctly patterned 'Chinese nation' with firm foundational history in such mechanisms of state socialization. Thus, through their active participation in the culture-politics of state making performances, Hoboksar Mongols find themselves implicated in this ordered patterning of illusory worlds around them—with very tangible social consequences.

II. The Field

This fieldwork programme was executed between July 2016 and December 2017 and, due to factors that will be described in more detail in Chapter 3, was definitively multi-sited, with roughly two-thirds of the time in Xinjiang spent in Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County, and the remaining third spent in the provincial seat of Urumqi or traveling between Xinjiang's few remaining Mongol settlements.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is a provincial level Autonomous Region located in the northwest 'frontier' of the People's Republic of China, bordering eight countries and three provinces/autonomous regions: Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan to the north and northwest, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to the west and southwest, the Tibet Autonomous Region and Qinghai and Gansu provinces to the south and east. With a series of oasis regions to the south and west and semi-arid steppe to the north surrounding the vast deserts of the Tarim basin, Xinjiang effectively constitutes a torus shape of inhabited space. In recent history, Xinjiang has been conceptually separated by the Tianshan Mountain range—both ecologically and culturally—into two distinct regions: First, the Tarim Basin region (known locally as *nanjiang*, or 'Southern Xinjiang'), an ecologically arid, religiously Muslim, and socio-linguistically Turkic series of oases to the south/southwest; and second, the Dzungar Basin to the north/northwest (often referred to as *beijiang*, or 'Northern

Xinjiang') generally considered to be both less arid and more ethnically and religiously diverse. Although Xinjiang is the largest provincial-level administrative region in China (1.6 million km^2), it ranks near last (25th) in terms of population (22.6 million, of which 180,000 are of the Mongol nationality; XJWWEZZQTJ 2015). Organizationally, Xinjiang is divided into 13 prefecture-level divisions including six prefectures (Ch. *diqu*), four prefecture-level cities (Ch. *di ji shi*), four autonomous prefectures (Ch. *zizhi zhou*) and one sub-provincial prefecture—the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture which administers Ili, Altai, and Tacheng Prefectures (Ch. *di qu*). These administrative units are further divided into districts (Ch. *qu*), county-level cities (Ch. *xian ji shi*), counties (Ch. *xian*), and autonomous counties (Ch. *zizhi xian*). Hoboksar Mongol Autonomous County (henceforth referred to as 'Hoboksar') is one such autonomous county.

Located within the Tacheng prefecture—between the Ili and Altai prefectures of Northern Xinjiang and bordering Kazakhstan—Hoboksar has a total population of approximately 55,000, of which the population is distributed roughly into thirds between people officially classified as Mongols (32%), Han (36%) and Kazakhs (28%) (XJWWEZZQTJ 2015). According to official and semi-official identifications of Mongol groups, Hoboksar is home to Oirat Torghut, Öölöd and Khoshud Mongols, but a significant number of Chakhar Mongols also reside in the region due to historic in-migration from Inner Mongolia (Atwood 2004:593). Further, a small number of Uriyangkhai Mongols and Daur can also be found within the county (Benson and Svanberg 1998:25).

Comparatively little has been written anthropologically on the Oirat Mongols of Xinjiang with the exception of local researchers such as Tseren Buhan (1996) and Tsui Yenhu (Cui Yanhu) (1996, 2012); however, due to the historic strategic concerns of both Tsarist Russia and Qing China, from the 17th-19th centuries, the Xinjiang Oirat Mongols and the region they inhabit have been considered significant by both Chinese and Western historiographers (see also Soni 2010).

Culturally, while widely recognized to have at times been incorporated into a broader Mongolian socio-political world (e.g. under Chinggisid rule), and at others detached from the senior Mongol ruling house (Mo. *Borjigin*) through establishing independent states (e.g. the Dzunghar Khanate), Mongol groups known as present-day 'Oirat Mongols' are nevertheless recognized for their distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. Inhabiting regions of Russia, Mongolia, and numerous Chinese provinces, a majority of Chinese Oirat Mongols reside in Xinjiang, many of whom continue to speak a distinct regional Mongolian dialect, and maintain a unique writing system known as *tod bichig,* or 'Clear Script' (Birtalan 2006). However, it should be noted that due to a number of sociopolitical factors, while today to speak of 'Oirat Mongols' is relatively straightforward and internally defined, historical representations of 'Oirats' as a distinct 'people' are in fact quite problematic in that 'Oirat' was a political designation, not an ethnic one. Nevertheless, in what follows, I outline the dominant historical account regarding 'Oirat' Mongols in Xinjiang.

Historically the term 'Oirat' dates to the days of Chinggis Khan and is referring to a fluid 'political confederation' which eventually emerged as a powerful force in the early 17th century with the rise of 'Dzungar' dynastic leadership. By forcing competing Torghut, Khoshud, and Dörböd Oirat nobles west to the Volga, from the 1630s to the 1670s, the Dzungar dynasty steadily increased its political and economic influence throughout present-day Xinjiang and beyond (Millward 2007:89). However, by the mid-18th century, after having been uncomfortably pinched between two expanding empires—Tsarist Russia and Qing China—for nearly a century, and after an ultimately devastating war with the Qing leading to something approaching a military genocide, starvation, and disease, the Dzungar Khanate was destroyed. With upper-estimates at 90% of the population having perished, many of those who remained (and not forced into slavery) would ultimately be officially re-designated Öölöd Mongols (Perdue 2007:285). After the defeat of the Dzungar Khanate in 1757, present-day Xinjiang came under firm Qing dynastic rule, and in 1771 'welcomed' approximately 70,000 Oirat Torghuts returning from the Volga to resettled the region, in what is now officially designated the 'Eastern Return' (*dong gui*) or 'The Return to the Homeland' (*huigui zuguo*) (Wang 2011). At present, 50% of Xinjiang Mongols are identified as Torghut, 20% Öölöd, and Chakhar and Khoshud constitute approximately 20% and 10% of the population, respectively (Atwood 2004:593).

As mentioned above, very little has been written on contemporary Xinjiang Mongols, and even less on Hoboksar's Mongol population. However, according to Tseren (1996), Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County presently has a total land area of 30,000 km^2, consisting of mountains to the north and grassland steppe to the south. Under Qing rule, the Mongols surrounding Hoboksar were known as the 'Northern League', divided into three banners[13] with 14 *sum*[14] in total. Upon 'Liberation',[15] Hoboksar consisted of five monasteries and one small village known as 'Hoshtolgoi', but in that the vast majority of the region's population were nomadic pastoralists, present-day Hoboksar contained nothing resembling a permanent settlement (Tseren 1996:148). In 1955 Hoboksar was officially designated the Hoboksar Mongol Autonomous County and as of its most recent administrative divisions now consists of six permanent villages (*xiang*), three pastures (*muchang*), two towns (*zhen*), and several smaller units administered under village, pasture, and town governments known as *cun* (Gao & Cui 1999:4). The majority of the fieldwork for this project was undertaken in the county seat, Hoboksar Town (*hebukesai'er zhen*).

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[13] Mo. *Khoshuu*. A Qing administrative unit and essentially a principality of a Mongol nobleman.

[14] A sub-unit of *Khoshuu* from which a nominal number of troops could theoretically be called upon.

[15] 'Liberation' is a term of Chinese state discourse describing the moment that Chinese CCP officially gained control over any given territory. Xinjiang was officially 'Peacefully Liberated' (*heping jiefang*) in late 1949.

III. Chapter Outline

For the purpose of foregrounding and contextualizing the chapters that follow, Chapter 2 constitutes a slight deviation from an 'anthropology of policy' approach. Instead, this chapter presents an outline of the 'Heroic Epic Jangar' and a description of how Jangar is discursively constructed as a central aspect of 'local traditional culture' among some Hoboksar stakeholders. Through an examination of how Jangar is discursively represented as 'tradition' in Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County, this chapter surveys the changing and often contradictory competing discourses surrounding 'Jangar' in an attempt to illustrate how often generationally defined narrative differences have come to construct radically different 'Jangars'—but where residents nevertheless consistently claim 'Jangar' has remained unchanged over time. This chapter strives to present narrative accounts that span roughly the periods covered in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 temporarily 'zooms-out' from Hoboksar and away from the 'Jangar' theme to outline the historical circumstances that have come to define the extreme 'sensitivity' in contemporary Xinjiang. This chapter attempts to illustrate the broad powers of authoritative political discourse through an investigation of the Chinese notion of *mingan*, or sensitivity, on China's frontier and argues that *mingan* works as a border-producing mechanism through highly strategic ritual deployments of political set-phrases. Through an examination of the development of specific Chinese formulaic language, or *tifa*, between the 1980's to present (Schoenhals 1992:6-7), I attempt to argue that this textual power is far more than mere sloganeering, but instead show it to be a mechanism for shaping space for autonomous action. Borrowing from Seligman et al. and Puett's discussions on ritualized behaviour to elaborate on the social power of political oratory's 'linguistic rituals' (Bloch 1975:11), this chapter argues that rather than understand formalized speech as 'signs' or 'symbols' representing 'meaning', in the Chinese context, formalized speech may be more productively understood as 'markers' delineating the borders of acceptable political behaviour. That is to say, Chinese political formulations do not define reality, rather they build clear lines around possible realities autonomous actors may construct, while simultaneously defining what lies outside these limits as threats to be rectified.

Chapter 4 attempts to elaborate on the complex intertextual generic relations between set political formulations, a ‘scientific’ outlook, and ‘objective’ research and analysis of the Xinjiang Mongol ‘Heroic Epic Jangar’. These relations at once construct an ‘epic’ and also situates it within acceptable official narratives of the natural progression of a unified socialist state. By elaborating on the ‘messiness’ of the state project to collect, ‘revise’, and publish Jangar as one of the ‘Three Great Epics of China’, this chapter attempts to describe the semi-closed generic complex in which official ‘cultural’ production was entwined from the late 1970s to 1980s. These ritually deployed political formulations described in Chapters 3 and 4 are shown to severely constrict the room for manoeuvring so as to produce specific results. But where the extreme restrictiveness of the situation described in Chapter 3 seems to allow little room to manoeuvre, Chapter 4 describes the highly reflexive and creative negotiations in which Mongol culture-workers and scholars operate so as to produce ‘correct’, but also rich and sophisticated, literary ‘culture’. This chapter attempts to draw the discussion into the specific framework and settings of regional culture-work immediately succeeding the Cultural Revolution and into the mid-1980s that came to define contemporary understandings of ‘Jangar Culture’ in Hoboksar within a politically correct ‘cultural’ narrative as ‘excellent nationality literature’.

Yet after the nationwide political tumult experience in 1989 and the subsequent dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s, China began to fundamentally reevaluate ‘culture’ as a political concept. In this decade, Chinese policymakers would come to reimagine ‘culture’ to some extent as a tool of international politics to be actively cultivated so as to defend against the threatening influences of ‘Western’ cultural forces (Ai 2012:135), and coincided with a global discursive shift which began to recognize ‘culture’ as a ‘resource’ to be excavated, shaped, and deployed for economic development (e.g. World Bank 2001; cf. Yudice 2003; Shepherd 2006, 2013). This fundamental reassessment of culture-power in China would greatly influence Jangar’s development. Chapter 5, then, follows this process from the early 2000s onward, where Jangar comes to be deployed as a central aspect of Hoboksar’s cultural, educational, political, ideological, and especially developmental agendas through the uniquely Chinese interpretations of ‘Cultural Heritage’ politics. This chapter follows Hoboksar’s complex approach to connecting local ‘Jangar Cultural Development’ to wider regional and national political interests while highlighting the often ignored personal and professional interests of those charged with its management and control. Through this specific case, this chapter attempts to illustrate how through government culture-work mechanisms, global ‘heritage discourses’ championed by international organizations such as UNESCO have been re-articulated so as to buttress existing Chinese cultural management regimes—not to replace them. Finally, by building upon the arguments developed in previous chapters, Chapter 5 concludes by arguing that, at least in the case of Hoboksar's Jangar as Intangible Cultural Heritage, in some ways 'culture' as 'heritage' might be more productively understood as 'valued' for what it *does*, rather than what it is.

Chapter 6 attempts to draw the discussion together by 'zooming-down' to the very office where national, regional, and county policies are received and where cadres struggle to articulate these diverse interests into a coherent 'cultural' product. Informed by the theoretical discussion developed throughout this thesis, the chapter attempts to describe how this rigid normative regime informs and restricts the environment in which 'practices and performances' (Smith 2006:11) of Hoboksar Jangar as 'cultural heritage' are articulated. Here, this chapter shows how such work facilitates both national and local goals by way of creative, yet often confusing and 'formalistic' (*xingshi zhuyi* [*de*]) means. This is done by elaborating on the complex negotiations of 'correct' political practice 'in form', and how such practices influence culture work in the county. By drawing on the works of Humphrey (1997), Bakken (2000), and Puett (2012, 2015), this chapter then attempts to illustrate how due to a perceived responsibility to properly reproduce set scripts of speech and behaviour regarding 'culture' and 'cultural development', the 'cultural spirit' of Jangar becomes an 'awkward exemplar' as it is forcefully and discursively connected to numerous, often contradictory, cultural narratives and political interests.

Chapter 2: The ‘Power’ of Jangar

Introduction: The Paradox of a ‘Traditional’ Jangar?

Be they ‘invented’, ‘imagined’, or ‘practiced’, ‘traditions’ are intangible, often abstract, and above all inescapably political (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983, Connerton 1989). Undeniably, ‘tradition’ is a contentious concept anthropologically, for in any study of ‘tradition’ it is evident that there is no coherent and commonly shared account of what constitutes ‘tradition’ or how to comprehend it analytically. No matter the attempt at explanation or context, ‘tradition’ is necessarily a claim—a shared and circulated claim with varying degrees of authority and historical veracity perhaps, but at a minimum it is a claim nonetheless. Nevertheless, anthropologists must grapple with the often public nature and deeply emotionally laden implications of these claims to ‘tradition’ and ‘traditional practices’ within the locales in which we work. Therefore, no matter how they are described, ‘traditions’ more often than not remain intensely meaningful and should, therefore, be taken seriously as objects of ethnographic investigation.

Attempts to grapple with the problematic taken-for-grantedness of ‘tradition’ as an anthropological concept have varied greatly, yet often claimed ‘tradition’ to exist within a dualistic framework of either ‘continuity’ or ‘change’ (e.g. Laidlaw 2010; Humphrey & Ujeed 2013). On the one hand, it has been argued that ‘traditions’ are identifiable social artefacts or sets of practices of the past carried into the present, yet nevertheless subject to change, renegotiation, and/or manipulation and appear “flexible and adaptive under some conditions and persistent and self-replicating under others.” (Smith 1982:127). Alternatively, the problem of the pervasiveness of ‘continuity thinking’ in contemporary anthropological analysis has been raised as a major theoretical impediment (Merlan 2015). Joel Robbins (2007) for instance claims that anthropological theories have historically overwhelmingly emphasized cultural ‘continuity’ as opposed to ‘discontinuity’, becoming the “deep structure of anthropological theorizing” (ibid.16) and argues that in some cases an ethnographic focus on ‘rupture’ may prove more productive analytically (ibid.12).

Though both perspectives can prove fruitful in anthropological analyses of ‘tradition’, this chapter intends not to focus on ‘traditions’ per se, but rather on the local claims to traditions’ enduring qualities. As anthropologist Brigittine French (2012) argues, be it an ethnographic term or analytical concept, ‘tradition’ is first and foremost the product of semiotic work. She argues that it is through the circulation of competing ‘social recollections’ through various media in highly politicized contexts that ‘tradition’ is subject to processes of decontextualization, recontextualization, rearticulation, and even ‘erasure’ in each unique circumstance in which ‘it’ is deployed (ibid.347). Furthermore, as Bauman and Briggs (2006) illustrate in their influential account regarding the historical significance of ‘tradition’ in constructing ‘modernity’, claims to primordialist and often territorially bounded ‘traditions’ figure prominently in dominant configurations of nationalist thought as the criteria of ‘cultural continuity’, linking our present ‘modern’ world with a distant ancestral past (ibid.163). They demonstrate how beginning in seventeenth-century European political thought, ‘traditions’ have become “a mode of discourse that is diagnostic of the past” and “the intertextually constituted continuum of reiterations by which the language—and thus the thought—of the past survives into the present” (ibid.11; cf. Giesen 1998). With this in mind, here I am less interested in ‘traditions’ as aspects of either ‘continuity’ or ‘change’, but rather the seemingly paradoxical question of how individuals or groups of individuals within specific social contexts might claim a recognized social artefact or set of practices to be unchanging despite obvious, and indeed often radical, social changes over time.

For much like Mongols throughout China and beyond, Hoboksar Torghuts consistently describe their ‘culture’ as being rooted in ‘traditions’ of nomadic pastoralism (cf. Sneath 2006:140). In fact, claims to the continuity of Torghut ‘tradition’ (Mo. *ulamjalal*; Ch. *chuantong*) is an inescapable element of Hoboksar residents’ articulation of ‘culture’ (Mo. *soyol*; Ch. *wenhua*). More specifically, in recent decades claims to a ‘Jangar Epic’ that has been passed down unchanged from generation to generation is a critical aspect of local self-identification as Hoboksar's Oirat Torghut Mongols and an important feature in a nationalistic narrative of this small sub-ethnic group's valuable contribution to a culturally rich and ethnically plural 'Chinese Nation' (*zhonghua minzu*). For in China, contemporary ideological efforts to construct specific institutionalized structures of social categorization based on gender, class, race, and indeed 'nationality' (*minzu*) that seem persuasive, 'scientific', and legitimate often depend on *a priori* assumptions about 'tradition' and 'traditional practices' in the face of a 'modern' Other that are at once politically ascribed, but also the often self-identified qualities of a distinct recognized group (Barabantseva 2008:573; Mullaney 2011:72; cf. Dikötter 2015).

The introduction of this thesis outlined the basic development of 'culture' as an important theoretical concept in Chinese political discourse; yet the notion of 'tradition' (*chuantong*) in 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua*), while admittedly far less theorized is an equally politicized concept. For example, the widely cited Central Nationality University of China published 'Dictionary of Culturology' (*wenhua xue cidian*) defines 'traditional culture' as follows:

> Traditional culture has four main characteristics: First, the blending of old and new. Traditional culture is something that has developed from the past to the present and is the result of the blending of the past and the present […] The second is its relative stability. It is undeniable that traditional culture is constantly absorbing new content in a dynamic process of formation, but it is a stable thing rooted in the soil of its own nation (*zhigen yu ziji minzu turong zhong*), remains relatively unchanged, and lasts through time. Third is ethics. Despite the different standards and manifestations of ethical concepts in different countries and nations, [the recognized ethics of traditional culture] is the strength and reason for the continuation of traditional culture […] Fourth, is its broad social purchase […] (Qin et al. 1988:339-340)

In a basic sense, this definition begins as would many Western academic definitions of 'tradition'—that is, 'tradition' is identifiable and a manifestation of both continuity and change. Yet, the definition suddenly reveals objectivist social evolutionary underpinnings with deeply seated ethicopolitical implications, not to mention obvious racial and nationalist overtones. Though by no means the only definition of 'tradition' in China, it nevertheless encapsulates much of how 'tradition' and 'traditional culture' is represented in officialised discourse. And though there is no reason to believe that the average Hoboksar resident would necessarily subscribe to, or even be entirely familiar with an officialised definition of 'tradition', to a greater or lesser extent, this discourse has nevertheless influenced how local residents talk about 'traditional culture' in Hoboksar.

However, in perhaps a slight deviation from the core thesis of this study, this chapter is not intended to be such a 'deep dive' into policies or political discourses and their social consequences as that of the succeeding chapters. Rather, this chapter is intended to foreground and contextualize the chapters to come. It does not propose to present a strong argument for what is or is not 'tradition' in China or among Hoboksar Mongols, nor is it meant to be particularly analytical. Instead, this chapter presents a basic outline of what is today commonly referred to as the 'Heroic Epic Jangar' and how it is talked about and discursively constructed as a central aspect of 'local traditional culture' among some residents.

With this in mind, Part I first attempts to illustrate some of the radical social change experienced by Hoboksar residents. For not unlike other regions of China, in recent decades, Hoboksar's development has precipitated drastic social transformations and will be briefly outlined below. This is followed by a description of the 'Jangar epic' and basic literature review. As a literary epic, Jangar has been extensively researched in Mongolian, Russian, and Chinese academic literature, yet there is almost no substantial Anglophone work on the subject. This section attempts to outline the epic, related literature, and provide additional context. Part II then outlines some claims regarding Jangar in Hoboksar among recognized Jangar performers and local stakeholders. It is important to note that I do not propose any claims to be more authoritative than others, nor do I deny that these claims are often highly contradictory. Rather, these sections emphasize some seemingly irreconcilable narrative contradictions, not as criticism or judgment, but as illustrative of how these often generationally defined narrative differences have come to construct radically different 'Jangars'—but where residents nevertheless consistently claim that 'Jangar' remains unchanged over time.

I. Hoboksar and Jangar

a. Hoboksar and 'Townification'

In China, regions are often facetiously described by the animal for which their boundaries are said to resemble. For example, many claim that the People's Republic itself resembles a 'chicken', where if the Chinese northeast were the bird's 'comb' and 'head', the 'tailfeathers' are Xinjiang and Tibet. Zooming-down to Hoboksar, this Mongolian Autonomous County was

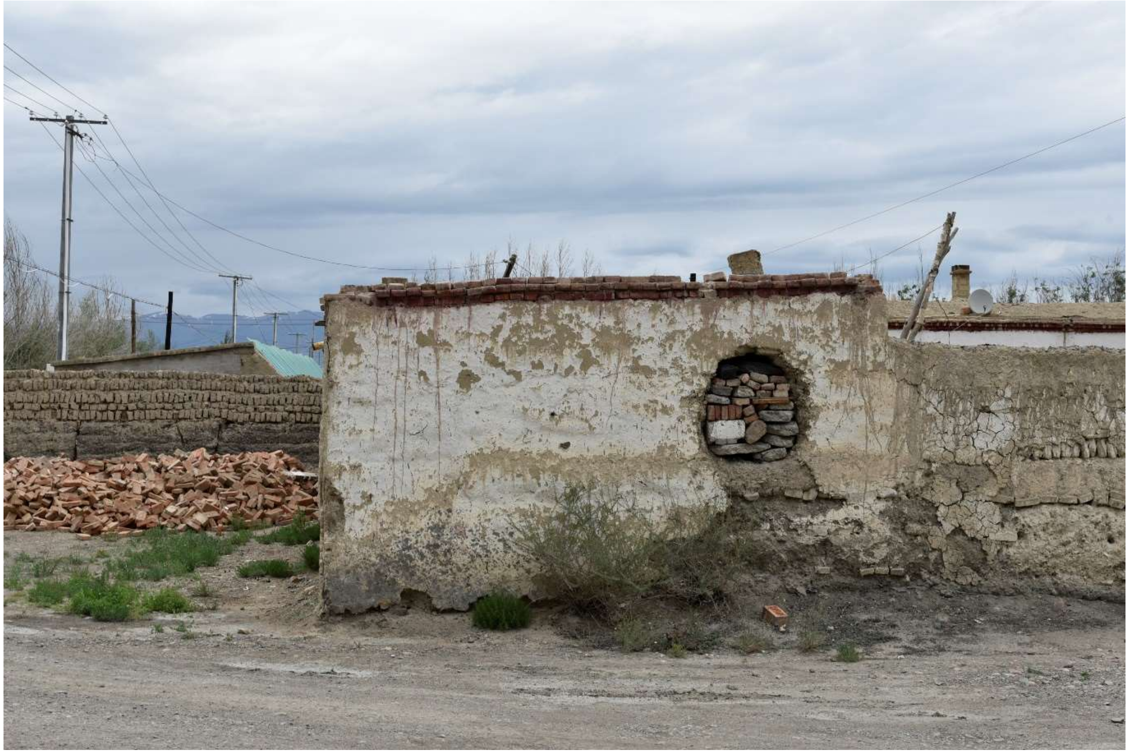

Figure 4: A so-called 'tufang' dwelling with wall partially revealing it as a brick structure and earthen covering.

fittingly said to resemble a horse's 'head' and 'neck'. But where the 'neck' of the county consisted mostly of flat, almost entirely uninhabited desert, the 'head' was understood to be far more mountainous, less arid, and home to the vast majority of Hoboksar's already sparse civilian population—less than 60,000 people in an area slightly smaller than the Kingdom of Belgium. This local population was itself pinched between the large, administratively independent para-military outfit known as the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps' (XPCC) located at the southernly, more industrialized Han dominated 'jowls' of the county, and the military's Border Guard garrisons at the county's northern and northwestern 'snout'.

Yet Hoboksar County as a political unit did not always have this horse-like profile, for in 1958 the county was forced to surrender more than 2000km^2 of its oil-rich southwestern territory known today as the Urho District (*wu'erhe qu*) to the neighbouring petro-city of Karamay (Gao & Cui 1999:19)—an act that has had lasting economic consequences for the county. For while Karamay has for decades proudly carried the title of China's wealthiest city in terms of per capita GDP (KLMYSRMZF 2019), Hoboksar was historically one of the poorest counties in China, and until very recently was officially labelled a 'regional impoverished county' (*quding qiongkun xian)* (Aishajiang & Wuersijiang 2007:404). However, due in part to recent infrastructural investments and policy emphasis on local resource extraction industries over its pastoral economy, Hoboksar has gone from one of the most impoverished counties in Xinjiang to a fairly wealthy one. After the discovery of oil and large coal deposits in the late 1990s and early 2000s, official statistics show that the total value of Hoboksar's industrial production increased by more than 300% in just five years (from 2006 to 2011) (Liang 2013:24). With this newfound wealth, beginning in the late 2000s—and particularly in the 2010s—Hoboksar Town began investing heavily in modernizing its facilities and settling its predominately transhumant population.

Indeed, while visiting Hoboksar Town for the first time in 2013, I was struck by the county's comparative poverty, visible in the rows upon rows of rustic 'mud homes' (*tufang*) so-named due to the earthen-plaster covering the buildings' exterior surfaces. At the time, other than an older, shoddily-built market compound, only a few brick and concrete government buildings and apartment complexes were visible at the town's centre, reaching no more than four or five stories high. Admittedly, at the time, there seemed to be construction projects on every corner, and from my hotel window I could see the yellow cranes dotting the skyline. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, only a few of these projects had been completed—including a multi-purpose sports stadium and a new 'People's Hospital'. However, upon returning in 2016 the transformation of the town's built landscape had been so extreme that after alighting from my chartered van, I consulted a map to ensure that I had indeed arrived at the correct 'Hoboksar Town'. For where once stood 'mud-homes', dozens of new multi-story apartment buildings were either completed or near completion, and across from the sports stadium was a large, state-of-the-art 'National-level' Cultural Centre, a Science and Technology Hall, and to the north of the town a 6000m^2 'Culture and Art' museum and new horseracing track with covered-stadium.

This rapid economic transformation, coupled with the recent expansion of sedentarisation and urbanization policies is commonly known as 'townification' (*chengzhen hua*) (see Han & Qi 2016; cf. Liu 2014), and in Hoboksar has worked to relocate local pastoralists and villagers into larger built settlements—specifically Hoboksar Town and the more southern, Han dominated Hoshtolgoi Town (*heshituoluogai zhen*). With the local government allowing significant subsidies and low-cost housing in the urbanizing towns, local pastoralists and villagers have access to the 'modern' amenities of community housing such as central heating, sanitation services, high-speed internet, etc. as well as ready access to critical public services such as long-distance transportation, hospitals, and quality primary and secondary education. New residents could even enjoy entertainment such as a movie theatre, restaurants, karaoke bars, and discotheques. At the town's centre, a newly completed 14 story 'government building' (*zhengfu lou*) towered over the increasingly vertical built landscape, symbolizing, perhaps, not only the immense changes the county was currently undergoing but also the centralization of political power over local populations that would not have been possible prior to 'townification'.

Though likely one of the more dramatic social policies since decollectivisation, 'townficication' is merely the latest in many such consequential social, political, and economic transformations that have directly affected social organization among Hoboksar Mongols. From communalization of the 1950s and 1960s, to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), to economic liberalization under the Reform and Opening (1978 onward), to the rapid political transformations in Xinjiang from the 1990s onward—discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3—roughly every decade has produced a generation raised and educated in a radically different 'Hoboksar' under radically different circumstances in which 'Mongolness', 'Torghut traditions', and Hoboksar 'culture' came to be constituted, identified, and reified.

However, it is not my intention to engage deeply with the monumental changes experienced in Hoboksar over the past half-century. Rather, in the succeeding sections, this chapter attempts to outline how some of these changes have come to influence how locals narrate a now key aspect of Hoboksar 'Toghutness' and local 'tradition'—the Heroic Epic Jangar.

b. Jangar, a Brief Introduction

The gross generalization of the term 'Western Mongols' tends to over-simplify the historical social and economic variation found in Central Asian Mongol populations; however, in terms of oral artistic expression, Mongolists and Folklorists have tended to recognize the regions formerly dominated by the Dzungars, Kalmyks, and Oirats as unique in this respect (Vladimirtsov 1983-84:22; Pegg 2001:51-57; Renqindaoerji 2007:91-94). Further, in terms of contemporary Chinese Mongols, Mongolist Chao Gejin recognizes at least three distinct areas where 'Mongolian Epic' has historically flourished: among the Barga and Horchin of Inner Mongolia, and the Oirats of Xinjiang (Chao 1997:323-324).

To be sure, there is no Mongolian word suited to describe a European notion of 'epic' (Bawden 1980:270), yet the terms *ülger* and *tuuli* are generally so described. *Ülger* are usually short, self-contained fairytale-like stories found among Inner Mongolians and are heavily influenced by written—often Chinese—narrative art (ibid.; cf. Humphrey 1997:36), whereas *tuuli* tend to share aspects of Turkic 'epic poetry,' are significantly longer—often numbering into thousands of lines per 'episode' (*bölög/bülüg*)—and is more frequently applied to performances of 'Western' Mongols (i.e. in Xinjiang, Western Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, and Gansu)

(Chao 1997:323). Of the great Mongolian ‘heroic epics,’[16] two are recognized as most widely distributed: the ‘Heroic Epic of Gesar Khan’ (David-Neel 1933; Heissig 1980; Samuel 2017), thought to have originated in Tibet but has experienced wide circulation among many Mongol populations, and what is now known as the ‘Heroic Epic of Jangar Khan’. Though recorded in Mongolian regions of Chinese Gansu, Qinghai, and Liaoning provinces (Chao 1997:323), the Russian Altai Republic (Pegg & Yamaeva 2012:299), and both Inner and Outer Mongolia (Poppe 1977:5), Jangar is recognized as most widely performed among Oirat/Kalmyk Mongols of Xinjiang (PRC) and Kalmykia (Russia)—especially Torghuts, for whom Jangar has maintained a particularly significant social role.

The first known written record of the Jangar appears in the published travel notes and essays of Benjamin Bergmann (1804) in which he briefly describes a performance of Jangar [*Dschangar*] observed among Kalmyks of the Volga region in present-day Russia. There, Jangar is described as a ‘song’ (*lied*) (ibid.:205) and its performers known as Jangarqi [*Dschangarschi*] as ‘bards’ (*Barden*), the greatest of whom he claimed to be capable of singing “3 days and 3 nights” (ibid.:214). Today, Jangar is often considered “one of the great epics of the Mongolian peoples” (Atwood 2004:260).

Compared to other Mongol tales, Jangar has a complicated plot with many well-developed characters, specifically Jangar Khan and his 12 heroes, each with distinctive traits and powers and all having defined roles in Jangar’s palace. In the many surviving poems, the stories rarely feature Jangar Khan in any major role, presenting rather subsidiary heroes who fight on Jangar’s behalf. The stories exist in our world, but on a plane of immortals that are thought to exist alongside us in the magical Khanate of Bumba.[17] The stories generally centre around weddings and feasts, great battles with opposing nobles, or defeating great multi-headed monsters called *mangud* (sing. *mangus*).[18] In the instance of a human rival, a heroic victory often ends with peace and incorporation of a foreign land into Bumba, or with the once-great adversary joining Jangar Khan’s court. On the other hand, the numerous *mangud*—vaguely defined villains guilty of causing all sorts of misfortune within the khanate—are described as hideous monstrosities with multiple heads who steal livestock, valuables, and women, and present an overall threat to the peace and security of Bumba. Regardless of the foe, it is always a foregone conclusion

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[16] The term ‘heroic epic’ is not a native designation. Rather, it is thought to be a translation of the Russian term for Heroic Epic, *geroicheskii epos*. (Bawden 1980:270)

[17] The ‘Praise to Jangar’ states that “the seat of the heroes [Bumba] is located to the west of the Altai mountains.” This is the region that encompasses present day Dzungaria—and the location of Hoboksar.

[18] Nicholas Poppe in his *The Heroic Epic of the Khalkha Mongols* claims the term *mangus* refers to ‘great serpent’ (1979:134).

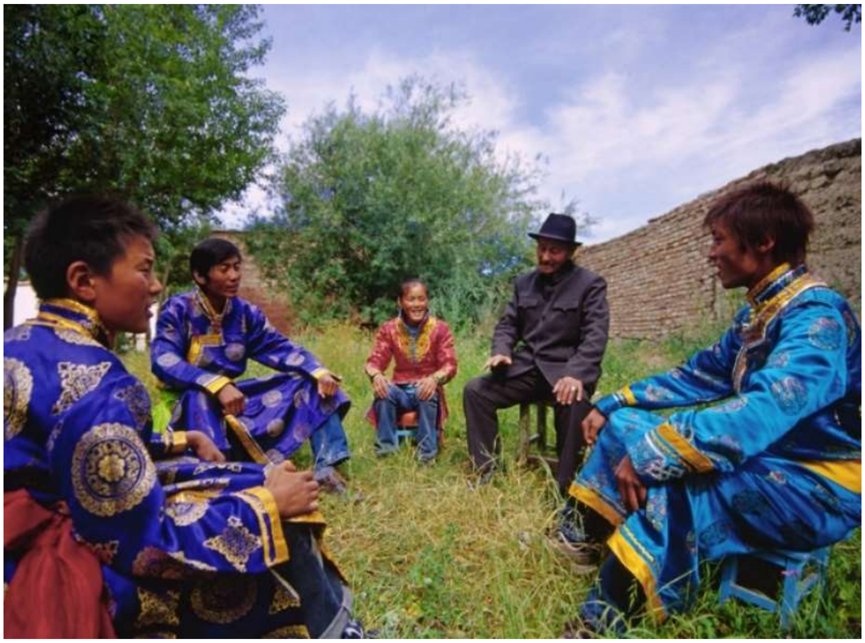

Figure 5: The Famous Hoboksar Jangar performer Juunai Jangarqi with local 'young Jangarqi'.
Photo Credit: Hoboksar County Culture Bureau.

that the hero will eventually triumph and order be restored to Bumba, often with the support of otherworldly powers.

Unlike the Epic of Geser Kahn which was widely transmitted both orally and in written form, while Jangar had indeed been transcribed in the recent past (Atwood 2004: 260), for the most part, Jangar was historically primarily an oral art performed by skilled, often illiterate bards known as Jangarqi—that is, those who 'do' Jangar.

In that Jangar was orally transmitted, and in that a single episode requires anywhere from one to four hours to complete, those capable of reciting an episode completely and accurately are highly regarded. In the case of Jangar, while each individual episode is an independent story in itself, all are connected through the appearance and understood existence of Jangar Khan and his court (Chao 1997). It was the role of the Jangarqi as holder of this knowledge to guide the audience through the complexity both in performance and as reference, and for this reason, Jangarqi were often said to have been historically judged through an informal gradation centred on depth, breadth, and skill in oral performance. Of the most famous recent Hoboksar Jangarqi, Arinpil Jangarqi (1923-1994) had a recorded repertoire of more than twenty episodes, and Hoboksar Juunai Jangarqi (1926-2017) was officially recorded as knowing twenty-six episodes (ZGFYBK 2015:399), yet locals and family members claim that he could perform more than thirty from memory (cf. Taiwen 2015).

Yet, while there has been considerable concentration on Jangarqi as performers of Jangar, unlike today where an individual can only be recognized as 'cultural transmitter' (*wenhua* *chuancheng ren*) for a single Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) programme, the 'Jangarqi' identification was historically not an exclusive one. That is to say, Jangarqi were Jangarqi because they had mastered the art of Jangar, yet Jangar was by no means considered independent of wider mythico-historical contexts, and so as to master Jangar, one must access vast stores of socially relevant knowledge. Therefore, great Jangarqi were, and still are, recognized as having been embodied reservoirs of immense social and historical wisdom beyond the Jangar epic. For example, the Hoboksar Juunai Jangarqi was not only a Jangarqi, but fluent in both local and regional history, the Gesar epic and other regional epics, hundreds of tales, long-songs (*urtiin duu*), short-songs (*bogino duu*), praise-songs (*magtaal*), rituals, was a competent dancer, and master of several instruments—including the all-important *tobshuur* (cf. Luna & Dao'erna 2015). For Jangarqi, then, this perception as a cultural polymath assisted in reinforcing the authority of the Jangarqi, but also Jangar's perceived historical veracity by drawing on ritual, narrative, and melodic poiesis in the performance of Jangar.

From the above examples, it should be clear that to many Hoboksar Torghuts and other Xinjiang Mongols, historically, Jangar performance was perceived as an event with relevance beyond the story itself and therefore must be contextualized in its entirety by an audience within a relevant body of implicit knowledge. In Part II of this chapter, the following sections will attempt to illustrate how claims regarding Jangar and Jangar performance have changed in recent decades, yet nevertheless are discursively reconstructed as relics of a distant past that travelled unchanged into the present and are defining features of Hoboksar Torghut Mongol 'traditional culture'.

II. From the Spirit of Jangar to 'Jangar's Spirit'

At present, there is no documentation of Jangar performance in Hoboksar published prior to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), where at this time virtually any form of now recognized 'traditional' folk-customs, music, arts, etc. were deemed 'old', 'feudal', and/or 'counterrevolutionary' and subject to extreme censure. Though certainly not as intensely monitored, after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, 'traditional' forms of expression were nevertheless restricted to a large extent (DeMare 2015:237; cf. Holm 1991), and therefore Jangar performances were said to have already become increasingly rare. Yet with the 'Reform and Opening' in the late 1970s and 1980s, 'traditional culture' deemed 'excellent' (*youxiu*) became the object of intellectual curiosity for officially sanctioned 'experts' (*zhuanjia*) and defining elements of both the 'scientific' identification of minority nationalities (*minzu*) and the ideological construction of a unified Chinese Nation (*zhonghua minzu*). In this new formulation, these recognized cultural manifestations were to be either incorporated into a strictly regimented national narrative or suppressed entirely (e.g. Wu 1980; Jia 1981).

The profound social implications of this ideological reversal will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters. However, here I shall concentrate on a more limited scope of this transformation that came to help shape the ways in which Jangar would be discursively constructed in the county and beyond—namely its intellectualization as an aspect of folk-literature and subsequent objectification as an identifiable and ethnically and territorially bounded cultural product. For as Boyer and Lomnitz note, 'intellectualism' is "a central dimension of the (re)production of nations and nationalism" and the 'expert' an "embodiment of the spirit of rationality of the nation." (Boyer & Lomnitz 2005:105,112) Indeed, it would only be in this post-Reform era that government and academic 'experts' would come to construct 'national commonality' through the articulation of standardized forms of 'Chinese nationhood' (Kipnis 2012:752), emphasizing national cultural unity through nationality cultural diversity—what came to be called the 'unity in diversity' theory of the Chinese Nation (Fei 1999:3). Explaining this theoretical turn in the Central Party School periodical 'Study Times', Chinese anthropologist Di Yongjun (2004[2003]) notes:

> 'Diversity' refers to historical origins, formation, and development [of China's 56] nationalities (*minzu*) as well as their cultural and social characteristics, which differentiates each from other nationalities; 'unity' refers to the interrelated development, complementarity and interdependence which makes each nationality inseparable from the whole […]

Working to at once 'primordialise' insiders while excluding outsiders, this 'unity in diversity' proposition encouraged nationalities and localities to semi-independently develop narratives and practices of a group's 'culture', yet do so by placing it within strict boundaries of set discourses of Chinese history and in association with other officially recognized nationality groups (Harrell & Li 2003; Bulag 2010; Chao 2012). But while this highly politicized process of Jangar's folklorisation had profound effects on how Jangar would come to be discursively represented locally, it was not until the 2000s that Jangar would come to be recognized as a central aspect of Hoboksar's 'local culture'.

It would be at this time, and especially after President Hu Jintao's 2006 announcement of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan in which the Chinese government would officially adopt UNESCO 'cultural heritage protection' discourse as a key element in its development strategy that the ‘Jangar Epic’ would come to be narrated as an ever-present aspect of Hoboksar’s ‘traditional culture’. Local authorities recognized and actively pursued the ‘construction’ and indeed exploitation of ‘Jangar Culture’ as an ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*), transforming it into a central aspect of local social, political, and economic development (Nyiri, 2006; Shepherd 2006, 2013; Blumenfeld & Silverman 2013; Shepherd & Yu 2013)—a process that continues to this day.

In light of the above, Part II of this chapter outlines sets of claims by practicing Hoboksar ‘Jangarqi’ and other local stakeholders regarding how ‘Jangar’ and Jangar performance has changed over time. Yet these claims by no means intend to present objective ‘facts’ regarding historical practices or some coherent ‘cultural’ mentalité among Hoboksar residents. Rather, this section attempts to describe illustrative claims by individuals with varying degrees of social authority in relation to Jangar and Jangar performances in three distinct periods: first, the pre-Cultural Revolution period in which Jangar was often described as containing aspects of ‘religious’ and ‘ritualized’ performance. Descriptions of performances of this period often seemed to consciously primordialise Jangar, thereby dislocating it from history into an ahistorical reckoning of ‘traditional’ performances; second, the period after the folklorisation of Jangar-as-literature and near extinction of Jangarqi in the county. At this time, a new narrative of Jangar began developing during the county’s desperate attempt to revive Jangar performance as an endangered ‘traditional’ folk-art; finally, this section will conclude by describing how contemporary ‘young Jangarqi’ and recognized county-level Jangar ‘transmitters’ (*chuancheng ren*) trained in an official ‘Jangarqi Training Base’ describe Jangar today as being couched in this same unbroken history of ‘traditional’ performance and ‘spirit’.

a. The ‘Power’ of Jangar

After arriving at my field-site in 2016, a young dancer named Tomor quickly became one of my most reliable contacts relating to local performance arts. Himself a local Torghut, after training at the Xinjiang Arts University he returned to Hoboksar to join the local dance troupe. As an avid promoter of local ‘cultural heritage’ (*wenhua yichan*), Tomor even planned to open his own dance school to teach Mongol children ‘traditional Mongolian dance’. Yet while Tomor was certainly well-versed in some local performance arts, he was not particularly familiar with the Jangar performance.

Well aware of my interest in the ‘Heroic Epic Jangar’, in that after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) ‘traditional’ performances of the epic had gone nearly extinct (Atwood 2004:260), Tomor spent several days organizing a reconstruction of a traditional Jangar performance for my benefit. Initially scheduled to take place in the mountains at the northern county border, due to recent increases in security and associated concerns regarding taking a foreigner into Border Guard dominated lands outside town limits, there was a last-minute change of venue forcing us to relocate to this place hugging the town's edge.

"Be careful!" Tomor warned me as I slipped on dew-covered grass following him up a dark, moonlit path toward several semi-permanent *ger* in the distance. For the past few years, the local government had been sponsoring the construction of these tent-like, traditionally domicile structures typically found among Inner Asia's pastoral populations to promote tourism by renting them out to local entrepreneurs for use as full-service 'picnic' style restaurants. Today, on this special occasion, one of Tomor's cousins had allowed us to use his leisure-*ger* for the night. Historically, *ger* construction was a tedious task that required substantial resources and the combined skilled labour of a wide network of relations—and is perceived locally today as a dying art form (cf. Paddock & Schofield 2017). Yet as we grew closer to the edifices, the brightly patterned canvas tarps and stainless-steel support beams made it glaringly obvious that these cheap facsimiles were *ger* only in form.

As we approached the *ger*, Tomor opened the flap to the entrance and invited me inside, whereby I was immediately greeted by his 'leader' (*lingdao*), the director of the County Art Troupe, and a Jangar performer who introduced himself as Batu. Tomor explained that it was his leader that had helped persuade the other guests to come to this 'unofficial' meeting. I thanked both him and the performer and presented them with small gifts of alcohol. "Historically, you'd bring favours of alcohol to a Jangar performance, and maybe a goat or two." Tomor informed me as he waved me to a seat at the *ger*'s northern partition.

This *ger* was certainly unlike others I had visited, with its large table fitted with a food turntable atop an elevated wooden platform that occupied most of what normally would have been a large rug covering a dirt floor. Stereotypical white and blue Mongol ceremonial scarves (*khadag*) were also randomly affixed to the walls, and colourful prayer flags were displayed like decorative streamers. Further, where the *takele* would normally be situated—a shelf-like shrine holding likenesses of religious personalities and sacred books, items etc. typically found in Torghut *ger*—was a sound-system and severed goat head, above which was an embroidered portrait of Chinggis Khan, the 13th-century founder of the Mongol empire. The Jangar performer pointed to the picture and mumbled excitedly about how this display should instead be Jangar, to which Tomor explained that to the Torghut 'tribe' (*buluo*) Chinggis Khan and Jangar Khan are equally significant. Indeed, as I would find, it was not uncommon for some residents to claim that Jangar Khan *was* Chinggis Khan.

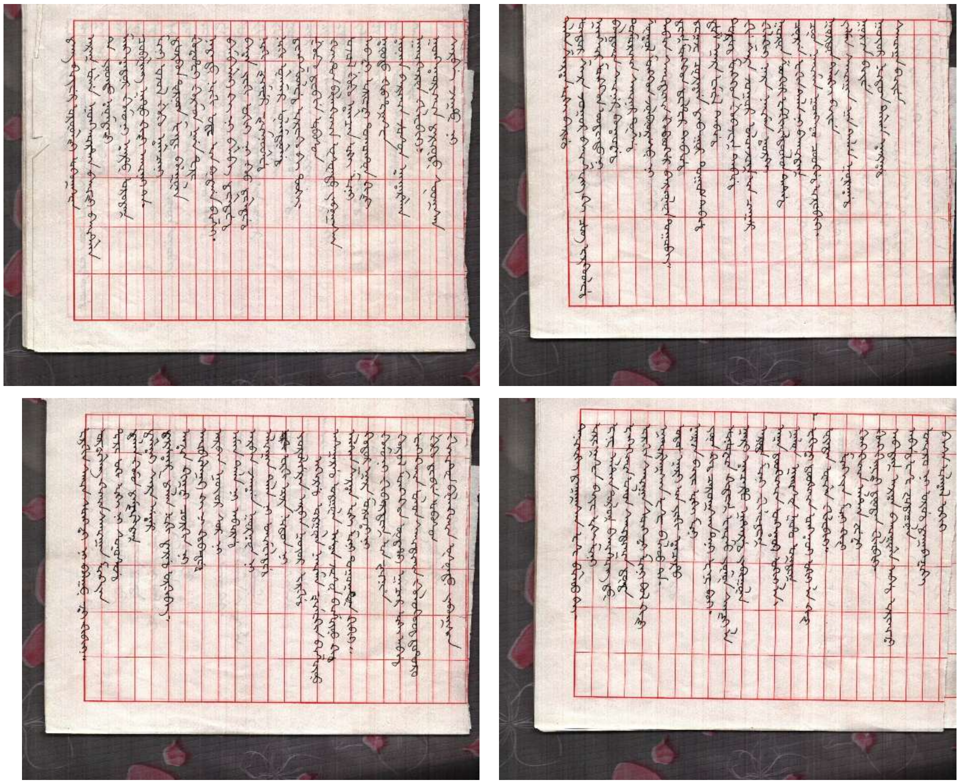

Figure 6: A short excerpt from the Jangar performed by Batu Jangarqi's father. The text is written in the regional 'clear script' and is distinct from standard Mongolian script.

Performers of Jangar in Hoboksar are known as Jangarqi and Batu Jangarqi explained how he came to learn the 'epic' (Mo: *tuuli*; Ch: *shishi*). In fact, Batu humbly claimed that though he is called a 'Jangarqi' because he can perform several episodes, his Jangar is far less fluent and detailed, and ultimately inferior due to its having been learned through written texts rather than the highly regarded, yet nowadays far more rare, 'traditional' oral transmission. He claims, however, that at least one chapter was transmitted to him from a written transcript of his father's storytelling.

He explained how at their family home on the pasture, bedridden and blind, his father would tell the stories of Jangar over and over again. Batu claimed that at the time, he had not really considered the storytelling to be much more than retellings of beloved childhood tales. However, it was Batu's sister who recognized their worth and, prior to their father's passing, transcribed the stories onto notepaper in the regional Oirat 'clear script', or *tod bichig*. It was only after his father's death and the subsequent promotion efforts by the local government that Batu came to recognize the greatness of his father's Jangar stories, and thereafter memorized the episodes, set their scripts to music, and began training as a performer himself. As he spoke, he offered the transcripts to me to look over and photograph.

As I gently fumbled through the fragile pages, Batu explained to us that other than his father's spoken stories, prior to county promotion efforts, he had only ever once heard Jangar performed in song by the now-deceased Bimbi Jangarqi in the early 1980s. Known as a 'herder' (*malchin*) Jangarqi, Bimbi was one of the three most famous post-Liberation Hoboksar Jangarqi, along with the 'lama' Arimpil Jangarqi and the 'scholar' Juunai Jangarqi —all now deceased (ZGFWZWHYCBKQS 2015:399-400, 408). We continued talking as we waited for the last guest to arrive—Sukhbaatar, the professionally more highly regarded Jangarqi grandson of a famous past Jangarqi who arrived later in the night.

Sukhbaatar is one of only two remaining local Jangarqi—and one of a mere handful of surviving Jangarqi nationwide—who are said to have learned their art through oral transmission.[19] Sukhbaatar and I had already become socially acquainted through my fieldwork at the Culture Bureau, yet I had still never seen him perform either a stylized stage version of Jangar or a 'traditional' one. Tonight was intended to remedy that by providing a recreation of a 'traditional' and 'ritualized' Jangar performance. But the trouble was that no one present had actually ever participated in a ritual Jangar performance, and so the participants instead attempted to recreate one from the descriptions of elders—specifically the accounts of Sukhbaatar's grandfather. In fact, though some locals claimed that 'traditional' Jangar performances had taken place as late as the 1960s, it was relatively well established that after the wide-spread social reorganization and communalization of the mid-1950s to 1960s (Sneath 2000:62), this kind of performance ceased almost entirely due to their association with 'feudal ideology' and 'superstition'.[20]

I began by asking the performers what 'Jangar' means to them. Sukhbaatar thought for a moment and in Chinese responded that Jangar is many things: it is 'history', it is an 'epic', it is a man. "When I think of [Jangar] I think of him as a deity (*shen*)." He explained. In fact, older Mongols often told me that 'traditional' Jangar performances were far more than melodic recitations of 'folk-epic' or storytelling. Instead, although at times Jangar was indeed understood to be a form of entertainment, the significance and pseudo-'religious' aspects of the performances were often emphasized over its entertainment value. Ostensibly recognizing Sukhbaatar as the superior performer, Batu remained mostly silent during these discussions, only occasionally adding a detail here and there.

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[19] Though Sukbaatar is known as having learned Jangar through oral transmission, in reality his was a hybrid process of both oral and textual transmission.

[20] A similar situation is described be Carole Pegg regarding 'epic' performances in the Mongolian People's Republic. See Pegg (1995:77), see also Anganost (1987); Taya (2015).

As Sukhbaatar began discussing the ritual atmosphere, he removed a few items from his bag, including 'incense' (*artsug*), a small brass oil lantern, etc. and set them on the table. He noted that prior to a performance, the Jangarqi's ritual instrument of choice—usually a stringed chordophone known as a *tobshuur* recognized locally to have ritual significance[21]—would be carried to the site of the performance by the inviter, after which the Jangarqi would follow and additional ritual preparations would begin. Like any good storyteller, throughout his explanation, Sukhbaatar acted out the ritual activities. He explained that prior to performing Jangar, the lanterns must be lit, and incense burned to cleanse both the Jangarqi and his *tobshuur*, and that the *tobshuur* would then be placed in the *ger*'s highest status position furthest from the door and elevated off the ground. Holding his imaginary instrument, Sukhbaatar lifted the *tobshuur* to place it high up on an invisible shelf. "And then," Sukhbattar said as he seated himself at the *ger*'s northernmost position, "he would start singing." He emphasized that while the Jangarqi sings, people must remain silent and listen carefully, and that the cleansing incense must be burned continuously throughout the hours-long performance.

Older locals and some academics often discussed the mysterious powers of 'traditional' ritualized Jangar performances, such as its ability to control the weather, to exorcise harmful spirits from homes or places, to heal, and even to kill (cf. Taya 2015). In fact, to many Hoboksar Mongols, the fact that a Jangar performance can manipulate the weather seemed commonsensical. For example, when I asked whether this ability was related to a similar claim of weather manipulation through lama *ovoo*[22] blessings, a middle-aged Torghut man replied sternly that lamas are charlatans (*pianzi*) who use astrology and that because lamas choose a day that they know will rain, it merely appears as though they have influenced the weather. However, whenever a powerful Jangarqi sings for rain, 'it always comes'. Even so, when displeased by things such as incomplete or off-season performances, Jangar was also said to bring bad weather and whirlwinds.

I myself apparently witnessed one such event when visiting an *ovoo* dedicated to the Jangar Epic. On this day, the skies were quite clear, and the forecast predicted only partly cloudy skies. Visiting the site with a group of older Mongols—none of whom were Jangarqi—one of the men decided to sing part of the 'Praise to Jangar' (*jangariin magtaal*) which is usually sung prior to or just after a Jangar performance. After an hour or so, we loaded the cars and drove back to the town. However, along the way we were struck by a white-out blizzard to which the singer blamed on his gross disrespect.

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[21] Regarding the 'Western Mongol' reverence of the *tobshuur*, see Pegg (2001:81-82,112).

[22] *Ovoo* (alt. obo, oboo, lit. 'heap') are ritual cairns that serving as border markers and local sites for sacrifice significant to local Mongol ritual life. See Atwood 2004:414.

Another display of Jangar's power was in the body of the Jangarqi him/herself. Some claimed that because the text and music emerged from the Jangarqi's body, and the rhythm and melody from his/her instrument, Jangar's power most greatly influenced the Jangarqi's mouth and instrument. The power, however, came at a price. For example, in Hoboksar a local taboo associated with women performing Jangar might be understood as less to do with a woman's performance being 'taboo' and more to do with the effects that Jangar's power had on a woman's body. For if a woman were to wield the power of Jangar, it was claimed by some that she would become infertile. In fact, the only adult female Jangar performer I was able to locate in Hoboksar explained that due to her fear that performing Jangar could harm her uterus or cause birth defects, she abstained from singing Jangar until after giving birth to her second son. Further, some Jangariqi among the Chahar Mongols of Xinjiang's Borotala Prefecture claimed that if one were to sing 'twelve episodes in a single night', either a yellow-headed sheep (known as a 'jade sheep') or a white horse must be tied outside the *ger*. Once the Jangarqi had completed the performance s/he must quickly walk outside and blow on the animal—causing the animal's intestines to explode. If the animal didn't die, the Jangarqi would (cf. Chao 2001:416; Taya 2015:142-151). Though the killing breath of the Jangarqi was not understood to exist in Hoboksar, while discussing this phenomenon, the Jangarqi here tonight nevertheless found these claims credible.

Sukhbaatar claimed that he 'believed' (*xin*) in these 'miraculous powers' (*shenqi de liliang*) but that he had never tried using them. Claims varied from person to person, but according to Sukhbaatar for something like this to happen, Jangar cannot simply be 'sung', but rather must be activated through the ritualized performance in which the body of the Jangarqi becomes inhabited by otherworldly spirits. He recalled an instance in which he had observed such a performance:

> It was a time when I was at a forum regarding epics. There was a [Jangarqi] from Qinghai who came to sing [Jangar]. He first recited religious scriptures, then started to sing Jangar. He sang and sang and just couldn't stop. The people in the forum told him that his time was up, that he had sung for 15 minutes [but he didn't stop] […] Someone rubbed his mouth and rubbed his hands, and he eventually [awoke]. They asked him what happened. He said, "It wasn't me singing Jangar. It was a spirit. He came inside me. He was using my body to sing Jangar. What I was saying, I don't even know…"

Sukhbaatar claimed that in instances such as these, Jangar was not a 'story', it was not an 'epic', and it was certainly not 'sung'. Instead, though he claimed that Jangar was definitively not a 'religion', he described Jangar performance as akin to the recitation of 'religious scripture'. "We now call it 'singing' Jangar, but at that time, it was considered ritualized scriptural recitation (*nianjing yishi*)." He claimed that prior to such a performance, two bowls of liquid butter would be prepared and that during the process, "something would come down [from the heavens]" (*shenme dongxi xialai*) to occupy the performer's body. "After you finished, that thing would leave your body and you would be very tired. You then take those two bowls of butter and drink them. And then your body will feel better."

Throughout the discussion, the men were engrossed in Sukhbaatar's descriptions. Indeed, as Sukhbaatar spoke, Tomor assisted in translating some of the more complicated Mongolian vocabulary into Mandarin, and on several occasions, expressed his surprise as to what he was hearing. Even Jangarqi Batu admitted that he had not heard such stories regarding ritualized Jangar performances. Nevertheless, each of the men found the claims to be credible and described their increasing respect for Jangar and traditional Jangar performances.

Sukhbaatar made it very clear that tonight he would not be engaging in this kind of 'powerful' ritualized performance. Instead, much like the imitation *ger* in which we sat, the Jangar performance we would experience tonight was 'traditional' only in form.

In the next section, this chapter attempts to illustrate how Jangar, once 'forgotten', was rediscovered as literature through the narratives of some more recent student performers of Jangar in Hoboksar.

b. 'The Living Buddha's Jangarqi'

The folklorisation of Jangar, beginning with the massive government-organized 'salvage' efforts of the late-1970s and 1980s—described in detail in Chapter 4—had numerous implications for how Jangar was to be recognized both within and outside Hoboksar. However, for the purposes of this section, here I will discuss only two: Jangar's construction as an 'epic' and subsequent rationalization as fictional literature. For though today most Hoboksar Mongols unproblematically discuss Jangar as an 'epic', this was apparently not always the case. In fact, attending a wedding west of Hoboksar Town, when discussing the Jangar 'epic' (*tuuli*) with a group of elderly Torghut women, in what at first seemed an offhand comment one woman admitted: "We didn't even know Jangar was '*tuuli*'. Jangar was Jangar [and] *tuuli* was *tuuli* […] but now we know." Indeed, this comment sparked such passionate conversation among the women that neither my assistant nor I could keep-up.

Further, particularly among older residents, the idea that the 'Jangar epic' is 'fiction' was at times contentious. As one man noted when discussing whether Jangar can be called 'fiction', he claimed: "We Oirats were raised on stories. You can call them 'folk-stories' […] [but] we all thought the plots were real […] so we would find these phenomena [in the stories] to be real." Though this individual did not personally consider Jangar 'real', he did accept and readily admit that many locals did. Indeed, in a survey conducted by a researcher then at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in a small Mongol dominated village in neighbouring Zhaosu County, it was found that of those surveyed all but one claimed Jangar to be 'real' (*zhenshi*).[23] The survey interviewed 50 Mongol residents of this village of less than 800—most over the age of 30—and found that what constituted 'real' varied by generation. Residents between the ages of approximately 30 and 60 claimed Jangar to be an actual historical figure, whereas many over the age of 60 described Jangar as a 'deity' (*shen*) (Ajingsi 2016:112-113).[24] Not surprisingly, these age groups align with Jangar's pre- and post-folklorisation periods.

Due to domestic legal restrictions and the problematic nature of doing research in contemporary Xinjiang, a similar survey independently executed by a foreign researcher would have been infeasible, and therefore quantitative comparison is impossible. However, from a purely empirical standpoint, these results mirrored the claims of Hoboksar residents within these age groups, where many working-age residents claimed Jangar to be an actual historical personality or even the artistic representation of Chinggis Khan, whereas particularly among the older pastoral populations Jangar was indeed described as a 'deity' and the stories to be accurate descriptions of a heroic past. Though it would be foolish to ascribe these changes to any single event,[25] one possible contributing factor for this clear generationally defined change is that through the folklorisation process state-sanctioned experts came to inscribe 'modern', 'objectivist' notions onto Jangar and associated materials that rejected the 'irrational'—such as 'superstitious' practices or 'supernatural' claims (Wang 1981:59-60; cf. Mackerras 1981:207; Anagnost 1987; Pegg 1995).

For example, a local Hoboksar legend claimed that prior to the migration of most Xinjiang Torghuts to the Volga Region in 1618, there lived a Jangarqi who could perform 'seventy episodes'. Iterations of this legend relayed to me claimed that a poor herder was 'gifted' episodes

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[23] This survey was conducted in Mongolian but published in Chinese. The original survey questions and answers in Mongolian were not published.

[24] In the published article, the author does not make direct claims to Jangar as a 'deity' but rather having 'god-like powers' (*shenli*) etc. However, in personal communications, the author claims that participants did indeed consider Jangar a 'deity' but that the publication rejected such language as being 'unconducive to [its] values' (*bu fuhe jiazhiguan*) (personal communication with author, November 2, 2017).

[25] Indeed, studies on the 'generation gap' phenomenon (*daigou*) are numerous, yet often attributed to socioeconomic factors e.g. Luo (2002); Yan (1997, 2003, 2011).

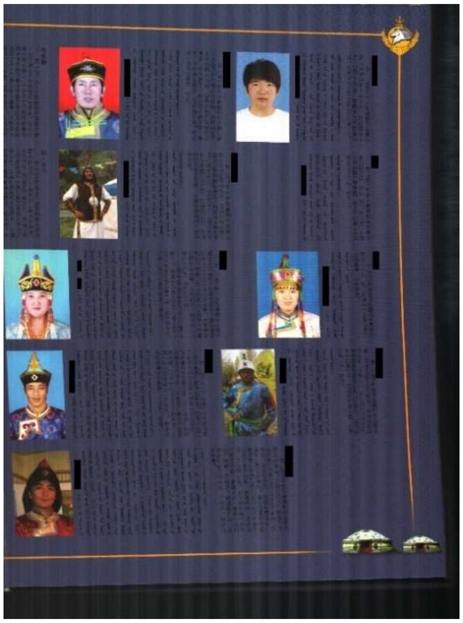

Figure 7: 'Young Jangarqi' recently recognized by the Hoboksar county government.

of Jangar from the White Old Man (Mo. *chagaan uvgen*)—an important Mongol deity—who had taken pity on him. Falling asleep one day in the mountains, the White Old Man visited the poor herder in a dream, giving him 70 small stones (the exact number varies by teller), each representing an episode. When the man awoke from his dream, he could perform all seventy episodes. Yet, a 'de-mystified' version of this story has been widely cited in Chinese studies of Jangar that claims that this Jangarqi did indeed exist; however instead of being gifted the stones from a deity, being both illiterate and innumerate, the stones were merely used as a means of recording the number of memorized episodes, and for each new episode learned he would add a pebble to a small bag. It is said that he carried 70 stones, and was therefore given the honorific title *dalan tobchi*, or 'seventy-episode (pouch)' (Batunasheng 1984:43).[26] This reinterpreted account is now described as 'oral history' and 'proof' that Jangar is a product of indigenous creativity, territorialized within present-day Xinjiang, and is most certainly not a cultural import from abroad. In fact, this practice of rationalizing 'folklore' into 'history' by linking folkloric narratives with nationalist historiography is not at all unusual, particularly in relation to China's 'frontier' minorities (Ma 2009:124).

Yet, though after its collection and publication as folk-literature Jangar was given great academic attention, its performers and performances were almost completely ignored. For while Jangarqi were honoured as contributors to this great literary work, by the 1990s almost all of Hoboksar's recognized Jangarqi had passed away, and among younger generations Jangar as performance had been lost completely. In fact, many middle-aged locals explained that, in the 1990s, few had read Jangar let alone seen it performed, while many younger people claimed at this time to have never even heard of Jangar.

In 1997, during a tour of a northwestern county village, the then County Magistrate (the county's highest-ranking government official) complained about the loss of local traditions. Asserting that traditions begin in childhood, the Magistrate gave an unofficial 'order' (*mingling*) to the village primary-school principle to select students to begin memorizing Jangar—and in that year three students were chosen. One of these former students explained the process:

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[26] While the *dalan tobchi* is now translated 'seventy-episode pouch', the Mongolian term gives no direct reference to 'episodes' or a 'pouch', and though described literally in Chinese literature, historically it is not likely the term would have been taken literally as either 'seventy' or a 'pouch'. In fact, references to 'seventy' in Mongolian often related to 'numerous' or 'myriad', whereas *tobchi* is also occasionally translated 'history'.

> When we first studied Jangar, most local people didn't even know what Jangar was […] At that time really no one could perform Jangar—no one knew how! Our leader [the Magistrate] said, "Oy vey! So many of our traditions are being lost. Hurry! Make the children study in school!" […] You could say it was an order […] find a few students, give them the books of Jangar, and make them start memorizing it. It was that sort of situation.

This former student claimed that it was only after he was chosen to carry on the tradition of Jangar performance that he was first introduced to Jangar.

He recalled that prior to memorization, he was required to read two 'thick' volumes of the epic. He complained that as a young boy the process was arduous and much of the archaic language confused him. "It left me tongue-tied," he laughed. "After about a year, I finally memorized the first episode. I can't say that I memorized one-hundred percent, or that I understood the meaning one-hundred percent," he explained but claimed to have eventually memorized five 'full' episodes.

After beginning to study these texts, the students claimed that the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences mailed them several cassette-recordings of Jangar performances to help them set the texts to music. Interestingly, however, the students were not sent recordings of Hoboksar Jangarqi, but rather Jangarqi from Xinjiang's Borotala and Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefectures. And though Hoboksar's famous Juunai Jangarqi was said to have visited the students in 1998, this was not to teach them local performance styles but rather to explain the texts and plot. In fact, one of the students even claimed that it was only in 2005 that he first heard Hoboksar's native Jangar melody. Nevertheless, the students were held in high esteem as the newest generation of Hoboksar's Jangar performers.

It was claimed that in 1999 a regional news group was sent to record two of the students perform at a scenic location. Present at the recording were local government officials and the regional 'Living Buddha', the 14th Shalva Khutughtu—a reincarnating lama that was highly ranked in the Lamaist hierarchy and historically considered of equal status to local secular princes (cf. Hyer & Jagchid 1983). After the performance, Shalva Khutughtu honoured the students. As one recalled:

> That day the Living Buddha was there […] Shalva told us: "In ancient times there were several kinds of Jangarqi. There was the prince's Jangarqi and the Living Buddha's

> Jangarqi […] These two boys [will be called] the Living Buddha's Jangarqi and the prince's Jangarqi." That's what he told us.

Though there was no official certification, even today these two former students are still referred to as 'The Prince's Jangarqi' and 'The Living Buddha's Jangarqi' in some county documents, and all three are considered important bearers of the Jangar performance tradition. In fact, at least two have been registered by the county for regional-level Jangar 'cultural transmitter' status, while the third is now himself a folklorist at Xinjiang University. Yet, to the outside observer the claims that these were somehow 'traditional' Hoboksar Jangar performances may seem questionable. Indeed, the students learned a literalized 'epic' from books and melodies from recordings of Jangarqi from other regions. Furthermore, the performances themselves were removed from the fluid social contexts described above and re-presented as melodic recitations of static texts. And even the veracity of these texts has been challenged (Renqindaoerji 2010:160).

For example, it was claimed that Hoboksar's famed 'lama' Jangarqi Arinpil was displeased with the episodes of Jangar published under his name. According to family, after the publication of the 'Heroic Epic Jangar' in the late-1980s, the illiterate Jangarqi asked his daughter to read him 'his' Jangar. After listening, the Jangarqi was said to have been enraged. His nephew recalls: "He said, 'This isn't my Jangar […] These aren't my words! These aren't my stories! […] Why didn't they print my Jangar as I sang it?'" Thereafter, Arinpil called on his only university-educated family member—his nephew—to record his Jangar in full, transcribe it completely, and publish it unedited to properly reflect his performance. In 1992, the young man did as his uncle requested but claimed that after collecting and transcribing the recordings, he could not find a single publisher in China to print the volume unedited. Instead, he was forced to publish in Japan in 1999—five years after his uncle's death (Taya 1999). It was two decades after his uncle's initial request that in 2012 the Jangarqi's nephew—now a professor of Mongolian studies—was finally able to print Arinpil's Jangar unedited in China (Taya 2012).

Regardless of the problematic nature of the claims to 'traditional' Jangar performance based in 'historical practices', the fact that the students were able to memorize several episodes of text is remarkable. Indeed, the 'Jangar Epic' as literature can include anywhere from hundreds to thousands of lines of text per episode, and so to memorize one full episode, not to mention several requires dedication and illustrates a deep understanding of Jangar-as-literature. Yet, these Jangarqi complained that, beginning with the county's Jangar promotion efforts in the early 2000s, performances would be gradually shortened to suit stage requirements from dozens of minutes to just ten to less than five. Nevertheless, even though these men found the extreme compression of Jangar performances unfortunate, most found the county's promotion efforts positive. As one noted:

> Over time [Jangar's] fame became greater and greater. Our Hoboksar took Jangar and lifted it up to the highest level—to the level of 'Jangar Culture' […] That is a positive process. In the beginning no one knew, but now 'Jangar' that word is everywhere.

c. 'Take Jangar's Spirit into a Modern Era'

After being ushered to the front row of Hoboksar Town's newly-constructed primary school auditorium, I was greeted by several teachers and 'guest-judges' then proceeded to set-up my recording equipment before the school's annual 'Jangar Competition'. One of the teachers explained shyly that in the past, 'Jangar competitions' took place all over Xinjiang hosting only the greatest Torghut Jangarqi, and claimed that today's event 'carries-on [our] national traditions' (*jicheng minzu chuantong*). I thanked my hosts for their warm welcome and began photographing the room.

To the right of the auditorium's elevated stage was a large placard that read 'morality lecture-hall' (*daode jiaotang*) and around the room were posters prominently displaying complex political formulations such as the 12 characteristics of 'Socialism's Core Values' and poetic phraseology describing the 'Citizens' Moral Construction' concept. Hanging from the ceiling were bright-red banners proposing that 'harmony starts with me' and instructions to 'construct a harmonious campus to carry forward traditional culture'. As the children began filtering-in, I was offered 'traditional' Mongolian milk-tea and asked to take my seat.

Nearly all of the student participants were clad in bright blue, red, and/or white Mongol 'traditional nationality costume' (*chuantong fushi*), and some carried Mongol 'traditional nationality instruments' (*chuantong yueqi*). Even before all of the students were seated, two masters of ceremonies began with some standard announcements before introducing today's event and briefly explaining the 'Heroic Epic Jangar' to be a story of constructing harmony and unity and the patriotic defence of the homeland. Jangar is 'excellent traditional culture' of the 'Chinese Nation' and recognized as 'National-level Intangible Cultural Heritage', they reminded us. The announcers then explained that each class would compete and be scored for participation, correct 'spirit', and for an appropriately 'innovative' performance.

As the announcements were underway, teachers and parents set-up props such as 'traditional' Mongolian games and materials that may have been found in a 'traditional' nomadic *ger*. An elderly woman dressed in a dark embroidered *deel* (a loose robe-like garment) and headscarf

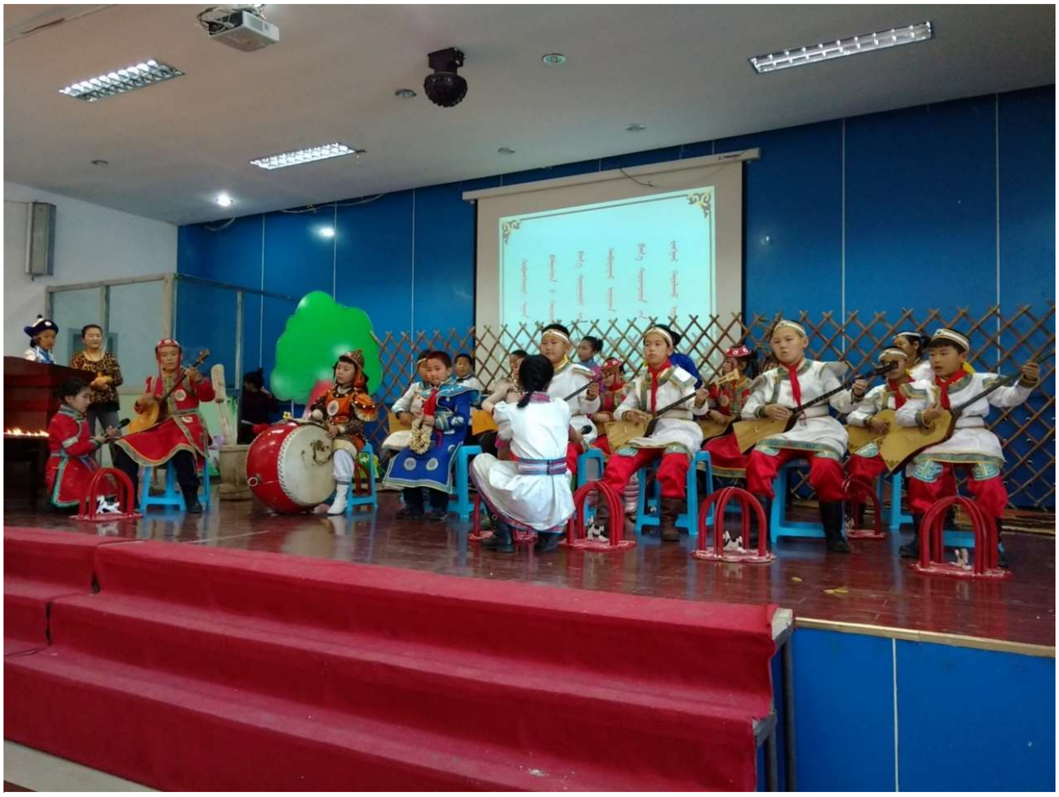

Figure 8: A stylized version of Jangar performed by primary school students in Hoboksar County and incorporates numerous ICH programs.

was helped onto the platform as some students took their places. The elderly woman was then placed frontstage holding a wooden bucket and *tsatsal* (a ceremonial milk-spoon) as the MCs announced the first class of competitors.

Behind the performers a slideshow of themed images was projected onto the back wall while students tuned their *morin huur* ('horsehead fiddle') and *tobshuur* instruments. A heavyset boy was given a large rattle made from a string of sheep anklebones, and some young girls were situated in front of seated performers as the familiar tune of 'Praise to Jangar' (*jangariin magtaal*) began ringing over the sound system. Hands firmly on their hips, with the first note the seated students began bouncing and swaying in sync while the young girls at the front flung out their arms to begin the highly choreographed swift, yet stiff movements of a 'traditional' *sawuerdeng* dance—a 'western Mongol' dance better known outside Xinjiang as *biy* or *biyelgee* (Pegg 2001:90). The children sang loudly and in unison for less than five minutes before surrendering the stage to the next class.

The next group took the stage with white and blue ceremonial scarves (*khadag*) while one student carried a giant cardboard-cutout of Hoboksar's trademarked 'Jangar Logo' to begin their 'traditional' performance. Though not all students performed, all classes were represented in the performances, and each class sang one of two now stereotyped Jangar songs: either the

‘Praise to Jangar’, an abridged and stylized version of a ritual *magtaal* praise-song historically sung either before or after a Jangar performance, or an introduction to the epic—neither of which are considered parts of the ‘epic’. In fact, some claimed that this now widely popularized ‘Praise to Jangar’ was based on a Chahar Jangarqi’s *magtaal* from Bortala Prefecture and, in that Xinjiang’s Chahar Mongols historically migrated from present-day Inner Mongolia, was not even considered ‘Oirat’, let alone Torghut. Nevertheless, each performance included numerous officially recognized aspects of ‘excellent’ traditional Mongolian culture, including at least seven National-level listed ICH programmes: Mongol nationality costume, *sawuerdeng*, horsehead fiddle, *tobshuur*, praise-songs, and of course the Heroic Epic Jangar.[27] One group even incorporated the famed, yet entirely unrelated, Mongolian ‘long songs’ (*urtiin duu*) into their Jangar performance. Regardless of the obvious problematic nature of these ‘traditional’ performances, the incorporation of Mongol ‘cultural heritage’ into school performance such as this would have been unheard of just a decade prior. Indeed, here Jangar is not simply recognized as an intellectualized, yet static, ‘folk-literature’, but simultaneously also a socially relevant and dynamic ‘folk-practice’ to be elevated and promoted as a recognized performance genre.

As Chinese folklorist Gao Bingzhong notes, with the government’s 2006 ‘cultural heritage protection’ emphasis in national development policy, ‘traditional culture’ qua folk-practices once stigmatized as counter to state modernization ideology were re-narrated as ‘intangible heritage’ and “positive components of public consciousness” (*jiji de gonggong yishi de zucheng bufen*) (2007:153; cf. Li 2015). With this, ‘traditional culture’ as ‘heritage’ was given tremendous attention by local and regional governments to be ‘developed’ and ‘popularized’ (*puji*) through state-planning and mass-education programmes (Blumenfield & Silverman 2013; Lu 2017). According to one local Education Bureau official, as part of Hoboksar’s ‘Townification’ process beginning in 2010, rural schools such as that described in the previous section were consolidated, and students relocated to the town centre (cf. Kipnis 2006), while regional policy reform would begin emphasizing approved ‘local [cultural] characteristics’ (*defang tese*) in education.

Not surprisingly, this centralization of ‘cultural’ education, then, allowed for strictly monitored dissemination of ‘traditional’ practices within an ideologically controlled environment. Indeed, despite some studies that conclude contemporary Chinese education has deemphasized ideological education (e.g. Thøgersen 2002), at least in the case of Hoboksar public school education remains a site of intensive political indoctrination efforts in which 'traditional culture' has taken a central role. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, in the People's Republic the focus of 'managing heritage' is to construct Chinese 'national unity', 'cultural identity', and to promote 'socialist values'. For this reason, only aspects of 'traditional culture' recognized to have 'historical, literary, artistic, and scientific value' able to support these goals are defined as 'cultural heritage' and 'protected' (see ZGRMDBDH 2011; cf. Lu 2017:131) Not surprisingly, this practice of apparently only celebrating 'listed' aspects of local culture was understandably also a source of some consternation. For example, in a conversation regarding how performances representing 'local Mongol culture' always seemed to include the same six stereotypical 'ICH items' (*feiyi xiangmu*), an older resident scoffed at the scheme. Ostensibly referring to the apparent objectification of local culture into discreet, definable units, she asked rhetorically, "Do we Mongols only have 'six cultures' (*women mengguren zhiyou liu ge wenhua ma*)?"

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[27] The *khadag* ceremonial scarf was incorporated as a National-level ICH programme in 2017.

Coincidentally, Hoboksar Town's primary school was composed of three main 'themed' buildings that were architecturally illustrative of this situation. To the front of the compound was the 'Nationality Unity Building' (*minzu tuanjie lou*) and to the rear the 'Science Building' (*kexue lou*), with the 'Traditional Culture Building' (*chuantong wenhua lou*) located between. This is notable because, in multi-national Xinjiang, Nationality Unity has been given priority over all other social policies as a key concept that understands China's 56 recognized nationalities as distinct but united into a single 'Chinese Nation' (Bulag 2002; Gladney 2004), whereas in China 'science' does not simply refer to the 'scientific method' but also a Marxist materialist perspective that recognizes state guiding ideology to be a 'scientific' reflection of objective realities (ZGGCDXWW 2013; Zhang 2018). Therefore, traditional culture's place in Hoboksar as sandwiched between policy and ideology was now literally built into the education system.

With school consolidation in 2010, Hoboksar was left with only one remaining fully 'Mongolian Language' school—the No. 1 Middle School serving Mongol students between the ages of 15 and 18. That year, the county officially designated the No. 1 Middle School a 'Jangarqi Training Base' to train 'young Jangarqi' through standardized formal education. Unlike the primary school, students there were provided intensive training courses in Jangar's plot and performance styles several mornings per week before the formal school day. It was further claimed that in these courses students studied the 'full' epic.

In an interview with the school's Jangar instructor, Mr Dulguun, he admitted that he himself was not a Jangarqi and merely a 'tutor', but that he nevertheless constructed a strict three-year

Jangar training programme beginning with text memorization, then voice training, and finally exercises in physical performance, and each year students are given standardized episodes to memorize before progressing to the next level. However, I would discover that despite claims to the contrary, students were not asked to learn 'original' episodes, but rather abridged versions of existing textualized epic. Also, in voice training students were encouraged to listen to cassettes of past Jangarqi for inspiration but were nevertheless told to find their own individual styles. Finally, students were trained for brief, stylized individual or group stage performances, yet though the students were obviously better trained, and though they certainly sang portions from the epic story, much like the primary school competition, a considerable portion of these very short routines included a hodgepodge of recognized ICH programmes in flowery stage performances. When I pressed him regarding how such drastic modifications to Jangar performances might 'change' Jangar, Mr Dulguun replied confidently: "It won't change Jangar."

He explained that, strictly speaking, if we were to compare this Jangar with 'traditional' Jangar, "it's not really Jangar"—but that isn't significant. Rather, to Mr Dulguun what is important is that 'Jangar has power', but a 'power' quite unlike that described by Sukhbaatar Jangarqi. He explained:

> I think today it has to do with the power of [our] culture. It has the power to make students more confident, to speak better, to make them understand their culture better! It makes them brave [and] has the power to develop patriotism!

That is to say, while Jangar's performance may have changed, the stories shortened etc., the content—its principle 'spirit'—has remained unchanged. Furthermore, this theme of 'patriotism' was mentioned numerous times in our conversations. For instance, when I asked why Jangar is important in students' education, Mr Dulguun replied definitively: "First, Jangar is patriotic […] It's about using all your power to protect Bumba [i.e. the homeland]. It is about developing culture, and *that* is patriotism."

Unsurprisingly, during my interviews with No. 1 Middle School's 'young Jangarqi', almost all of the students described Jangar as an embodiment of the Mongol people's 'patriotic' spirit. One of the students, a registered county-level Jangar cultural transmitter, even claimed Bumba to be a 'communist' (*gongchan*) paradise; another described Jangar's contribution to Nationality Unity; yet another compared 'Jangar's values' to socialist values. Moreover, when I inquired as to the dangers of 'changing' Jangar to suit contemporary tastes, only a handful of students expressed concern. In fact, of the No. 1 Middle School's 'young Jangarqi' officially registered as county-level 'cultural transmitters', one declared that he had established a rock-

and-roll band to convert Jangar episodes into three-minute rock songs. Another hoped to see Jangar turned into a cartoon or graphic novel. But neither of these students felt these acts would ‘change’ Jangar provided it ‘takes Jangar’s spirit into a modern era’ and continues to transmit Mongolian ‘traditional culture’ to future generations.

Conclusion: ‘Making the Past Serve the Present’

This chapter has attempted to illustrate how despite radical changes to ‘Jangar’ as a concept in Hoboksar, claims of an unchanging ‘traditional’ form, carried from an ancestral past into the present has assisted in the narrative construction of a singular ‘cultural’ index of categorical identification for Hoboksar’s Torghut Mongols. In this sense, Jangar seems to become a historical question with a straightforward answer and evidence of a ‘people’ with a pedigree extending into times immemorial. As one interviewed Jangarqi claimed, parroting an oft-repeated phrase: “Jangar contains [Torghut] culture carried-on for thousands of years.”

Indeed, this perspective is supported by Marxist materialist interpretations that have used the ‘epic’ extensively as evidence to support official claims to the Mongol nationality’s linear social evolution, and claims to the epic’s relative ‘stability’ are critical in bolstering these ‘scientific’ conclusions (e.g. Renqindaoerji 2007; cf. Jia 1981). Yet, from claims of a pseudo-‘religious’ ritualized Jangar performance to the recitation of a literalized ‘epic’, to an aspect of Mongol nationality ‘cultural heritage’ as an important constituent part of a unified Chinese Nation, in recent decades Jangar has proven remarkably conceptually flexible and mutable despite claims to the contrary. But rather than challenge the seemingly contradictory claims outlined above, this chapter has attempted to embrace these contradictions as illustrative of how Jangar is talked about and discursively constructed as a central aspect of ‘local traditional culture’ and discursive bridge linking an idealized past with a politicized present.

Drawing on Pierre Nora’s (1989) notion of memory sites, Brigittine French (2012) argues that authoritatively constructed ‘traditions’ such as the Jangar performance can be productively interpreted as semiotic ‘sites of memory’. She argues that it is through the circulation of conceptually plastic signifiers that “produce cartographies of communicability […] by which the past is selectively brought into the present for strategic ends” (ibid.337). It is in this process that apparent contradictions come to be rectified through often highly politicized yet seemingly natural processes of ‘entextualisation’ and ‘erasure’ in which they come to “resemble transparently true objective facts.” (ibid.344).

Understood as the highly reflexive and strategic process of decontextualizing and re-contextualizing discourses such as 'tradition' (cf. Briggs and Bauman 1992; Silverstein & Urban 1996), 'entextualisation' describes an attempt at reproducing and relocating an 'original' contextually unique discursive event into a new context thereby producing a new authoritative reading yet nevertheless asserting the authority of the 'original' into its new social setting (Urban 1996:21). Aspects of entextualised discourse that do not suit this new narrative context may then be subject to social or institutional 'erasure' by, consciously or not "rendering some social phenomena invisible in ways that simplify a social field." (Irvine & Gal 2000:37) Furthermore, anthropologists have convincingly argued that 'entextualisation' as a process is not limited to literary texts or the replication of verbal utterances, rather it includes a range of symbolic communicative behaviours. Indeed, anthropologists have increasingly come to describe 'ritual' and ritualized reproduction of text and behaviour as examples of 'entextualisation' in practice (Briggs 1993:180; Barber 2012:69; Tomlinson 2015:2)—and according to anthropologist Jan Blommaert, claims to the 'traditional' are "entextualisation *par excellence*" (Blommaert 2005:48).

In his ethnography of ritual speech performances among the Weyewa of Indonesia's Sumba Island, Joel Kuipers (1990) describes how ritual performers of 'sacred' (*erri*) speeches offer audiences *li'i*—or the eternal word/voice of the ancestral tradition holders (ibid.6)—that are socially enacted and garner both political and economic significance. Within these performances, specific ritualized deployments of *li'i* are described as an "authoritative, monologic 'trunk,' representing a single, unitary 'voice of the ancestors,' speaks for the entire group of descendants," and stands in contrast to the polyphonic and often chaotic voices of the villagers (ibid.67). Thought to remain pure and unadulterated through time, *li'i* are said to contain great powers capable of re-establishing order and concord after calamity. However, Kuipers notes that whilst Weweya ritual performers claim these words to be original, authentic, and unaltered regardless of context, performers use these performances to manipulate, rather than tether meaning through 'entextualisation'. That is to say, in these obviously highly contextualized social situations that negotiate the interests of both performer and audience, through the deployment of ritual language entextualisation masks this relationship through the authoritative self-referentiality of ritualized speech. In this way, entextualised speech effectively destabilizes linear historical processes by bringing historical speech into the present, reducing the distance between an audience and an often unclear, yet nevertheless authoritative historical personage effectively to zero (Kuipers 1990:58). Similar processes seem to be at work in regard to Jangar and its (re)articulation over time.

For as this chapter has attempted to illustrate, over time, Jangar performances have gradually mutated to suit contemporary social and political contexts, yet are nevertheless claimed to contain within them the 'spirit' of some idealized 'original' despite their quite obvious transformations. Yet while in the case of the Weyewa or other related studies where this process of entextualisation is often described as covert and implicit, in China the process is an explicit, institutionalized ideological procedure known as 'making the past serve the present', or *gu wei jin yong*.

A phrase originally coined by the first Minister of Culture of the PRC, Mao Dun (1982:166), *gu wei jin yong* was early on taken-up and promoted by Chairman Mao (Mao 2002[1964]:227). In fact, Mao consistently claimed that 'traditional culture' should be inherited critically and where "in learning our historic heritage, we must use Marxist methods for critical summary" (Mao 1975[1938]:2-3) and proposed 'cleaning' (*qingli*) traditional culture:

> "The process of cleaning ancient culture by eliminating feudal garbage (*zaopo*) and adopting democratic [cultural] excellence (*jinghua*) is the necessary condition for developing new national culture and enhancing national self-confidence." (Mao 1949[1940]:43)

This is to say, for Mao, the purpose of adopting traditional culture was not to look backward, but forward.

Encapsulated in the phrase *gu wei jin yong*, this philosophy quickly became the most influential ideological formulation in relation to 'traditional' culture in China—and remains so today (e.g. Xi 2013a, 2013b, 2014a). As Chinese culture policy expert Hu Huilin notes in his *The Study of Culture Policy,* in contemporary Chinese official policy discourse '*gu wei jin yong*' is described as follows:

> "Socialist culture and arts are a special form of expression and mode of existence in the history of human spiritual development […] 'Make the past serve the present', 'make the foreign serve China', and 'remove the stale to promote the new' are objective laws and a modern requirement. They are basic cultural policies to solve problems from [the perspective of] the interaction between the linear historical development of traditions and [modern] culture." (Hu 2003:316)

Indeed, in his important 2014 'Speech at the Literature and Art Work Forum', President Xi Jinping himself directly referenced Jangar in relation to the *gu wei jin yong* philosophy. In this same speech, he concluded:

> The transmission of Chinese National culture (*zhonghua wenhua*) is […] [a process of] 'making the past serve the present' (*gu wei jin yong*) and 'making the foreign serve China' through a dialectic of acceptance/rejection (*bianzheng qushe*), innovation, discarding the negative, preserving the positive and "opening one's life to the [positive] customs of the ancients." (2014b)

It should be apparent that as with entextualisation the guiding ideology of *gu wei jin yong* encourages the conscious detachment of recognized 'traditions' such as Jangar and Jangar performance from previous interactional settings to reinsert it into contemporary ones in accordance with specific politically correct generic frameworks and in relation to a manifold of competing interests. In this way, it can be said that 'Jangar' is at once constructed as representative of a recognized group and also widely recognized as an identifiable symbolic 'site of memory' as 'tradition' for that group (cf. French 2012). Yet, at the same time, it is equally important to highlight that this process, though exceedingly hierarchical and political, is one in which local Hoboksar residents actively participate.

Contemporary anthropological literature on China tends to be dominated by 'resistance' narratives, and an emphasis on the rejection of commoditization and/or the incorporation of 'culture' into officialised nationalist discourses (Gladney 1991, 1994, 2004; Bulag 2002; Han 2011)—even if the process may be considered 'collaborative' (Bulag 2010). Such a perspective has contributed much to anthropological literature and certainly has an important place in social research. However, I contend that too strong an emphasis on resistance narratives may at times risk overlooking other important social processes at work. With that in mind, a key argument of this thesis is that 'Torghuts' of Xinjiang are far from passive victims of an authoritarian state's imposed definition of 'culture', but many are often active participants and even leaders in its 'construction'.

At least in the context of 'Jangar', as 'excellent traditional nationality culture', this chapter has attempted to show that 'tradition' is at once an example of continuity and subject to discontinuity. Yet to be considered 'traditional', specific aspects of 'culture' are necessarily decontextualized and recontextualized to perform the role of continuation in contemporary circumstances. Viewing this process as a unique form of 'entextualisation' in China may, I argue, assist us in better understanding this phenomenon. In the following chapters I do dwell on 'entextualisation' as an abstract concept, but rather attempt to illustrate just how specific kinds of political discourse come to influence 'culture', its articulation, and indeed its 'construction' in Hoboksar. Yet, to better frame the complicated political atmosphere in which 'Jangar

Culture’ has developed, in the next chapter I will temporarily leave Hoboksar and the ‘Jangar’ theme to delve more deeply into Chinese policy construction in some of its most ‘sensitive’ circumstances.

Chapter 3: Navigating the ‘Sensitive’

Introduction: Terrorists with a Death Ray

“Where are you?” A woman’s voice barked through the phone. “I’m coming up,” I replied. “I got lost on…” She cut me off, ordering me to get upstairs because I’m ‘late’—by five minutes. I sighed, bit my lip, and sprinted up the next two flights of stairs.

The door was open. As I closed it behind me, a short middle-aged Mongol woman with a round face walked into the foyer. She opened her arms to show off her newly tailored dress, as if to say ‘ta-da!’ and asked with a smile, “Does it look like Chanel?”

“Absolutely!” I lied.

Yina had spent her life clawing up the cadre ladder of influence, and, by her own admission, as a minority had already reached the peak of her career. The only way to continue furthering her political ambitions was through a late marriage to a powerful Han Party-official. Politics in China is a man’s world, and perhaps because of this Yina developed an abrasive personality, accepting only the complete compliance of anyone in her presence; yet this abrasiveness was occasionally punctuated by genuine warmth and affection.

Yina grabbed her Louis Vuitton bag and thrust it into my chest as she walked out the door. “We won’t be needing you.” She said coolly to her chauffeur, waiting outside the door. “I want to take Michael on the bus. We have time.” The driver protested, claiming that it was too dangerous to travel to the south of the city alone, for the south is Urumqi's Uyghur quarter—a Muslim Turkic minority that comprises more than 40% of the region's population. "Dangerous? I'm with him!" She laughed, "Look at his big beard and long nose… He looks just like them! I'll be safe."

As we walked away, she scolded me for not shaving. "From now on, I won't be seen with you as long as you have that beard," insinuating that I looked too 'Muslim'. In these 'sensitive' times, profiling is an accepted institutionalized norm where any form of outwardly expression, be it speech, behaviour, or appearance, is highly scrutinized. We boarded the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) carriage and quickly made our way toward the southern quarter.

Approaching the "Southern Gate"—a 'structure' that no longer exists but nevertheless still conceptually separates the northern Han section of the city from the southern minority quarter—Yina pointed out the window. "What do you see?"

At first, I wasn't sure how to respond; however, I quickly caught her meaning. Almost immediately after passing the 'Southern Gate', all Han had disappeared from sight. "In the past," she whispered, "Han would be everywhere here, and Uyghurs up north. But after '7/5', Han are too afraid to come down here—and Uyghurs don't trust Han." Of course, she was referring to the 'July 5th Incident' of 2009, where city-wide protests against the poor treatment of Uyghur migrant workers in southern China ended in a massive Uyghur riot and Han counter-riot that killed hundreds and left the city permanently scarred. In the name of 'maintaining stability' (*wei wen*), since 2009, Xinjiang has become an armed security-state with palpable inter-ethnic tensions. Indeed, it was the epitome of irony that our destination was located on 'Unity Street'.

We arrived at the iconic Harembag Restaurant—renowned for its ethnic foods and luxurious atmosphere—and headed to the second floor where Yina's friend had reserved a private room for a Mongolian Hot Pot dinner. When we arrived three people were already seated—a Uyghur doctor, a Kazakh secretary, and a Han journalist. We sat down, arranged ourselves, and waited for the last two expected guests.

As we sat, Yina quarrelled with one of the Uyghur servers who claimed she couldn't understand what Yina was saying. "Get someone else in here!" Yina snapped, then turned to me and explained that because the server thought Yina was Han, she was 'pretending' to not to speak Chinese out of spite. "Do you see how sneaky they are?" Yina hollered to her heavyset Uyghur friend sitting across from her, who laughed and playfully tried to cover her face with a brightly coloured headscarf.

The final two guests arrived—a bookstore owner and a policeman.

Before eating, Yina told us that she had some sombre news. “This is something disturbing, and something you won’t hear in local media… the only reason I know of this is due to my husband’s position.” She stood up, grasping her teacup nervously in her hand. “There has been… an incident…”

Apparently, a military drone had recently been shot down near a satellite broadcast station in Northern Xinjiang. Under a recent shift toward drone surveillance, this unit was one of a growing fleet of domestic spy planes that have taken to the skies to monitor ‘extremist’ activity in Xinjiang, and this incident was cause for major concern for security officials—who immediately mobilized the military in response. When security forces arrived, they determined that the drone had indeed not malfunctioned; rather, it had been taken down by some sort of concentrated energy weapon—a weapon they feared was being used by extremized separatist terrorists.

Everyone at the table sat in shock. The doctor held her hand over her mouth, as the police officer grabbed at the tablecloth. “How could terrorists do this?” the journalist exclaimed.

Yina continued, “After closer inspection, they discovered that the drone had been ‘fried by microwaves’…. but the bigger question was ‘where did the terrorists get such sophisticated weaponry?’” Yina slammed her teacup on the table. “Apparently, the station uses microwaves to broadcast to the satellite.” She laughed. “It wasn’t terrorists after all! The plane flew over the broadcast station just as it began transmitting to the satellite!” The room burst into side-splitting laughter.

Yet I sat silent and intrigued, wondering if this narrative may be a metaphor of Xinjiang’s current grim security situation. For in this room full of people of different nationalities (*minzu*), occupations, political affiliations, and social classes, no one questioned the fact that the drone was shot down by terrorists. Indeed, not even the security officials in the story had considered otherwise. No—for a moment everyone was convinced it was terrorists with a Death Ray.

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This chapter endeavours to investigate a key aspect of Xinjiang residents’ lived experience—‘sensitivity’—and how a unique form of Chinese disciplinary power is exercised through the strategic reproduction and accrual of specific ‘powerful’ authoritative political texts. Though the above illustration may at first seem an extreme example, influenced in part by an apparent state monopoly over authoritative narrative construction of Xinjiang’s contemporary situation, the suspicion and conspiratorial orientations in thinking described above are commonplace and (re)produced through just this sort of textual device. This chapter begins with a brief introduction of what will be described as ‘text power’—a unique form of centralized disciplinary power that works to constrain actions within the boundaries of formalized language. This is followed by a discussion regarding the historical development of these texts in the Xinjiang context and their subsequent contribution to the region's increasingly extreme 'sensitivity' (*mingan*) that comes to texture most aspects of residents' lives. Indeed, in present-day Xinjiang navigating the 'sensitive' requires continuous, carefully choreographed performances within the putative boundaries of politically correct space.

I. A 'Sensitive' Introduction

Borders delineate the imagined spaces between nations, both reinforcing a state's power, yet paradoxically also betraying its insecurities (cf. Alvarez 1995). As long as the centre attempts to navigate these anxieties, there will always be lives affected by policies as coping mechanisms exercised from the centres of power (Goldstein 2010:487; Maguire et al. 2014). For a border represents an end, signifying the true extent of sovereignty (Sassen 2006:415; Brown 2010:26). As anthropologist Madeleine Reeves emphasizes, "the messy, contested, and often intensely social business of making territory 'integral'" (2014:6) includes material, embodied, and performative dimensions critical in the perennial processes of state-making and maintenance (ibid.:14). And due to complicated and contested histories, China's border regions are particularly precarious—and often too are the lives of people situated there. China's border regions symbolize not only the extent of Chinese sovereign power but also its disputed nature (Friedman 2010:168; Anthony 2012:199). Although by official accounts, the Chinese nation is constituted 92% by Han nationality (*minzu*), its border regions contain significant minority nationality populations, some of whom have histories of autonomous rule and have only recently begun to recognize Chinese state authority.

In that all nations have borders, nations are required to justify those claims. On an international field, these claims are often legitimated through negotiation, treaties, or war. Yet domestic validations of borders are equally significant, and justifications for authority over places also often include justifications for the subjugation of inhabitants of those lands. For China, these explanations are historical in nature, beginning with claims to a diverse yet somehow common 'Chinese Nation' that extends thousands of years into the past—what is called the *zhonghua minzu* (Fei 1999). In truth, the so-called *zhonghua minzu* is a relatively recent artefact of Chinese national ideology that presupposes a unity of diverse peoples who are fated historically and into the future to participation in a co-constituting relationship and mutual social progress (Leibold 2007:150-152). Furthermore, in ethnically plural Xinjiang, the notion of 'Nationality Unity', or *minzu tuanjie*, is an ever-present 'reality'. During his 1992 speech to the Central Nationality Work Conference, President Jiang Zeming describes *minzu tuanjie* as follows:

> Our country has always been a unified multi-national country, and its long historical development has experienced long-term nurturing, forming a great and cohesive *zhonghua minzu*. It binds us together as one family and is inherited from generation to generation in three ways: First, in our lasting unity; second, in our mutual cultural and economic co-constitution; third in our recent history of solidary in all nationalities when resisting foreign aggression and our mutual long-term revolutionary struggle (1992).

In Xinjiang, any public activity consisting of more than one nationality is gauged within a rubric of *minzu tuanjie* (cf. Bulag 2010). In China—Xinjiang specifically—it is an incontestable discursive trope that the region and people have been an 'inseparable' part of China since 'ancient times' (Jones 2005:75).

To be sure, bold statements such as these rub uncomfortably against various theoretical difficulties—for example, the concept *minzu* itself. In the past *minzu* studies rarely challenged state definitions for and recognition of national minorities, often taking the notions of *minzu* at face value (e.g. Dreyer 1976, 1977; Hsieh 1986). But where much Western emphasis has been focused on Weberian notions of ethnic and national social self-ascription (Weber 1968:389) and where classic Marxist interpretations emphasized social evolutionary understandings of pre-existing nations (Stalin 1942:12), in the Chinese context 'ethnic' or 'national' awareness often only presented itself *after* the state had formally and 'scientifically' determined their existence—not before (Barabantseva 2008:573; cf. Mullaney 2011). Ethnicity and nationality studies neglected to differentiate between social self-identification of persons as members of a distinct ethnicity and the state's capacity for objectifying *minzu* identification, and Xinjiang was no exception (cf. Rudelson 1997).

Another difficulty is China's historical claim to the region itself. Indeed, Xinjiang as a unified political entity is a relatively recent development dating only to the 18th century with the defeat of the Dzungar Khanate and the Qing's assertion of control over the region in 1759 (see Perdue 2005), and Xinjiang as a province was only established in 1884. To be sure, the designation Xinjiang (新疆) itself means '*new* domain', whereas prior to the 18th century, the regions to the west—which included Xinjiang—were rather unimaginatively referred to as the 'Western Regions' (*xi yu*). As explained above, these narratives have changed since independence. However, according to James Millward, after the defeat of the Dzungars in the mid-18th century, even the decision to annex Xinjiang into the empire was a matter of debate (2007:97; cf. Perdue 2005). Furthermore, Gardner Bovingdon (2004:359) locates the first usage of the phrase "Xinjiang has been an inseparable part of the homeland since ancient times" in a 1959 article, soon becoming the required official formulation when discussing Xinjiang history (Zhang 1959:14).

As recent studies have illustrated, Chinese state power has manipulated history to meet its own political ends, conveniently picking and choosing from the past to suit the present (e.g. Duara 1995). Yet to be clear, it is not my intent to engage in discussions of historical revisionism or its implications. Rather, my aim is to reevaluate these activities through a new theoretical lens and to, hopefully, gain new perspective. However, it is impossible to understand contemporary Xinjiang without first investigating the looming anxiety generated by the region's prevailing 'sensitivity' and its historical context. For this reason, this chapter 'zooms-out' to a slightly more 'macro-level' with the hopes of contextualizing the extreme reality in which Xinjiang residents now find themselves.

Throughout my fieldwork, whenever anyone would speak of Xinjiang's current situation, it was always done with utmost caution. For in contemporary Xinjiang anything in life that does not suit officially recognized narratives of a unified state and solidarity among the people/nationalities can be considered 'sensitive', or *mingan*. As Hildegard Diemberger has shown in her discussion on Tibetan oral histories, contested histories and/or cultural narratives in China can be tremendously sensitive with potentially serious political consequences and fluctuates between strict and less strict control (Diemberger 2010:114-115).

Indeed, during my last stay between 2016 and 2017, even the term 'sensitive' itself became, at times, too sensitive to utter in public. Instead, people euphemistically referred to Xinjiang's 'special' qualities. For example, in a particularly awkward conversation with an Urumqi academic, I mentioned the difficulty of doing ethnographic fieldwork in Xinjiang. When inquiring how to write without negatively impacting the people in my field I noted, "I need to find a way to write about Xinjiang without being *mingan*." Startled, he began waving his hands back-and-forth, then barked, "No, no, no! Not *mingan*! Xinjiang is a 'special' place, in a 'special' time, and you are here with your 'special' identity…" then changed the subject.

In another instance, when discussing possible research topics not considered 'sensitive' I became frustrated when everything I proposed was determined *mingan*. Perturbed, I pointed to my dinner and said sarcastically, "I'll study food then." My conversation partner, not recognizing my sarcasm, shook her head and sighed, "No, food is *mingan*. If you talk about Xinjiang food, then you will need to talk about *minzu*." I quickly discovered that *mingan* is ubiquitous, and rather than try to escape it, I would have to proactively navigate a path through it.

Indeed, as Lily Tsai notes, even subjects that do not seem overtly political may be politically sensitive and what considered sensitive varies across regions and over time (Tsai 2010:250). Tsai suggests a "socially embedded" approach to research in 'sensitive' situations which underscores the social relationships with people and institutions in the field as a means of attenuating the ever-present potential problems of political sensitivity in the locales in which we work (Tsai 2010:246).

Furthermore, some anthropologists of China have emphasized the often creative discursive and narrative strategies in which minorities work to navigate *mingan* situations (cf. Swancutt 2020:451). For example, in her ethnography of Nusu shamanic folk dance in Nujiang Prefecture of Yunnan Province, Mireille Mazard notes that locals and researchers "were intensely aware of the politically 'sensitive' […] nature of projects concerning minority ritual and religion." However, despite this 'sensitivity' Nusu animism flourishes as practitioners and researchers learned to "navigate difficult political waters with a tricksterish skill, transforming the meanings of terms to disguise sensitive ideas." For example, by repositioning Nusu 'shamanistic ritual' not as religion but rather as 'folk-dance', or the more scholarly yet politically implicated term 'primitive religion' with 'nature religion' (ibid.:31). However, while it is true that this strategic renarration of otherwise 'sensitive' topics and practices into more sensitive form is widely practices in Xinjiang, it is also true that the room for such manoeuvring is politically far more restrictive.

In this respect, Xinjiang is indeed special. That is to say, in China public acts of overt politicism are dealt with harshly; however, there is a great deal of freedom in interpreting what this indeed means. Blogs, informal meetings, and even entire academic conferences often touch upon extremely sensitive topics. As long as participants do not challenge the legitimacy of the Party and state, individuals are given significant latitude and even sometimes encouraged to lead in these discussions. However, in Xinjiang this is rarely the case, and since the 2000s—and particularly after 2016—unsanctioned discourse has become increasingly problematic.

As I attempt to show, in present-day Xinjiang, what is considered sensitive is far from clear. Though before it is possible to grasp the historical context that has led to such sensitivity, it is first necessary to better understand the role of what I shall here describe as Chinese 'text power' in constructing official narratives of Xinjiang and resident's proper place within it. For as alluded to above, Chinese textual practices not only describe acceptable realities—they generate them. Therefore, in a country where policy trumps law, idiomatic political formulations as texts are more than just simple catchphrases—formulations literally define the boundaries for behaviour, both within 'state' and 'society'. And in an ideological arena that does not distinguish between Party, state, and people (for it is claimed the Party is the state, and the state is its people) everyone is theoretically implicated in this unique form of textualized power.

a. Language and 'Sensitivity'

To explore the significance of a discursive movement that assists in constituting 'text power' in the region and beyond, I turn to Maurice Bloch's early ethnography of political speech among the Merina.

Bloch makes several interesting observations regarding the nature of formalized political speech among the Merina, yet by his own admission, he had not at first taken these strings of apparently vacuous and rigid formalities to be of much theoretical worth. However, after closer analysis, he found that it was through these rule-based fixed linguistic formulations that social control was exercised (1975:6). In fact, Bloch claims these oral formulations were fixed to such a degree that "everything about [political speech] was more or less predetermined." (ibid.:7)

Bloch (1975:7-8) describes a typical ritualized speech among the Merina as consisting of layer upon layer of cliché quotations and proverbs, where toward the end, one might hear some actual content just before finishing off with a bit more cliché. However, what struck Bloch was not only the consistency of the speeches but also their great social significance. For these cliché prose were not understood to be the words of the speaker; rather, they were ostensibly understood to be past statements of ancestors. By the end of each meeting, conclusions had been reached, and due to the unquestioned respect of elders, were rarely challenged. "The process whereby one is caught by the formalization of oratory into accepting without the possibility of question what is proposed is an everyday occurrence…[o]n these occasions if you have allowed somebody to speak in an oratorical manner you have practically accepted his proposal." (ibid.:9) Indeed, Bloch argues that the power behind these set phrases lies in their severely limiting nature, where in their rigidity, virtually all potential for linguistic creativity is lost and where acceptance of the formulation indicates the result. That is to say, through the deployment of formulations, predictable outcomes are fashioned.

The similarities between political speech among the Merina and China are remarkable. For if one were to substitute 'Merina' for 'Chinese' and 'council meeting' for 'Party meeting', this would perfectly illustrate the state of formalized language in contemporary China (Schoenhals 1992). As discussed in Chapter one, 'ritual' in this context is understood as 'action' that is not necessarily communicative or semantic meaning (Bell 1992; Humphry and Laidlaw 1994;

Seligman et al. 2008; Puett 2015). This would include the ritualized deployments of and responses to specific political formulations, be it among Merina elders or Chinese cadres.

Past Chinese scholars studied linguistic formulations thoroughly. In fact, the significance of formulaic precision is clearly presented through the central Ruist (i.e. 'Confucian')[28] concept 'Correcting Names', or *zhengming*. *Zhengming* was central to Confucius' understanding of cosmic order, where he understood the world to be subject to disorder, and while human beings could indeed bring a patterned order to the world, this could only be done when all behaved as it should. Confucius says, "Let the ruler be ruler, the minister minister; let the father be father, and the son son." (quoted in Fung 1983:60). Here Confucius expresses that things must not only be, but they must behave as they are. That is to say, an unvirtuous ruler, an unfatherly father, etc., brings disorder to the world due to the refusal to properly perform. For Confucius it is due to the realities of the world no longer conforming to their names that disorder plagues the earth. As Hall and Ames note in relation to *zhengming*:

> Under these conditions, naming for Confucius cannot simply be a process of attaching appropriately corresponding labels to an already existing reality. The performative force of language entails the consequence that to interpret the world through language is to impel it towards a certain realization, to make it known in a certain way. (1987:268-269)

Thus, if in the Abrahamic tradition words (*logos*) created the world, in the Ruist tradition, words (*ming*) bring order to it.

When asked 'What is virtue?', Confucius responded, "A virtuous leader is cautious in word." (Kongzi 2005:117). Wisdom such as this came to dominate dynastic governing philosophy for millennia. Yet, it is not my intent to overemphasize the political purchase of Confucius' words in contemporary China. Indeed, until recently, the CCP found Ruist thought antithetical to socialist modernism. Nevertheless, these teachings have influenced Chinese governing culture, and from Confucius to present, for Chinese philosophers and statesmen alike, the proper deployment of linguistic formulation is a matter of great consequence. As Michael Schoenhals (1992) notes, Mao himself was aware of the power of formulaic language, and where "the Party chairman [Mao] involved himself in the most minute details of semantics as part of his political leadership." (ibid.:4)

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[28] Here, I use 'Ruism' (ch. *ru xue*, lit. 'the learning of scholars', see Yao [2000:29]) as an accepted alternative to 'Confucianism' that some argue carries considerable intellectual baggage including religious connotations, and tends to homogenize a diverse school of thought and practice (cf. Sun 2013).

At all levels, both inside and outside of government, formulaic language, or *tifa*, influences Chinese political life. Regarding policy-making, Schoenhals notes that in China, policy-making often *is* policy formulation (ibid.:3). As is common knowledge, language in China is strictly governed, especially in the public sphere. While the Propaganda Department is certainly a major influence in prescribing and proscribing certain linguistic deployments in the public domain, formulations are introduced through a number of mechanisms, particularly through Party circulars of numerous organs of power (known as 'Red-headed Documents,' or *hongtou wenjian,* due to their bold red-typeface headings) as well as media outlets such as *Xinhua* or *People's Daily*. Extensive lists of approved textual formulations provide guidelines for expressing certain ideas in certain settings, where formulations are then expected to be filtered down and reproduced at lower levels—particularly through written texts involved in policy execution. While formulations are omnipresent in official spheres and 'work-units' (*danwei*, a general term for the Chinese 'socialist workplace', see Bray 2005:3), regular citizens are likewise often expected to present political opinions through the deployment of approved formulations. Simply put, appropriate formulations meet goals, whereas inappropriate ones "create ideological confusion among the masses." (1992:8) Indeed, formulations represent the Party's attempt to monopolize public political expression.

Formulations are intended to be applied nationally, regionally, and locally in various contexts, and therefore while formulations are syntactically fixed, they are valued for their contextual flexibility. Quoting the CCP Propaganda Ministry, Schoenhals notes that "a 'policy-wise extremely sophisticated formulation' [is] one that is not 'one of those where if it's not this then it's that, if it's not white then it's black'." (1992:11) Similarly, for Bloch formulaic ambiguity is central to its political power in that it helps to disconnect the axiom from the context of the event. Linguistic ambiguity disconnects the communicator from the statement, thereby representing not 'self' but rather 'role' through oration, a system Bloch describes as "merging of the specific into the eternal and fixed." (1975:16)

Indeed, much like the case of entextualisation described in the previous chapter, Chinese formulaic language is a hierarchically defined, yet highly reflexive process by which syntactically fixed policy phraseology is consciously decontextualized for the purpose of relocating and re-contextualizing it into new sociopolitical settings (Urban 1996:21; cf. Briggs and Bauman 1990; Silverstein & Urban 1996). In this way, actors at once negotiate and legitimate the institutional and/or personal interests activated through ritual deployments of these texts while claiming the authority of the 'original' through the authoritative self-referentiality of the text itself (cf. Kuipers 1990).

Bloch continues: “The move toward the formalized therefore becomes a move in the direction of unity […]” (1975:16) Indeed, in the Chinese context, this unity of language represents a unity of goal and mind. In fact, the Chinese term ‘comrade,’ or *tongzhi*, translated literally denotes ‘one who is of like mind’. Formalizations then, Bloch argues, are a mode of power—but they are “power for the powerful” and not mechanisms available to all, and “implies acceptance of who is top [but] it does not produce it.” (ibid.:23-24; cf. Agha 2007:146) In the same way, in China only the highest levels of government have access to formulation construction and alteration, and while lower-levels of national, regional, or local government may fashion their own formulations, these formulations must always be both connected and subjected to higher ones (Schoenhals 1992:31-32).

Chinese political set phrases and formulations, then, are expressions of ‘text power’ by producing a hierarchical form of textually defined disciplinary power that nevertheless demonstrates remarkable plasticity. For it is a matter of procedure that execution of policy ‘suit the local conditions,’ and therefore the ambiguity of political formulations becomes a valuable tool for meeting local needs. Therefore, policy measures based in identical formulations implemented in one region of China may differ in another (Zhang and McGhee 2014). In the context of a ‘special’ Xinjiang, in certain respects, this has meant mutations in form unlike anywhere else in China. Further, political formulations once deployed are policy guides for national development, where law is often recontextualized to aid in its implementation. In the following sections, I will attempt to illustrate the historical evolution of Xinjiang’s unique sensitivity by emphasizing the significance of the textual power of a few noteworthy policy formulations and their consequences.

b. A ‘Special’ Place

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) was established in 1955 after being ‘peacefully liberated’ six years earlier. Recognizing the special circumstances of non-Han *minzu* regions, following the Soviet model of creating ‘Republics’ in areas with significant minority populations, the Communist government established provincial-level ‘Autonomous Regions’ promising self-governance and a level of independence from the Han dominated centre. In its initial conception, Autonomous Regions allowed space for the development of minority specific policy and policy implementation. But while Soviet Republics had constitutional rights to secede, Autonomous Regions had no such authority, further illuminating China’s insecurities associated with its ‘frontier’ that persists to this day. From the beginning, despite vast mineral resources, XUAR was one of the poorest and least developed regions in

China (Wiemer 2004:164). This disadvantage was exacerbated by several cotemporaneous social and economic crises, including the disastrous effects of the Great Leap Forward, which led to tens of thousands of refugees fleeing Xinjiang, and the advent of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Lüthi 2008:214).

While each above instance did indeed contribute to Xinjiang's unique sociopolitical context today, this historical review will instead concentrate on Post-Reform and Opening Xinjiang from 1978 onward. I contend that much of the difficulty in the region has evolved from a systemic approach to unrest in the borderlands that amounts to responses to responses to responses, that when implemented tended to define borders of acceptable reality through strict formulaic language, which together accrued into an inflexible confusion of policy measures that often left anxious authorities with little room to manoeuvre.

c. Xinjiang in the 80s

Though the Cultural Revolution is often thought to have ended with the death of Chairman Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, for reasons too complicated to elaborate here, Xinjiang's Post-Cultural Revolution recovery was retarded several years.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Supreme Leader Deng Xiaoping's 'Reform and Opening' economic liberalization project began introducing new market principles throughout China, decollectivizing agriculture, encouraging private entrepreneurship, while opening the country to foreign investment. During this early period, most industries remained state-owned and inefficient (Steinfeld 1999:passim), yet regions in which the state had applied economic reforms nevertheless saw rapid and sustained economic growth. This prosperity, however, was not equally distributed. Where the eastern coast profited greatly from the Reform, the western regions lagged. Indeed, the conservative leadership in Xinjiang even discouraged applying reform policies, fearing its possible destabilizing effects (Bovindon 2004:22). However, a watershed moment for liberalization in *minzu* regions of China came after the reformist leader Hu Yaobang travelled to Tibet to investigate conditions there in 1980. Upon visiting the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Hu Yaobang experienced what one analyst describes as 'spontaneous outrage' at the conditions he found there, followed by an immediate loosening of central control over Chinese autonomous regions (Sharlho 1992:38). After his recommendations were implemented, Xinjiang underwent a brief cultural renaissance, where television, radio, music, literature, and most significantly religion and political expression realized an unprecedented degree of openness.

Importantly, prior to the 1980s Xinjiang engaged in almost no cross-border trade, but with liberalization, cross-border communication became increasingly prevalent, which not only allowed for the reciprocal exchange of goods and services, but also of ideas. Books and pamphlets flooded Xinjiang from abroad and allowed for new perspectives on the place of Chinese minorities. But where communication with the Soviet Union, while often nationalistic, remained secular, the growing cultural influences from Pakistan took on an Islamist form. According to Sean Roberts, the growing number of Pakistani traders in Xinjiang during the 1980s "often saw it as their duty to provide information about Islam" and supplied heretofore unavailable Islamic paraphilia (2004:226). Roberts notes that "the most significant Pakistani religious influence on Xinjiang has been through the education of Xinjiang's mullahs and imams […] On returning to Xinjiang, many of these students have been instrumental in promoting a stricter understanding of Islam." (ibid.:227)

Furthermore, during this time, Xinjiang began engaging the Muslim world, with a specific interest in trade and investment cooperation. In 1985, Xinjiang began sending 'friendship delegations' to Muslim countries. At the same time, Saudi Arabia donated one million Qur'ans to Chinese Muslims and funded the construction of new Mosques throughout Xinjiang (Roberts 2004:48). In fact, at the close of the Cultural Revolution, the entire region could boast no more than 2,000 mosques, by 2000 that number increased tenfold to approximately 23,000 (Becquelin 2000:88).

Issues related to regional demographic shifts also began to present itself through open expressions of inter-ethnic disquiet beginning in the 1980s. According to Stanley Toops' analysis of demographic data, while the proportion of non-Han population stood at 94% in 1953, minorities accounted for less than 60% just thirty years later (2004:247). Much of this growth was a result of relocation and development policies of inner-Chinese labour to Xinjiang, while an additional one million young people were relocated to Xinjiang for 'education' during the Cultural Revolution (see Yan & Gao 1996:279). In fact, some of the first mass protests in Xinjiang during the '80s were continuations of years of remonstration by disaffected Han demanding to return home post-Reform (Bovingdon 2010). However, shortly after, disgruntled minorities began violent anti-Chinese actions and protested for Xinjiang independence.

In 1981, Kashgar prefecture experienced at least three large violent anti-Chinese actions, including two protests promoting an East Turkistan and/or Uyghurstan, and one organized armed insurrection with the intent of establishing an 'East Turkistan Islamic Republic' "by means of armed force and to drive out the imperialist unbelievers, in other words, the Han Chinese." (Dillon 2004:59). And in 1985, a large student protest took place in Urumqi, and later spread to Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing voicing outrage at the dismissal of a popular Uyghur chairman. The protests were said to have taken a separatist tone calling for Xinjiang's independence and for 'Han out of Xinjiang' (Dillon 2004:60; Bovingdon 2010). In light of these events, prior to departing his post in October of 1985, the Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Enmao attempted to officially declare that "nationality splittism is the main threat to Xinjiang stability." However, fearing that an official statement such as this would deemphasize the role of economic development in regional stability, XUAR minority *minzu* officials rejected the statement (Haribala 2008:30). Even so, it would be the events of 1989 that would set the stage for the decade to come.

On May 12th, 1989, more than 3,000 protesters donning emblematic Islamic dress took to the streets of Beijing, marching toward the Tian'an Men. The protestors received official permissions to protest, and many were even organized by the state-sponsored Chinese Islamic Association. The now little-known Muslim-led event took place in Beijing to protest 'China's Salman Rushdie' following the publication of a book titled Sexual Customs (*xing fengsu*), which they claimed denigrated Islam, in which according to Dru Gladney Chinese Muslims were:

> [V]iolently incensed [...] by sections of the book dealing with Islam which compared minarets to phalli, Muslim tombs and domes to the 'mounds of Venus', and the Meccan pilgrimage to orgies, which were an excuse [...] for homosexual relations and sodomy (1991:2)

Following the demonstrations in Beijing, similar Muslim-Chinese rallies took place in Lanzhou with 20,000 participants, Xining with 100,000 participants, while smaller marches appeared in Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, and Shanghai (Gladney 1991:4).

Inspired by these events, a similar protest took place in Urumqi from May 16-19, where over this three-day period, more than 3,000 demonstrators took to the streets. But while the rallies were initially deemed 'orderly', on May 19th for unknown reasons the peaceful demonstration degraded into a violent disturbance (Bovingdon 2004:201) and after the forceful crackdown on unrelated student protests in Tian'an Men, on June 15th authorities in Xinjiang issued a circular calling for preventing 'fabricating and spreading of reactionary political rumours and distributing reactionary slogans, leaflets and big- and small-character posters', and demanded that several people said to have been involved in the May 19th Urumqi demonstrations be handed over for prosecution. Xinhua, the official Chinese news organization, described that protest as follows:

> [A]n organized and premeditated incident devised by a handful of people who adopt a hostile attitude to the CCP and the socialist motherland and oppose the reunification of the motherland and unity among all nationalities. Under the pretext of the issue caused by the book, *Sexual Customs*, they carried out beating, smashing and looting activities on a large scale against the Autonomous Region Party Committee [...] (quoted in Dillon 2004:61)

In the aftermath, three purported leaders of this 'organized and premeditated incident' were given life sentences.

While it is true, the Urumqi demonstration did turn violent, it is not clear why this demonstration would be conceptually connected to dangerous separatist forces supported by outside powers while demonstrations over identical issues elsewhere would not be likewise considered so. It seems probable that Xinjiang's history of separatist sentiment and strategic location played a role. After all, the United States and the USSR had been known to meddle on China's borders, providing both logistical and material support to separatists (e.g. Conboy & Morris 2002; Dillon 2004:57). Such claims of outside intervention are common to authoritarian regimes, but it would be disingenuous to assume that all, or even much of the separatist sentiment is due to 'foreign subversion'. As I have attempted to illustrate, economic, demographic, and social problems were all contributing factors. But at the same time, Xinjiang's geography also complicates things and was a contributing factor to the aggressive response against Xinjiang Muslims as opposed to those situated closer to the Chinese centre. For at this time, Xinjiang was not only bordering two conservative Islamic states—Pakistan and Afghanistan—but also Soviet Russia and three Muslim majority soviet republics during a time of great instability. For beginning in 1988, the Soviet Union began to witness mass demonstrations, and indeed violence, throughout the Union—a fact that China was aware, and likely attributed to the USSR's own liberalization agenda. Indeed, the chairman of the XUAR government Tomur Dawamat would later cite 'global changes in pursuit of bourgeois liberalization', as a factor in Xinjiang's unrest—a clear allusion to Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* liberalization policies (Warikoo 2016:171). What's more, by the end of that year, the Soviet Union was beginning to dissolve at its borders—only deepening Beijing's sense of insecurity.

After a series of mass, often violent demonstrations throughout the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall, in February of 1990, competitive multi-party elections were declared throughout the Union. The Communist Party subsequently lost control of 6 republics where ethnic nationalists won majorities. Meanwhile, Beijing watched as the archetype of socialist governance was disintegrating, themselves subsequently experiencing one of the longest and most sustained decades of organized violence since the Cultural Revolution—emanating from its Muslim borderland.

d. Xinjiang in the 90s

In April 1990, an incident in the border town of Baren would be a turning point for Xinjiang politics. According to official accounts, 'Uyghur militants' had gathered under the pretext of religion, shouting anti-Chinese rhetoric, followed by 'We do not believe in socialism', 'In the past Marxism-Leninism suppressed religion, now religion will suppress Marxism-Leninism', and called for *jihad* against their oppressors (Dillon 2004:63). Rioters were said to have fired guns and thrown bombs at police and officials, and even blew-up a local government building. Later that day, 300 'militants' mounted an assault on the local Public Security Bureau (PSB) office. When support forces arrived, they were overpowered and disarmed. Some were killed, others taken hostage, where insurgents were said to have continued throwing homemade bombs at government offices. By the next day, the Border Guard was dispatched, and PLA and militia arrived from Kashgar—finally ending the assault (Guo 2015:44). In the aftermath, Chinese authorities placed blame for the insurrection on 'foreign interference', specifically from Turkey (Dillon 2004:63), and similar disturbances rocked the border along Central Asia in the weeks that followed. An unbiased account of what really happened in Baren over those few days will likely never surface. Nevertheless, the Baren Incident would mark the beginning of a desperate region-wide crackdown, effectively ending the brief period of openness experienced throughout the 1980s.

Significantly, Baren incident would result in the 7th XUAR Regional People's Congress one month later formally conceptually associating *minzu* 'separatism' and 'religious extremism' as co-constitutive elements of a hostile force threatening the state. Indeed, five years after hardliner Wang Enmao's failed attempt, in his 1990 annual report Chairman Tomur Dawamat would label 'national separatism' the 'main threat to the stability of Xinjiang' (FBIS 1990:53). On the same day, the XUAR People's Congress passed legislation to limit the right to public protest through the deployment of broad, abstract language forbidding collective acts that 'threaten national unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity', 'threaten public security or social order', and 'undermine *minzu tuanjie* or incite separatism'.[29] This act of the highest governing body of XUAR would set the tone for the next tumultuous decade, leading to a series of acts targeting regional non-Han populations (Haribala 2008:29), and discursively connecting separatist action to run-of-the-mill hooliganism.

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[29] Xinjiang Weiwuer zizhiqu shishi 'jihui youxing shiwei fa' banfa 1990. Accessed February 24, 2018. Available at: http://law.npc.gov.cn/FLFG/flfgByID.action?flfgID=86993&showDetailType =QW&zlsxid=03

Having associated the Baren Incident with ‘illegal religion’, the government began systematically prosecuting ‘illegal religious activities’, revoking qualifications of religious personnel and restricting the construction of new mosques. Political examinations became requirements for Imams, and required clerical qualifications be presented only to ‘patriotic’ Imams (Bovingdon 2004:33-34). By 1991, Xinjiang revoked qualifications to 10% of all Islamic clerics, and that same year the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences accused Islamic separatists of political indoctrination through religious infrastructure and *minzu* artistic expression—which intentionally or not effectively labelled all non-Han ‘culture’ as likely sources of extremist/separatist heteronomy.

This response to the Baren Incident exemplifies the XUAR government’s fixation with the ‘nationality question’ and public dismissal of what may have been local citizens otherwise legitimate complaints. While it seems that ‘religion’ and ‘separatism’ were likely factors instigating unrest, it seems unlikely to be the exclusive root of local concerns. Indeed, economics, Han in-migration, and family planning were all stated concerns of those involved (Dillon 2004:62).

From Reform onward, on paper Xinjiang’s economy improved—with higher than average overall growth. Yet prosperity was not equally shared, weighted heavily in favour of the non-minority Han population. For example, in 1995 Uyghurs accounted for 90% or more of the population in 13 of the 20 officially designated areas of extreme poverty in Xinjiang (Holdstock 2015:87). Furthermore, according to economist Calla Wiemer (2004:177), in 1993 every one percent increase in Han population was associated with a 44RMB increase in local per capita GDP. This is not to say that policies were consciously implemented for the exclusive benefit of Han over minority *minzu*. However, it is accurate to say that development policies overwhelmingly benefit a few Han dominated industrial regions over minority *minzu* agricultural and pastoral ones. Furthermore, much of the resource-rich regional economies were—and still are—dominated by SOEs and the Han dominated Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, or *bingtuan*.

Another frustration among Baren Rioters was strict implementation of late-1980s family planning policies. Family planning policies have unsettled historic social ordering among all nationality groups since implementation, however, among Xinjiang minorities policies were seen as disproportionately affecting minority *minzu*. The stated purpose of the policy is to alleviate problems associated with overpopulation; however, as many minority *minzu* tend to point out, if there were not so many Han immigrating to Xinjiang, overpopulation would not be a problem. What's more, by putting limits on minority birth-rates while increasing Han immigration, minority *minzu* felt that they were being put at a severe disadvantage, while forced abortions were perceived as antithetical to religious doctrine.

From the Baren Incident until the mid-1990s, there were few documented comparable mass protests. In light of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the ensuing disorder along the Chinese border, this was indeed an impressive feat—and was likely due in part to increased surveillance and stricter policy control enacted from 1990 onward. However, Xinjiang nevertheless experienced a spate of bombings and political assassinations throughout the decade, lending to increased anxieties by authorities.

At the same time, between 1990 and 1996 the Chinese political landscape was moving toward a harder line regarding minority regions, specifically Xinjiang and Tibet. The former Party secretary of Tibet Hu Jintao, among others, received high posts in the Central Party structure, while the conservative Wang Lequan was promoted Party Secretary of XUAR. This political shift had an apparent effect on Party policy in Xinjiang, and in 1996 the central government released a top-secret circular titled 'Summary of the Standing Committee of the CPC Central Committee on Maintaining Stability in Xinjiang' outlining procedure meant to guide authorities in dealing with unrest—known as 'Document No.7'. This circular would have wide-reaching consequences.

While the circular did not diverge significantly from then-contemporary policy, it discursively reconceptualized the Xinjiang question through new linguistic formulations endorsed by national Party leadership. The document began with a strong statement:

> [W]e have to bear in mind that *national separatism and illegal religious activity are the main threats* to the stability of Xinjiang. The main problem is that *international counter-revolutionary forces* led by the United States of America *are openly supporting the separatist activities* inside and outside of Xinjiang…Within our national borders, *illegal religious activities are widespread*… If we do not increase our vigilance and strengthen work in every respect, large-scale incidents might suddenly occur and confusion and disruption could break out and *affect the stability of Xinjiang and the whole nation*. (CCPCCDCC 1996, emphasis added)

The document would further outline a policy for 'government construction' through building "a team of cadres who are politically dependable," a policy with clear ethnic undertones. With the issuance of Document No.7, the discourse of the regional polity took a U-turn, formally supporting the draconian policy measures being implemented in Xinjiang. As one Chinese observes notes, after Document No7.:

> Ethnic cadres and groups are no longer 'firmly believed and relied upon'. Any belief and reliance must be founded in the highest standard of either favouring or fighting the 'struggle against secession'[…]From policy measures implemented under the auspices of Document No.7, we see that the object in the struggle of 'ethnic separatism' has expanded to all non-Han officials and students[…] Clearly, it treats 'national separatism' as national thought that permeates Turkic Islamic society. (Haribala 2008:31).

After Document No.7 was released, XUAR authorities had been given new, officially sanctions powers to crack down on dissent emanating from a less 'reliable' demographic.

In April of that year, the PRC initiated a nationwide policy of 'Strike Hard at Severe Crimes Campaign', or *yanda.* This campaign's stated intent was to break up both organized and petty crime; however, on April 30th the XUAR government repositioned *yanda* goals stating: "There is every indication that national separatists are working in collusion with all kinds of criminal and violent elements […] and have seriously threatened the safety of people's lives and property, as well as social stability and the smooth progress of the modernization drive in Xinjiang." (quoted in Dillon 2004:84)[30] One week later, XUAR associated 'unlawful religious activities' with separatism (ibid.:85). Redefining political dissent and unsanctioned religious activity as forms of criminal hooliganism, in this way, XUAR utilized the anti-crime initiative to target political dissent and religious activity at all levels (cf. Millward 2007:331). Under significant political pressure to 'maintain stability' and preserve 'nationality unity,' authorities would increasingly lay blame for most minority nationality discontent on 'extremism' and 'separatism', regardless of context.

In the weeks and months that followed, reports of violent outbreaks in response to the crackdowns began to emerge, and by February 1997 the largest demonstration since the Baren incident took place in the northwestern city of Yining, where it is reported that 3,000 or more took to the streets to protest a series of executions. State media underplayed the incident but would later report that four or five had died with hundreds more arrested—yet others place the death toll into the hundreds (Dillon 2004:94).

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[30] For comparison, see Tanner (1999) regarding the 'Strike Hard' campaign elsewhere in China.

For the remainder of the decade, XUAR and central governments would endure assassinations, armed insurrection, and sustained bombings—some of which would reach as far as Beijing. They would likewise questionably associate *minzu* demonstrations against authorities, violence against officials, arson, and a range of criminal activity with splittism and religious extremism (Bovingdon 2010:185-87). The Xinjiang problem would also be extended into the international realm, where the government engaged in extensive bilateral and multilateral negotiations in attempts to break-up separatist organizations abroad. Domestically, the government would continue in its economic cure-all logic by investing in regional development as part of a broader western development project. However, while this massive development scheme did indeed assist in much-needed infrastructural development, government policies continued to encourage mass Han migration into the region, and where much of the economic prosperity delivered through these programmes were perceived to be enjoyed by Han.

While the aftermath of the Baren Incident redefined XUARs perception of its '*Minzu* Question', it was Document No.7 that established the basis for CCP policy regarding 'separatism' and 'extremism' in Xinjiang into the new century (Becquelin 2000:88). However, it would be the post-September 11th global events that would again transform the discourse surrounding the Xinjiang Question in China.

e. Xinjiang in the 2000s

In the years that followed the Yining Incident—dubbed in some circles a 'massacre' (cf. Amnesty International 1997)—China received some of the strongest and most sustained pressure regarding its handling of Xinjiang unrest. Multiple nations in the Islamic world issued strong statements, and on April 28, 1997, the EU passed a resolution condemning the "arbitrary arrest and execution of a number of Uighurs in Eastern Turkestan […] [and] China's policy aimed at eliminating the culture of the Uighur people." Furthermore, the resolution not only referred to Xinjiang as 'East Turkistan', but also referred to Xinjiang as 'annexed territories'. (European Commission 1997:11)

International condemnation did not slow Chinese policy implementation. Instead, China found international support for its security measures in its post-Soviet neighbours. In 1996, China established the Shanghai Five (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) with the intent to both initiate closer economic ties, but also to root-out Xinjiang *minzu* nationalists residing within these countries and beyond China's reach—namely Uyghurs. Within a matter of years, most members of Uyghur nationalist groups had been jailed, deported, or began to relocate to the West (Holdstock 2015:110). However, it would be the US-led 'War on Terror' that would seem to both vindicate China in its perceived harsh policies toward the region, but also reposition its discursive project. With a new global emphasis on 'non-traditional security', China began building the case that it too had been fighting terrorism on its borders for decades.

On November 14, 2001, the Chinese Foreign Ministry gave a public briefing in which it claimed a direct link between the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) terror organization and Al-Qaeda, claiming it received training, funding, and even to be directed by Osama Bin Laden (Holdstock 2015:159). A few months later, the Chinese government released a white paper detailing the extent of terrorist activity within its borders. While scholars have since been critical of the evidence presented (e.g. Millward 2004), that year, the United States added ETIM to its officially recognized list of terror organizations.

This act represented a major political victory for China, amounting in its eyes to an endorsement of what were now always-already 'anti-terror' policies over the past two decades. The Baren Incident was retroactively determined to be an act of terrorism, as was the Yining Incident. Indeed, though in the past authorities rarely categorized Xinjiang unrest 'terrorism', the document claimed that from 1990 to 2001 'over 200 terror incidents' had occurred within XUAR (Information Office of the State Council 2002). With this perceived international absolution, China began to place significant emphasis on fighting what it now termed the 'three forces'—separatism, extremism, and terrorism. Indeed, the conceptual impact of this particular formulation should not be underestimated. By connecting these three terms, all acts of 'separatism', 'extremism', or 'terrorism' have been always-already conceptually co-constituting. Government statements describe the relationship between the 'forces' as follows:

> While the three forces' individual forms of expressions are different, their intrinsic qualities are the same. From the very beginning, they were a relation of 'you are me, I am you,' colluding with one another. (Xinhua 2009)

However, while the national and XUAR governments fought against the 'three forces' both domestically and abroad, what constituted 'separatism', 'extremism', or 'terrorism' was never clearly articulated. In fact, although the National People's Congress did incorporate supporting 'terrorist organizations' into criminal law, the term 'terrorist organization' remained undefined. Laws tended to lump 'terrorist' activity under headings such as 'endangering state security,' suspected 'collusion with outside territories,' or even to 'turning traitor'.[31] As two Chinese legal scholars observe, due to this lack of definition, the "application of discretional circumstances presents a great arbitrariness [sic]" where those involved in simple public disturbances may be labelled 'terrorists' (Zhao & Wang 2008:5). Furthermore, observers note that the ramifications of policies executed under the auspices of 'fighting the three forces' has been disproportionately felt by XUAR minorities (HRIC 2011:64).

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[31] Guojia Anquan Fa 1993, art.4. Amended in 2015 to include 'opposing terrorism and extremism' and 'separatism,' yet both remain undefined in the law. In 2011, China released a rather all-encompassing definition of terrorism: "Terrorism refers to instigating social panic, endangering public security or coercing state organs or international organizations through violence, destruction, intimidation, or intentionally causing casualties, property damage, damaging public facilities or social order…" Guanyu jiaqiang fankongbu gonzuo youguan wenti de jueding 2011, art.2.

While Xinjiang's qualitative condition and context may differ, quantitatively Xinjiang's 'unrest' has not been significantly greater than other regions in China. For example, around the time of the Baren Incident, where over 300 people took part in an 'insurrection', in 1993 the largely Han-populated county of Renshou in Sichuan province experienced a similar such incident, described as follows:

> Large-scale riots erupted in Fujia district [of Renshou County] in late May and early June. Farmers beat cadres, attacked police, held some hostage, and smashed or burned all cars in sight. "Serious incidents" of "beating, smashing, and looting" occurred. Ten to fifteen thousand farmers surrounded the Fujia government offices. Some broke into the compound and excoriated and beat forty to sixty cadres. The streets of Fujia town were packed with villagers. Peasants carried "pitchforks, rods, and placards." In Huafang township, angry peasants took a deputy Party secretary hostage. There was looting, arson, and stone throwing. (Bernstein & Lü 2009:135)

In this instance, an entire town had been overcome by anger, inviting peasants from neighbouring towns to act against oppressive authorities—amassing a mob 50 times greater than that in Baren. Rather than institute draconian measures of control and limitations to freedoms, the Han peasants' demands were met. Furthermore, one month after the Yining Incident, Jiangxi province experienced a series of protests in 70 townships across three prefectures, amounting to over 100,000 demonstrators in total. In June, another broke out with twice the number of participants, ending in the Public Security firing on protestors 'armed with explosives' killing 70. That same year, in Hubei province a peasant revolt broke out in 12 counties, 8 of which were labelled riots (*saoluan*) and rebellions (*baodong*). It is reported that groups looted a local armoury and a major firefight took place where more than 40 were killed or wounded (ibid.:26-27). In none of these cases were policies comparable to those executed in Xinjiang implemented. As mentioned above, perceptions of geopolitical instability, foreign instigation of unrest, ethnic disparity, etc. all may have contributed to the perception of an existential threat emanating from Xinjiang and not other regions. However, I maintain that another significant factor can be found in a systematic attempt to de-ethnicize the '*minzu* question' in Xinjiang's instability.

While it would be disingenuous to say that the Xinjiang situation is a problem of ethnic and structural racism, it would be disingenuous to claim that *minzu* is not a factor. However, this is what thirty years of government statements claim. For example, after elaborating on the 'facts' of violent extremist terrorist separatist terrorizing the country, the 2002 Chinese government white paper on ETIM terrorism states:

> The people of different ethnic groups…respect each other and treat each other equally, co-exist in peace and harmony, and pursue common development. The region presents a scene of prosperity. Although there are still a handful of "East Turkistan" terrorists both at home and abroad, it is impossible for them to fundamentally affect Xinjiang's excellent situation, in which the society is stable, the people of all ethnic groups are united, the various undertakings are making progress and people's lives are constantly improving. (Information Office of China's State Council 2002)

Yet this presentation of the 'happy *minzu*', I contend, should not be taken as mere wordsmithing, nor as a naïve attempt to 'fool' the world. Instead, it is consistent with approved formulations and infused with 'text power' meant to produce specified realities. Therefore, the *minzu* question in Xinjiang must then be read in its ideological context.

According to the Chinese Marxist historical materialist interpretation of the nationality issue, *minzu* is a question of class-struggle. Indeed, Chairman Mao states, "the nationality struggle, in the end, is a question of class struggle." (Renmin Ribao 1963:1) With the establishment of socialism, the class question was transformed into a question of social and economic development. With the founding of the People's Republic then, the fundamental interests between non-Han *minzu* and Han *minzu* were reconceptualized as the singular interest of the *zhonghua minzu*. The discursive construction of this transcendent, eternal *zhonghua minzu* is associated with a strictly defined narrative regarding *minzu*, and even when recognized minorities present themselves as reluctant subjects, '*minzu*-ness' is re-presented by the state as an organic constituent part of a unified *zhonghua minzu*. But as I have attempted to show, when minority *minzu* resist the state—through participating in demonstrations, acts of violence, or through unsanctioned behaviour—the state of unity is threatened, thereby destabilizing this construction of '*minzu*-ness' as part of a 'unified' whole as the *zhonghua minzu*. So as to rescue the illusive reality of unity, minorities are presented as happy, autonomous subjects contributing to the wholeness of the state, 'extremists' are re-presented as foreign or influenced by the foreign—subjectified by heteronomy. Therefore, the nationalist activities that espouse separation and independence from China are only a small group of 'hostile alien class-elements' (*jieji yiji fenzi*) and do not represent the will of most non-Han people.[32]

From this perspective, the minority *minzu* discontent of the 1980s was understood as a question of unequal attention, and the allowances of freedom of political expression, religion, and economic reform were believed enough to solve the problems in toto. As mentioned above, the suggestion that minority nationality separatism posed a threat to stability was rejected outright, and the question of *minzu* separatism was, for the most part, discursively ignored or understood in terms of criminal activity. However, with the 1990 declaration of a separatist threat, the conceptual linkage of 'illegal'/'extreme' religion to this threat, and the 1996 ideological redefinition of *minzu* administration in Xinjiang, the 'hostile alien class elements' were recognized as polluting and sabotaging the collective interests of the state, and *zhonghua minzu* as a whole.

With the global War on Terror, China found a new vocabulary to engage the Xinjiang problem and deflect international criticism. And though the XUAR government continued to prioritize economic development, more formulaic language began to accrue, policies implemented, surveillance enhanced, and room for action grew more claustrophobic.

II. A 'Special' Time

Chinese political formulation is a matter of political procedure, and through these formulations not only allow for predictable outcomes, but as we have seen, they define politically correct spaces for behaviour. The content of what policymakers or government offices express is often of little import—but what is of critical concern is the extent to which this speech constrains actions within the boundaries of formalized language. With language formalized, options are restricted. For speech must adhere to proper political procedure, and to disregard that procedure is a dangerous, often unthinkable prospect. In fact, disregarding procedure, especially when contesting traditional authority (i.e. the Party) can at once weaken the position of the actor while simultaneously strengthening the position of the authority (cf. Bloch 1975:9). By both restricting what can be said and done and how things can be said and done constrains subordinates to accept the realities constructed. Thus, the more formalized the political discourse, the more robust the sanctions, and therefore the more restricted behaviour becomes. As one commentator notes, in regard to formalized political language, "[c]anons of speech and the political are merged; they constitute, literally, the same hierarchical structure." (Blount 1978:297)

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[32] In fact, reports of 'separatist, extremist, or terrorist' acts in Chinese media almost never mention the *minzu* of actors—and if they do, these errors are quickly rectified.

Importantly, 'text power' must be accepted, not because it is true or false—indeed formalizations allow no room for a true/false dichotomy—but rather because *it is*. Therefore, Chinese 'text power' found in technologies such as formalizations and set phrases gains its great authority by exorcizing logic and semantic reference—not by expressing it. For these reasons, I contend that we must view Chinese political language not primarily as communicative of content, but communicative of borders. That is to say, rather than understand formalized speech as 'signs' or 'symbols' representing 'meaning', in the context of Chinese formalized speech, it may be more productively understood as 'markers' delineating the borders of acceptable political behaviour and meaning. When life becomes politicized, borders begin to solidify and range of motion diminishes. Chinese formalized political language, in a literal as well as literary sense, politicizes life, and thereby textually define boundaries of the body politic. This formalized political language is, to a greater or lesser extent, socially encompassing—and in the Xinjiang, often with serious consequences.

The Chinese state and the XUAR government then, rather than creating realities, create boundaries within which 'realities' can be realized. To ritualistically deploy the formalized language of, for example, "Xinjiang has been an inalienable part of China since ancient times" does not imply that the authorities are making a claim to knowledge, professing that only they know the 'truth' about Xinjiang's past. Rather, this formalization builds clear lines around possible historical realities autonomous actors may construct, while simultaneously defining what lies outside these limits as dangerous *minzu* nationalism that seeks to destabilize an ahistorical national unity—that is, a unity existing beyond historical narrative. The systematic censorship and destruction of contradictory knowledge, and presenting the possession of such knowledge as dangerous separatism is a materialization of a boundary-making mechanism, reconstituting its authority through authoritative action.

In this way, I argue that political language such as 'separatism', 'extremism', and 'terrorism' should not be seen as either objective realities or vacuous constructs, but rather inverted limits of political space—textual conceptualizations of the exterior and understood to threaten a strictly defined subject-performance constructed order. As borders are constricted, in order to preserve harmony, any externalities must be corrected.

In the previous sections, I have elaborated on Xinjiang's complicated history while endeavouring to build a new theoretical framework for which to contextualize the remainder of this thesis. In this section, I present *mingan* in ethnographic context. To understand the context of everyday *minzu* life in contemporary Xinjiang, it is important that the reader 'feel' *mingan*; yet at the same time, I must take pains to disguise every interaction as much as possible. For today Xinjiang represents the world's most sophisticated surveillance state where the possibility of anonymity is a cruel fantasy—where all electronic information is logged, telephone conversations monitored, and public meetings registered through a colossal next-generation surveillance network, 'artificial intelligence', and big data analytics, and where even private conversations are at risk of being scrutinized (Zand 2018; HRW 2018:78; Samuel 2018).

a. Remember July 5th…

Due to strict limits on information and its degree of 'sensitivity', the traumatic events of the Urumqi Riots leading to several days of chaos from July 5th, 2009, have been left to rumour in public discourse. Several scholars have attempted to reconstruct these events elsewhere (e.g. Bovindon 2010; Holdstock 2015:187), however, I am unable to engage with these perspectives here. Yet after the July 5th incident, due to a series of perceived missteps, the XUAR Party Secretary was replaced and his successor Zhang Chunxian began to loosen some of the more severe measures taken since 2009, including reconnecting Xinjiang to the World Wide Web after the near year-long extreme communications restrictions initiated in the hours after the riots began.

Initially, the official reasoning for cutting access to the internet in Xinjiang was due to 'hostile foreign forces' and the 'three forces' utilizing the internet as a recruiting tool, convincing young people to travel from the countryside to incite violence against Han (see Harris & Isa 2011:28). Zhang's reconnection of internet access, however, came with increased surveillance on users and reports that up to 80% of Uyghur websites were eliminated (UHRP 2011:2). Surveillance continued to increase, including instituting a new 'Real Name System' (*shi ming zhi*) for mobile phones and internet, making telecommunication anonymity illegal by connecting telephone numbers and internet use to government IDs and a national registry (Famularo 2015:3). At the same time, securitization continued to intensify as military and armed police would be stationed on busy intersections, and militias would patrol the streets—what was known as 'Grid-Style Community Policing'. Armoured Personnel Vehicles with machine gun turrets would dot the streets around popular locales such as shopping centres or tourist attractions. Virtually all dissent and unrecognized cultural expression would be linked to dangerous nationalism, separatism, extremism, and terrorism, and in the face of such challenges, minority citizens would be disproportionately burdened in upholding *minzu tuanjie,* or Nationality Unity.

In this state of affairs, while in other regions of China, restrictions over expression were loosened, over the course of three decades, in certain contexts, everything in Xinjiang life would be at risk of becoming *mingan*. Through decades of reactive rather than proactive policy measures, constrictive political formulations, etc. XUAR had literally begun inventing enemies. Nevertheless, after having been named, these enemies were as real as any, and in the name of maintaining order, needed to be dealt with.

By 2016, as tense as the situation already was, the worst was yet to come.

b. "Everything is Politics"[33]

In the summer of 2016, a surprise political shakeup occurred, resulting in the transfer of Party Secretary Zhang from Xinjiang to Beijing, and for the first time in PRC history, a Party Secretary from one Autonomous Region was transferred to another—the Tibetan Autonomous Region strongman, Chen Quanguo. Within months of his being installed as the new regional Party head, Xinjiang was quickly transformed into the world's most securitized and surveilled region.

Through the previous thirty years, Xinjiang experienced several traumatic events contextualized through the language of existential threat. Without the necessary experience to combat these threats, previous XUAR leadership seemed unable to handle the Xinjiang Question. Yet Chen Quanguo, known for his innovative policy measures and credited with bringing relative stability to Tibet, was tasked with rooting out the separatist, extremist, and terrorist threats to bring stability to the region. After taking his place as regional Party Secretary, he began rolling out a sophisticated system of social control, unlike anything the world has seen.

One major innovation included a new vocabulary for defining and recognizing 'extreme' forms of behaviour. In 2017, XUAR released its 'Regulations on De-extremification' which included broad controls on cultural and political expression. For example, article 2 of the ordinance defines 15 categories of extremist behaviour, including an 'any other extremist words and actions' section—thereby potentially encompassing any and all outward behaviour. The regulations even put restrictions on 'unusual facial hair' and 'choosing fanatical children's names', as well as stipulate under penalty of law that families "advocate for science, pursue civilization, maintain *minzu tuanjie*, and oppose extremism" (XJJDHTL 2017). Due to the broad definition of extremism, the United Front (a government agency responsible for bringing non-communist elements to heel) published guidance regarding '26 Forms of Illegal Religious

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[33] The following section discusses general securitization and surveillance in Xinjiang. So as to protect informant anonymity and to reduce pressures on the localities in which I worked, I do not refer to any materials relating directly to these areas. All information is open source, publicly available materials, much of which are gleaned from official media reports.

Activities' which included using religion to 'influence social order', speaking out against Family Planning measures, advocating against alcohol and tobacco consumption, 'slandering' the unpopular Mandarin Chinese dominated 'Bilingual Education' system, and 'taunting' cadres (XUARTZB 2017a).

Under Chen Quanguo, XUAR initiated an even more comprehensive security strategy by updating the existing 'Grid-Style Community Policing' policies begun by his predecessor. In 2016, 90,000 new policing related positions opened in Xinjiang—more than triple the previous year—while the public security budget jumped by more than 350% (Zenz & Leibold 2017). The grid system deployed across the board checkpoints, armoured vehicles, and armed police guardhouses labelled 'convenience police-stations'. Guardhouses would eventually be required to be built one every 300 meters, and by the end of 2016, the city of Urumqi already had nearly 1,000 (SCMP 2016). Under Chen, these stations were expected to be able to respond to any threat in under a minute, bringing 'zero distance service' to residents (Jin 2016).

Public areas such as parks, malls, and even supermarkets and hotels were outfitted with airport-style security. To fill up on petrol, one is required to present an ID and be matched with facial recognition before driving into the fortified station to tank-up. Armed police checkpoints dot the streets before entering any county-level administered area, inspecting all traffic, verifying traveller identity, and registering purpose of visits, where ID and facial recognition scanners register each individual's presence before approving/rejecting travellers, and where some checkpoints even requiring eyeball and full-body scans (Chin 2017). Those deemed 'dangerous' were not permitted to pass or detained.

In Xinjiang, this type of biometric data collection has reached levels only imagined in science fiction. For anyone judged by authorities to be 'questionable' or part of a 'special population' undergo biometric collection procedures, disproportionally target minorities. Surveys collect demographic data, 'cultural level', religious habits, information regarding international travel and international acquaintances, relatives and acquaintances that have committed crimes, etc. In 2016, Xinjiang PSB released the "Notice to Fully Carry Out the Construction of Three-Dimensional Portraits, Voiceprint and DNA Fingerprint Biometrics Collection System," known as 'Document No.44'.[34]

In 2017 this system was rolled out on a regional scale when with the "Regional Population Registration Verification Programme," police, local governments, and medical personnel were required to work together to collect biometric data on whole populations. Under the auspices of a ‘voluntary’ “Free Health Tests for All” programme running between July to October 2017, health professionals gathered medical data on more than 18 million out of the 23 million citizens in XUAR (Wang & Han 2017). According to one watchdog, official statements claim this information will be added to a national database being compiled for ‘scientific decision-making’ aimed at management, anti-poverty campaigning, and ‘maintaining social stability’ (HRW 2017).

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[34] This policy notice is not available for public consumption, however there are often references to this policy in public procurement notices for high-tech biometric collection systems found in regions throughout Xinjiang. E.g.: http://www.xjks.gov.cn/Item/36586.aspx (accessed March 3, 2018)

Regardless of area, urban or rural, wealthy or impoverished, dominated by minorities or Han, surveillance cameras blanket most inhabited space. Furthermore, an ‘alert project’ has been deployed, where facial recognition technology is employed to monitor ‘special’ persons through a system that alerts authorities when individuals stray beyond designated ‘safe areas’ such as home or the workplace. Indeed, China currently represents nearly half the surveillance equipment and 3/4 of the deep learning server markets globally (Bloomberg 2018), and for every 100,000 people the police in Xinjiang monitor, the same amount of surveillance equipment in other regions would monitor millions (Chin 2018). In some areas, vehicles are required to carry geolocative sensors, whilst mobile phones, personal computers, and other electronic equipment are regularly checked by authorities. Likewise, police are tasked with wandering the streets, randomly stopping citizens to sweep phones for ‘sensitive’ content using handheld devices (ibid.). Telephone calls are monitored, and some reports indicated that one could be detained for answering a phone-call from a blacklisted number (Hoshur 2018). Mobile phone apps have become precarious, where the list of banned apps is growing, particularly messenger applications. Companies offering apps that are permitted, such as the popular Chinese messenger application WeChat are legally obliged to hand over information on users to the authorities. One major contractor from Beijing claims it is providing and further developing software for authorities to collect massive databases on jobs, hobbies, consumption habits, and other behaviours of citizens (Bloomberg 2018).

With this mass of data, XUAR is employing cutting-edge techniques for big-data analytics through what has become known as the Unified Integration Operations System.[35] This platform analyses data collected to assist in ‘Strike-Hard’ anti-crime campaigns, anti-terror work, and ‘maintaining stability’ (cf. Wang et al. 2015), and where official statements state that the programme is focused on criminal elements and politically threatening individuals (Reuters 2018).

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[35] Public information regarding the system is difficult to find, however procurement data is publicly available. E.g. http://www.xj.cei.gov.cn/info/10856/354281.htm (accessed 4 March 2013). A recent report on the system has been released by Human Rights Watch which purports to have ‘reversed engineered’ a specific aspect of this programme used to police to monitor the population. See HRW (2019).

The system then collates multiple sources of data, such as CCTV cameras equipped with facial recognition, biometrics, financial figures, family planning data, health information, legal records, geolocative data, data on computer addresses, smartphones and other networked devices, license plate numbers, identification numbers, social media presence, online purchases etc. to collect statistics on individuals 'in real time' and determine 'unusual' behaviour (HRW 2017), and from this monitor and fashion predictive warnings of possible future threats related to individuals or groups (cf. Bu & Hong 2016). Indeed, the predictive powers of Big Data were stated by then Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, the body overseeing national public security, when he noted that through analysing multiple "scattered and fragmented" sources, one can "find patterns" and that a collation of Big Data—like that detailed above—"expresses the past, and represents the future." (Zhao 2015) Yet how this information is categorized and used to find and monitor 'sensitive' individuals is unclear.

As I have attempted to illustrate how XUAR defines 'extreme' behaviour is at times broad, and at others seemingly arbitrary. For example, the XUAR United Front compiled a list of '75 manifestations' of extremism, including actions such as 'misrepresenting Xinjiang history' (possibly gleaned from big data), or refusing to shake hands with a cadre (possibly registered by local officials), and consumption patterns like discontinuing use of alcohol or cigarettes, storing too much food, or 'taunting' someone wearing 'fashionable clothing' were also included (XUARTZB 2017). Whether these '75 manifestations' indicate the categorizations used by law enforcement algorithms is unclear. Nevertheless, those flagged as threatening and seeming to deviate from 'normal behaviour' may be investigated, visited by public security, and/or sent away for political education (cf. Zhang 2016).

After having been compiled, the system then crunches this data, creating a composite score, thereby ranking individuals by their perceived threat level—'safe', 'normal', or 'unsafe' (Chin 2017). Those deemed 'unsafe' have severe limitations placed on movement and may be subject to detention for 'political education'. And while officials refer to such centres as 'vocational education training centres' that are "exactly like boarding schools," (Liu 2017) critics claim that these centres are not voluntary training courses, but rather compulsory confinement (Zenz 2019:115). There are no official public reports on the number of people 'studying' in these centres, but a leaked document reported 120,000 held in a single prefecture, while others suggest that by 2018 as many as 800,000 had undergone or are confined and undergoing political education region-wide (Phillips 2018).

These new policies are felt by everyone, every day. Anyone who works for a work-unit is required to sit for 'study sessions,' memorizing policy formulations—especially the speeches of General Secretary Xi. Every Monday morning, each person is required to visit the community in which they are registered to participate in a flag-raising ceremony, sing the national anthem, and listen to political speeches where new formulations may be introduced. Citizens are required to take part in 'stability maintenance' training covering new policies, laws, and expectations in case of emergency. Most workplaces are required to be equipped with shields, body armour, and clubs, while employees receive training for their use by local security forces. Posters with illustrated instructions on how to beat someone with a club are even required to be posted on the walls. Workers are then required to arm themselves and report outside at the sound of an alarm. Furthermore, anyone with a registered household residence, or *hukou,* in Xinjiang is required to turn in personal passports to the police, while religious figures are even required to praise the party and General Secretary Xi during ritual meetings, and sanctioned rituals may only be performed by 'patriotic' religious personnel.

As surveillance begins to texture all facets of life and boundaries become ever tauter, the recent 'struggle' against the 'Two-Faced Person' has added even more uncertainty to people's lives. When General Secretary Xi refers to the 'Two-Faced Persons' in most cases, it refers to a corrupt official or someone who abuses their official position. For example, a general understanding of a 'Two-Faced Person' was a state official who perhaps speaks out against corruption whilst simultaneously taking money for favours on the side (Xin 2016). However, in Xinjiang, as with most *tifa*, the set phrase the 'Two-Faced Person' has taken on its own form when it became associated with separatism, and by default also extremism and terrorism (Xinjiang Ribao 2017). In 2017, "Strictly investigating Two-Faced People in the struggle against separatism" became a central regional policy, sometimes arbitrarily singling out anyone who may deviate in the slightest (Tianshan 2017). In this political movement, the 'Two-Faced Person' became anyone who not only questions the authority of the state or policy but anyone who doesn't appear devoted enough to the cause. Reported examples include complaining about policies through messaging apps, but also refusing to smoke in front of village elders (SCMP 2017). In this way, through a clever reconceptualization of national political phraseology, Chen defined a Two-Faced Person as anyone who indirectly supported the 'three forces' by not being vigorous enough.

Yet contrary to some reports, while disproportionately felt by Xinjiang minorities, this level of control should not be thought to exclusively affect minority nationalities. Indeed, this pressure is felt even among Han—as an acquaintance of mine working for a Xinjiang research institute discovered. Having been outside China as a visiting-scholar since before Secretary Chen took power, he had little knowledge of the situation in Xinjiang. To be sure, this dire situation is never reported in Chinese media and foreign news organizations are limited in access. Further, after returning to China, he chose to continue his research in a coastal city, never once returning to Xinjiang. In fact, after he returned to China, I tried to warn him of Xinjiang's current condition. He didn't believe me and even called me "just another foreigner trying to damage China's image with lies." Still, as mentioned above, anyone with a Xinjiang *hukou* is required to turn passports in to the police; but as a legal resident of another province and only technically employed by a Xinjiang work-unit*,* my Han friend did not believe that this regulation applied to him. However, while working on the coast, he received a notice recalling him to Xinjiang, claiming that his refusal to hand in his passport was a sign of being a 'Two-Faced Person', and therefore he would to stand for a 'Self-Criticism' (*jian tao*) and receive punishment. If this were to occur, his future career prospects would be bleak, and he may be at risk for detainment and re-education. He recalled later how he returned in terror to his work-unit and spoke to his leader, begging, "Please don't do this… I only want to finish my academic research. Nothing I'm doing is political!" His leader refused to excuse him for his 'two-faced' crime, slammed his fist on the desk and exclaimed, "In Xinjiang, *everything* is political!"

c. A 'Special' Identity

Analytically speaking, theoretical notions of 'subjectivity' and 'identity', either explicitly or implicitly, make claims to 'interiorities'. However, in the context of both historic and present-day Xinjiang, this analytical focus on interior 'belief' through external actions may be misplaced. For as I have attempted to illustrate, due to the immense pressures of a threatened authoritative surveillance state, in present-day Xinjiang both speech and action are constantly monitored, and what constitutes correct or incorrect speech and behaviour are not always clear.

Yurchak (2006), in his study of Soviet discursive regimes, describes what he calls a 'heteronymous shift', a passage from 'semantic' to 'pragmatic' discursive relations. Within this shift, the reproduction of a standardized vocabulary of correct representational behaviours became more meaningful than referential connotations of those representations themselves. For Yurchak, the Soviet 'overidentification' with authoritarian symbology created a reality in which it was "often impossible to tell whether [identification] was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two." (ibid.:250). Likewise, in his study of Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Johan Rasanayagam sees this 'shift' as one from semantic discursive regimes toward that of 'performance', where performed representations were not necessarily representative of 'interior beliefs' (2010:76). Through these 'performances' individuals "could maintain a position within the system by performatively reproducing themselves as Soviet persons while ascribing to alternative meanings and forms of sociality" and suggests that responses to politically sensitive discourse in post-socialist Central Asia remain similar (ibid.:77). While I do not dispute either of the above analyses, arguments such as these do not seem to adequately challenge the behavioural dichotomization of what Seligman et al. (2008) may describe as sincerity/insincerity. Through the language of ritually deployed formalized speech, this thesis intends to reconceptualize these discursive relations and performances, not as sincere/insincere but rather as contributing to order through performing the illusion (2008:22; cf. Chapter 1). In light of the above analysis, I propose analysing how individuals perform within these changing discursive regimes by emphasizing externalized practical engagements with and within social environments through performance in textually bounded spaces.

As this chapter has attempted to show, Chinese 'texts of power' such as set phrases and political formulations represent the borders of politically correct space. And much like the boundaries of the state, this textual power at once symbolizes a unique form of Chinese sovereign control while simultaneously betraying its existential insecurities. Though the principles of this 'text power' are exercised nationally, due to the historical factors outlined above, the process has been exaggerated to an extreme, and over decades the room for politically correct action in Xinjiang has grown increasingly claustrophobic. Indeed, in present-day Xinjiang navigating the 'sensitive' necessitates continuous, carefully choreographed performance.

Conclusion: 'It's all understandable…'

In Xinjiang, all regions that contain significant populations of Xinjiang Mongols are restricted to foreigners—what is known as 'regions restricted to outsiders,' or *bu duiwai kaifang diqu*. Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture's Hejing County—the largest Torghud Mongol region—is a military zone, while Khoshud County, with its unique Khoshud Mongol culture, is located near a nuclear weapon testing area. Wusu County is also sensitive due to its proximity to a military zone. Zhaosu County, with its Oolod Mongols and Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County's Torghuts, are both located on border-zones closed to outsiders. And while Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture is technically open to outsiders, its history as a closed zone and proximity to the border has left it particularly sensitive. However, through networking and working to reduce the perception of my threatening 'identity' through proper performance, I was able to navigate around such restrictions and gained the support of local and regional government officials to visit these areas. However, this did not always ameliorate anxieties at lower, local levels. In one instance, while following a ranking government official in another prefecture normally closed to foreigners, drinking with local leaders and discussing 'folk-customs' the mayor took me aside, outside of earshot of his superiors and through a series of euphemisms threatened me. On another trip with the same government leaders to visit a government consecrated *ovoo*—a Mongol ritual cairn and territorial marker—a local official invited us to dine with him, where he berated me with insults and demanded that everything I write be positive and connect my research to Mao. I decided the best response was to lift my glass to our belligerent host and sang a song in thanks for his hospitality.

After returning to the city, the government leaders took us for a special dinner, and praised me for my behaviour, resilience, and ability to navigate the sensitive nature of the area and the anxieties that came with it. As the night wore on, those in attendance grew more inebriated. One of the participants began complaining loudly about the surveillance, the checkpoints, and mobile phone checks. Everyone nodded nervously in agreement. She then protested that never has there been such anxiety to speak in one's own home. As the tirade continued, people shook their heads in uncomfortable solidarity, looking at one another as if to say, "Stop her!" The woman finished her tirade by concluding, "This is just like the Cultural Revolution!" By this point, the boozy steam had boiled off, and as she calmed, realized just how far over the line she had wandered. The official composed herself, then stated: "But in this special time, it's all understandable."

I would soon discover that this phrase 'it's all understandable' would become a private formulation to which many would turn in case they overstepped the boundaries of acceptable conversation regarding the situation in Xinjiang, especially among government officials. It was a marker that some thought could bring the whole discussion back within accepted form. For finding policies a 'necessary inconvenience' is hardly ever an issue, but to be perceived to criticize policy is. To state that policies are 'understandable' is to recognize their utility as a good, however inconvenient, and is to place one's behaviour within the putative boundaries of acceptable discourse. In such an environment, such behaviour and statements cannot be considered 'sincere', but neither can they be disregarded as 'insincere'. Reflecting what Stephan Feuchtwang might call an 'ideology of realism' (2016:15), what is important is not the 'sincerity' of actions performed, but rather the ways of being though behaviour within the confines of textualized boundaries of acceptable political realities.

Chapter 4: Discovering ‘Epic’

Introduction: Culture, from Revolution to Reform

By summoning specific scenes and fashioning explicit realities, ‘genre’ conjures and generates textual worlds (cf. Clifford & Marcus 1986; Smith 2012; Fabian 2014). With few exceptions, classic Euro-American understandings of genre posited a relationship between words and the world, where an Aristotelian-informed conceptualization of genre recognized essential qualities of words, signs, or texts that constituted *a priori* models of categorical reference (e.g. Sapir 1909:xii; Aristotle 2002:3-4). Particularly in terms of ‘music’ and ‘literature’, until the late 20th century, ethnographic studies of non-European creative expression tended to reflect a “scholarly tradition of reliance on *a priori*, universalistic, Western-based analytical genres, atomistically defined and etically applied.” (Briggs & Bauman, 1992:139)

On the one hand, collection and classification of artistic expression in China has a long history inseparable from politics, and even with the infusion of western ‘modern’ generic models in the early 20th century, these European genres often mapped awkwardly onto existing categories, reinforcing an image of Chinese civilizational exceptionalism in both Western and Chinese literatures (Hung 1985; Tuohy 1999:50; Schimmelpenninck 1990:31; King 2010). Yet, on the other hand, throughout this revitalization movement Chinese scholars nevertheless found themselves attempting to construct aspects of ‘folk-culture’ that China lacked. Robin McNeal, for example, describes the ‘construction’ of one such genre in early the 20th century through calls for the introduction of Greco-Roman style ‘myth’ as a Chinese literary genre, where the “imaginative power of myth could mobilize and transform the sentiments of the Chinese citizenry” (2012:681). Hardly ‘fiction’, these socially embedded historical and cosmological narratives were often entwined with rites of passage, seasonal celebrations, and ritual activity. So as to construct model ‘myths’ comparable to Western literature, it has been argued that folklorists forced social ‘rupture’ (Daruvala 2000:24-25, 95) through what Lee Haiyan describes as ‘epistemological violence’ by re-narrating these accounts as literary ‘fiction’, thereby distancing the stories from their social contexts (Lee 2005:48-49; cf. Hung 1985; see also Holm 1991).

In China, as in the West, although ‘genre’ has remained central to literary studies, the specific social implications of genre nevertheless have tended to remain under-theorized (Briggs & Bauman 1992:145; Liu 2011:42). However, early anthropological engagements with genre, particularly in North America, questioned these *a priori* categorizations. Franz Boas (1940), for example, deconstructed these heretofore ‘static’ and generalizable generic taxa, where Paul Radin (1926) illustrated the socialized and flexible nature of generic categorizations. Early anthropological perspectives concluded that though plastic and constantly renegotiated, genres should be seen as normative organizational means for structuring discursive practices. That is to say, genre is at once a flexible taxonomical apparatus, but more importantly, it is a contextually grounded and imminent social, even strategic knowledge structuring resource (Briggs & Bauman 1992:135). As one theorist notes, ‘genre’ is “a *structured complex* which has a *strategic character* and interacts with the *demands of an environment*… [that] are to be defined not in terms of the intrinsic structure of their discourse but by the *actions* they are used to accomplish.” (Frow 2015:14, emphasis in original) Yet if in the Euro-American context the social implications of genre often remain masked by its own apparent ‘objectivity’ (Miller 1984:156), in China, specific genres’ value to be ‘used’ (*liyong*) as a tool for social engineering remained an explicit political reality. As Feuchtwang and Wang note, “Chinese academic representations of [folklore] are largely accommodated to the State and the Party’s policies, particularly to their politics of culture.” (1991:259)

This chapter follows one such Reform era project through the textualization and construction of a Xinjiang Oirat Mongol ‘epic’—the Heroic Epic Jangar. I will argue that in contemporary China the ‘(scientific) folk-epic’ is a discernible genre in its own right, constructed in part through the restrictive but nevertheless generative ‘text power’ of Chinese Party-state definitional and discursive authority. That is to say, it was through the exercise and negotiation of specific authoritative political and ideological texts that allowed for the construction of a scientific and correct 'folk-epic'. In this way, specific normative 'genre-effects' were expressed and worked to transform 'Jangar' into 'the Heroic Epic Jangar' and 'excellent' nationality traditional culture.

In the following sections, this chapter attempts to outline the sociopolitical landscape in which Chinese culture-workers and scholars once again endeavoured to re-imagine and renarrate a post-Cultural Revolution China. But also, rather than follow the popular inclination to search for 'resistance' in textual production (e.g. Finley 2013), this chapter attempts to contribute to recent studies of Chinese minority literature that suggest that in some instances it may be more appropriate to go "beyond resistance" narratives (Thum 2012:293). As Ildiko Beller-Hann (2019:1) argues in regard to the complex, politicized, and potentially precarious processes of textual poesis among Xinjiang minorities: "Although it is tempting to view them as sites of resistance, it is more appropriate to perceive these texts as sites of accommodation, probably motivated by individual and communal self-preservation."

In a climate where virtually anything considered 'traditional' had been labelled 'old' and subject to erasure, a nationwide attempt toward cultural revival through 'salvaging' (*zhengjiu*) 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua*) deemed 'excellent' (*youxiu*) was underway through often top-down projects of preservation and promotion efforts. As I attempt to illustrate, through a 'messy' process of collection, 'revision', and publication of a taken-for-granted 'Jangar Epic', the perceived disparate 'parts' were strung together into a coherent and above all 'correct' whole so as to construct an 'epic' comparable to those of ancient Greece (e.g. Homeric epic) and became a primary example of Reform-era *minzu* 'folk-literature' (Renqindaoerji 1997:1). As I endeavour to show, this process of constructing a genre of 'epic' remains politicized, and though the final product appeared as an ordered, integrated, and defined text, it nevertheless seems to be what William Hanks (2000) might describe as a uniquely Chinese 'hybrid genre' through constant intertextual negotiation within the boundaries of evolving genres of political speech and policy.

To discuss this process, the next section begins with the cultural turmoil of Mao's 'Last Revolution' (MacFarquhar & Schoenhals 2006).

I. Rehabilitating Culture

a. Culture and Reform[36]

“The sun shines after the rain” was an oft-repeated phrase by many older scholars when describing the early years after the Cultural Revolution. Undoubtedly a time of optimism, it was likewise also a time of great uncertainty. For though most seemed confident in the new leadership and new direction, exactly how long and to what extent these reforms would hold left a lingering anxiety. Indeed, without clear direction or institutional precedent, the borders for acceptable behaviour remained blurry.

As a promising young Inner Mongolian scholar, Burinbayar joined the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Literature in 1960, and in 1962 began a short career studying Mongolian folk-literature—including Jangar. In the early 1960s, Burinbayar penned a short essay regarding the Jangar epic’s key hero, Hongor; yet due to the political disruptions post-Great Leap and the subsequent eruption of the Cultural Revolution, his essay remained unpublished. Throughout this decade, Burinbayar would be struggled, abused, criticized, and sent to the countryside for re-education through labour. Yet in 1976, ‘dawn arrived’, the Gang of Four was deposed, the academy reinstated, and Burinbayar was instated as the Deputy Director of Minority Folk-Literature at the Institute of Literature in Beijing. Shortly after taking up this position, Burinbayar published his essay under the title, “An Appraisal of Hongor’s Image in *Jangar*” in CASS’s premier literary journal, *Literature Review*, detailing the epic hero Hongor as a “Hero of the People” fighting for the “labouring classes” in a “story of a tenacious struggle against invaders and all sorts of enemies of the homeland.”[37] In this article, though Burinbayar admits that the epic “has been soiled by the tampering of feudal class exploitation,” through a strict lens of Marxist social evolutionism and Maoist literary criticism, he attempts to prove that Jangar is not an aspect ‘feudalism’, but is rather a reflection of ‘primitive society’ (i.e. primitive communism), contains positive values, and is indeed valuable literature in-and-of-itself.

Having been published in one of China’s most prestigious journals under the direct supervision of central state institutions, Burinbayar felt validated and sought out political support to begin collecting Jangar folk-literature in Xinjiang. Knowing of a prominent Xinjiang Torghut

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[36] During my fieldwork, I was able to interview most of the surviving individuals involved in the initial XUAR Jangar ‘salvage’ project undertaken in the 1980s. The following is based on more than a dozen interviews with related individuals as well as supporting written documentation. Unfortunately, of the surviving main actors in the Jangar project, due to his privileged yet sensitive status, the one significant personality that I was unable to reach for interview was ‘Mengke’.

[37] For the sake of anonymization, I have removed citations for published materials by Burinbayar and Mengke. All materials are available for review by examiners upon request.

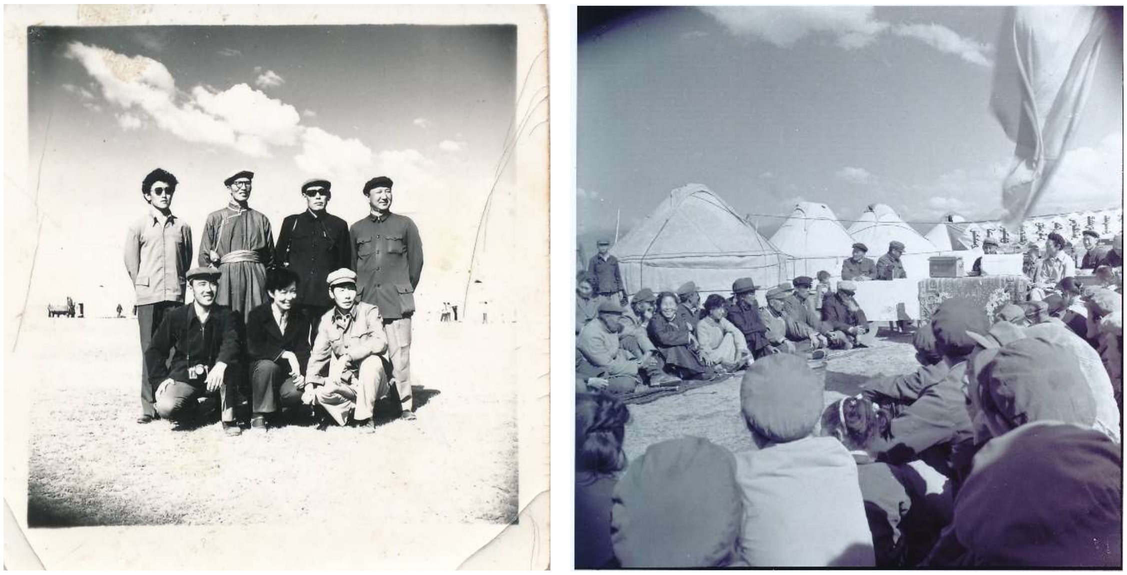

Figure 9: (Left) Photo of the initial Jangar collection team c. 1981. (Right) A local government organized Jangar collection effort, likely in Ili Prefecture c. 1981. Photo Credits: Anonymous.

Mongol in Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture named Mengke, Burinbayar set off for Xinjiang. Upon arrival at the prefectural seat, Burinbayar and his associates searched for Mengke, only to discover that he had been promoted to Vice-Chairman of the People's Government of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR)—the equivalent of vice-governor—and was studying at the Party School in Beijing. Surprised but not discouraged, Burinbayar returned to Beijing to attempt to meet who would now amount to one of the most powerful men in Xinjiang.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, an ardent communist and lifelong cadre Mengke quickly rose through the revolutionary ranks to become one of the most influential Mongols in Bayingolin. Yet with the arrival of the Cultural Revolution, he met hard times. His autobiography outlines the tortures endured and will not be discussed here. However, Mengke describes in detail the confusion and pain he underwent, not only physically, but emotionally. Watching anything and everything not considered 'revolutionary' destroyed, without elaborating on the details of his experience Mengke claims that at least one positive thing came out of the destruction: "I learned a new skill," he writes, "I learned how to protect myself." Having been forced to voluntarily participate in the revolutionary chaos, Mengke ostensibly found his new position an advantageous launching point for preserving what was now no longer 'old' (*jiu*) but 'traditional' culture (*chuantong wenhua*). In the autumn of 1978, Burinbayar met with Mengke and claimed that even as he was being groomed to take the political reins of China's largest provincial-level region, Burinbayar was surprised by Mengke's down-to-earth and welcoming attitude. Burinbayar presented the soon-to-be Vice-Chairman with his essay which he claims

Mengke would subsequently use as evidence of Jangar's value so as to legitimate region-wide collection work. Himself a singer of Jangar and avid follower of the art, upon graduating from the Party School Mengke returned to Xinjiang to take his post he established and personally led the official "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 'Jangar' Leading Small Group" so as to 'salvage' (*zhengjiu*) this great Mongol oral art (Jia 1988: 14; Renqindoerji 1997:1-2). In the months and years that followed, though Burinbayar did indeed undertake fieldwork, he did not stay long, returning to Beijing shortly after. Instead, the bulk of the collection work would be undertaken by an alternative larger team organized under Menke's direction with which Burinbayar would only be tangentially associated.[38]

Mengke built his organization first by 'borrowing' (*jiezou*) two Mongol professionals from other XUAR government offices to lead the workgroup—the first from the Mongolian Language Division of the People's Publishing House, Badma, and the second a reporter from Xinjiang Daily. In the early collection period, these two Jangar workgroup officials began collecting songs in collaboration with both local Xinjiang and outside scholars. Other than these established professionals, recruited members were expected to be young, unmarried (mostly) men prepared to undertake the gruelling years-long Jangar collection and transcription work. At the same time, though Xinjiang was one of the most impoverished regions of an already economically backward pre-Reform and Opening China, the significance that the XUAR government placed on Jangar collection materialized through office space, jeeps, top-of-the-line recording equipment, and reimbursement for remuneration and gifts to folk-singers, etc. In fact, interlocutors would later explain that while similar projects had taken place prior to the Cultural Revolution regarding 'The Heroic Epic of Gesar' and the Kyrgyz epic Manas, and while similar collection programmes were re-initiated following the Cultural Revolution, Jangar was given a special place in XUAR politics. It was claimed that only Jangar received such sustained direct involvement from top regional officials, not to mention such significant material aid. Reflecting the primary importance placed on this 'Oirat Oral Epic', in October of that year, the Xinjiang Literature and Art Federation would establish the Institute of Folk-Art, Xinjiang branch, whose first significant task would be Jangar collection, revision, and publication.

To be sure, the importance of this material support during the early days of collection should not be ignored. At this time, financial support for most humanities and social sciences work nationwide was severely limited. For example, one Beijing-based CASS folklorist recalls the severe lack of resources, excitedly explaining:

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[38] For similar folkloric projects executed in Xinjiang see for example Daniel Prior (2000) and Nathan Light (2008).

> "At that time our work unit had no money…they didn't even give us our paychecks regularly…I had to borrow 200rmb to buy an audio-recorder! At that time you couldn't even find an audio-recorder in China…I knew someone at the Mongolian Embassy…I had to give him the money and he bought me a small audio recorder…we only had about 40RMB salary! Each audio-cassette was six RMB! Seven cassettes was a month's salary! At that time, cassettes were treasured…I would have to make [folk-artists] tell the story once, and if it was good, I could keep it [*laughs*]…at that time I couldn't afford to buy cassettes!"

Yet while the Jangar workgroup was certainly privileged in this respect, members nevertheless met significant hardships, including a lack of resources. For while the members were provided with vehicles, the poor infrastructure of the late-1970s and early-1980s Xinjiang left many areas inaccessible by jeep, resulting in a significant amount of work to be completed on horse/camelback. Jangar workgroup members likewise also complained about a severe lack of audio-cassettes, leading them to only record the 'best' and 'most complete' performances while often ignoring anything that was not considered 'Jangar epic' in the strictest sense.[39] Yet, early collection of Jangar was most seriously restricted due to political sensitivities of the time.

Due to pressures experienced from the late 1950s and subsequent horrors of the Cultural Revolution, during the initial stages of Jangar collection, former members complained that few would admit to even knowing Jangar, let alone to being able to perform it. Furthermore, some early collectors were received with great suspicion. In one instance, a former work-member recalled an incident in Bortala where a professor from Inner Mongolia University travelled to a commune in Wenquan County to talk to local artists "to understand the situation." Apparently, he and his companion both carried recording devices and wore thick glasses. Having never seen people with glasses and recording devices, the man claims that locals believed "the professors were [spies] from the Soviet Union and captured them!"

Indeed, in an official published work report from 1988, it describes how collection efforts from 1979 discovered that many Jangarqi were becoming aged and infirm and that many had passed away (Bata 1988:10-11). With an increased sense of urgency, an official 'red-headed document' (see Chapter 3) produced by XUAR Party Committee Propaganda Department and General Office of the People's Government required all related government institutions—from provincial to village level—to value and actively support Jangar collection efforts. Indeed, after this action had been taken, interviewees often spoke of high-ranking local officials receiving workgroup members and actively participating in collection efforts. Furthermore, many local governments would seek out known folk-singers beforehand to provide 'ideological education', explaining the significance of folk-culture and of their participation in the Jangar collection effort.

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[39] This is often disputed in written documents and reports, however it was a regular theme among my interviewees.

One example of direct institutional support at the local level occurred in Hoboksar when in 1981, the then county magistrate ordered a mid-level culture cadre named Batnasen to undertake a comprehensive survey of Hoboksar's Jangar performers. After identifying these Jangarqi, he was directed to 'educate' them and convince them to participate in the collection effort. Batnasen claims to have found 20 Jangarqi, of which ten participated that year, contributing a total of nine episodes of Jangar. He claims that it was "from this time forward that I developed the motivation to collect Jangar." Thereafter, beginning in 1982, Batnasen would personally assist in collecting dozens of episodes, including 31 from Hoboksar's two most famous Jangarqi, Arinpil (12 episodes) and Juunai (19 episodes). Furthermore, Batnasen would also write one of the first and most comprehensive oral histories of local Jangar history, eventually leading to Hoboksar being perceived as a centre of 'Jangar Culture' (cf. Batunasheng 1984).

After receiving this institutional backing, during the next three years, more than 150 episodes would be collected throughout Xinjiang—illustrating the central importance of state support in early collection activities.

Another significant obstacle for the workgroup was the fact that none were trained fieldworkers. While some would later receive short training sessions in folklore and subsequent members would have backgrounds in Mongolian literature, each of the workgroup members interviewed stated that Jangar collection was a learning process in itself. Though there had indeed been a working model of 'epic' from which the workgroup could draw—after all, the Jangar 'epic' had been given significant attention in the Soviet Union since the days of Stalin (Atwood 2004:260)—collection efforts were to a great extent improvised. For example, several members complained that they had never even been trained to use the provided photographic equipment and Japanese-made audio-recorders, leading to difficulties in subsequent transcription work. Another member explained that his initial almost complete inability to convince folk-singers to perform was due to a very simple breach of guest-host relational etiquette that was only ever rectified after a local Production Brigade Leader had scolded him, pointing out his mistakes. However, perhaps the most serious problem was that none of the members were trained, nor were they required to take detailed field-notes and photography of the visited sites and performances, instead simply adding very basic (occasionally inaccurate) information regarding each folk-artist. Nevertheless, from 1980-1982 the Jangar collection workgroup claimed to have visited more than twenty counties, meeting more than two hundred folk-artists, including over sixty Jangarqi, recording 187 hours of Jangar performance amounting to 157 episode variants (Bata 1988:7-8; Jiamucha 1996:359-360; Renqindaoerji 2007:43).

At this time, collection and transcription work often coincided. Although in theory, each cassette was to be transcribed by he who collected it, early transcription work was often undertaken by younger workgroup assistants. One such assistant was a young Mongol cadre borrowed from a Hoboksar Commerce Department related office named Natsagiin, who joined the workgroup with two other young Mongols from other regions. Now retired and looking back on those days with great pride, he recalls work at the time was hard and often confusing, bluntly stating, “we three young people didn’t know anything.”

Without formal university education and barely twenty years of age, Natsagiin claims to have published several poems in a prestigious regional magazine, ostensibly attracting the attention of the Xinjiang Literature and Art Federation’s leadership tasked with overseeing Jangar collection. Natsagiin recalls being ‘borrowed’ in the spring of 1980, and upon arriving in Urumqi, participating in a meeting in which he and his fellow colleagues’ responsibilities were defined, and thereafter immediately began transcribing. Without training, the three young men began the arduous work of transcribing previously recorded Jangar audio-performances.

Natsagiin remembers that all three new recruits had been placed in a single office space: “We were all in the office working very hard,” he recalls. “I had my recorder on, he had his recorder on, and you had your recorder on. But it didn’t work.” He explains that with each playing various episodes by different Jangarqi simultaneously, none of them could properly hear to transcribe. He also complained that in those days background noise, recorders low on battery, improper audio-recorder set-up etc., all led to difficulty in hearing the audio, not to mention the complications of archaic language, poor enunciation, regional dialects, etc. in which the episodes were sung. Nevertheless, they needed to transcribe something and therefore were often left transcribing a best guess of what was being sung. He further claims that within just a few months, both of Natsagiin’s colleagues had given up and were transferred elsewhere, leaving him alone with a mounting workload. Distraught, Natsagiin contemplated returning to Hoboksar, but first sought counsel from the ‘Living Buddha’ of Hoboksar, Shalva Khutughtu. He recalls the Living Buddha advising him against leaving:

> “Why would you have this kind of idea? Jangar is our Mongol people’s traditional folk-epic given to us by our ancestors from ancient times to today…This work is work to

> save your people. Natsagiin, by collecting these materials you now represent the 14 *sum* [districts] of Hoboksar—you must be proud! You must follow [workgroup leaders] and work well. Jangar is our heritage, and the Living Buddha implores you to remember this and to work hard!" (written statement by 'Natsagiin', received on December 28, 2016)

With his spirit revived, Natsagiin continued his work and the very next year was recruited to undertake field-collection throughout Xinjiang, and in a written statement names more than two dozen Jangarqi from across Xinjiang whom he recorded.

In fact, it is worth noting that one Literature and Art Federation collector associated with the workgroup claimed that, early on, a man even attempted to fabricate an entire episode of Jangar yet insists that the counterfeit was immediately discovered and disregarded. No other members interviewed could corroborate this claim, while some disregarded it entirely. Nevertheless, even that such rumours did exist suggests the great pressure the workgroup collectors and transcribers experienced. However, the lead collector at the time would later write that a member was discovered to have written a full chapter 'from memory', while others changed names of heroes of other narrative poem performances to Jangar related characters, erroneously claiming them to be 'Jangar'—some of which were published (Jamca 2010:70, 74; cf. Renqindaoerji 2010). Nevertheless, with the bulk of the fieldwork completed and transcription underway, the workgroup was now responsible for the revision, editing, and publication of the collected materials.

Of those directly associated with Xinjiang's Jangar collection, revision, and publication, other than Vice-Chairman Mengke and CASS's Burinbayar, an editor from the People's Publishing House Enkhbatin is the only other surviving original collaborator.[40] Already a subordinate of Badama, Enkhbatin began working on Jangar as early as 1978 and was involved in many of the subsequent major state-sponsored Jangar revision and publication efforts, including the three most authoritative: the "fifteen chapter edition" published in 1980/82, the three-volume "seventy chapter edition" from 1985-96, as well as a multi-volume 'materials books' (*ziliao ben*)—then deemed confidential 'internal materials' (*neibu cailiao*) unavailable to the public. He claims that prior to the establishment of the Jangar Leadership Small Group in 1979, he and three other professors visited a number of Mongol counties in the spring of 1978.

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[40] I interviewed 'Enkhbatin' on three occations and spent more than a week with him surveying Bayingolin Prefecture, yet prior to departing he presented me with a written statement regarding his editing and publications experiences, specifically requesting that I disregard audio-interview materials. Therefore, I have used previous interview materials merely as 'background' to reconstruct a more complete picture, and utilize further documentation and interviews with other members as suppliment.

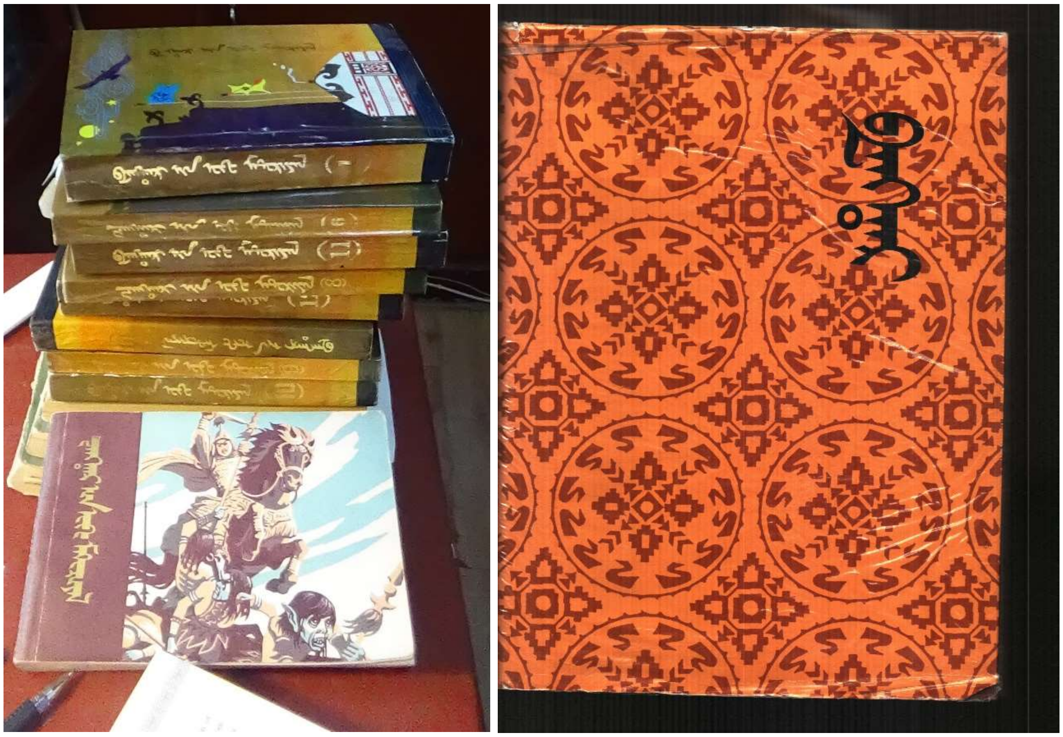

Figure 10: (Right) The earlies publications of the Jangar collection group as ‘internal materials’. (Right) The final literary version of the Jangar Epic, published in the regional ‘Clear Script’, primarily used only by Oirats/Kalmyks.

Enkhbatin claims that during this time, they met more than forty Jangarqi, recording dozens of episodes of what the Jangarqi called ‘Jangar’. Upon returning, Enkhbatin claims that the materials were “transcribed without the slightest modification,” but also says that much of what they had collected was not ‘Jangar epic’, leading to a process of sifting through the materials to ‘find Jangar’.

Enkhbatin claims that the recorded materials not only contained the Jangar ‘epic’ but also other ‘epics’, and even “mixtures of the Jangar epic and other epics”. He claims that “this was because most people thought that to perform Jangar meant to perform ‘epic’”—evincing an apparent interchangeability of the terms. For this reason, he claims that they had to “find the real Jangar” within these materials. According to Enkhbatin, the Jangar ‘epic’ collected differed greatly from the ‘epic’ of the past: “We didn’t consider these the standard, instead we selected chapters of the ‘epic’ based on [the appearance of] Jangar and his heroes.” Once the ‘real’ Jangar had been discovered, the revision work began.

Having collected more than fifty episodes, a significant portion was determined ‘not Jangar’, while many others were considered ‘repetitive’. After categorizing what was and was not Jangar, so as to eliminate repetitiveness, the editors determined “the best [performances] to be the standard” (*zui hao de dang biaozhun*), then selected passages from ‘inferior’ performances to be added to their model, creating a new, more perfect ‘chapter’ (*zhangjie*)—a methodology often referred to as ‘taking from the long to improve the short’ (*qu chang bu duan fangshi*). In this way, the more than fifty collected performances were textualized, revised, and edited into fifteen ‘chapters’ for publication. After each chapter, the editors would credit the Jangarqi, whose performance was determined the ‘standard’.

With the establishment of the Jangar Leading Small Group in 1979, the process and standards of collection changed significantly. For example, after the initial collection experience, the workgroup was admittedly far more selective in what it collected, occasionally rejecting performances and recording over the cassettes. Nevertheless, the revision and publication process remained largely unchanged. In a very similar way, the 157 performed episodes collected by the workgroup from 1980 to 1982 were textualized, revised, and edited into sixty chapters (expanded to seventy chapters in 1996).

As the above has attempted to illustrate, constructing a complete, coherent ‘epic’ from disparate, often unrelated material was a years-long arduous project undertaken by amateur folklorists and ethnologists in lieu of trained professionals. Yet even as the Jangar Epic has been given great political focus in Xinjiang, other than cursory overviews such as those described in the works of Renqindaoerji (2007:42-51) and Jiamucha (1996:338-343) or short articles or conference proceedings (e.g. Batunasheng 1984; ‘The 2017 Seminar on the Epic Jangar’), there has been very little written on the collection, ‘revision’, and publication process. Instead, emphasis has been placed almost exclusively on the *results* of the efforts, where the *process* of collection, ‘revision’, and publication has been almost completely ignored. As this section has attempted to illustrate, through this process, the interests of politicians, cadres, academics, and folk-artists began to blend together, and the interests of the ‘state’ and ‘society’ seemed to blur. And while clearly executed within the accepted boundaries of set policy, the project was articulated almost exclusively through local Mongol *minzu* themselves at all levels of government.

In the following section, I attempt to illustrate the pragmatic linguistic performances by which academics and culture cadres navigate by means of incorporating complex, interlacing generic forms that allowed for the construction of a ‘correct’ knowledge product in the newly conceived Jangar ‘Epic’.

II. Enculturating the *Heroic Epic of Jangar*

With the fall of the Gang of Four, Maoist revolutionary ideology would, for the most part, be eclipsed by an emphasis on economic development, ‘scientific socialism’, and the restoration of ‘traditional culture’—particularly nationality culture. Though seemingly contradictory, much of the theoretical precedent for this revival came through an institutionalized reinterpretation of some of the very Maoist thought that instigated cultural destruction just years before. This was done in part through the temporary elevation of former Premier Zhou Enlai thought, among others, so as to re-examine Maoist ideology in relation to cultural expression. Yet even in this reinterpreted framework, in terms of 'culture', politics remained supreme. In an oft-referenced speech by Zhou Enlai, though he establishes that the Party has no business determining what is and is not 'art', nevertheless with respect to the arts and literature, "leadership has the right to put forward their views politically, for politics is in command. However, this mainly determines whether it is a fragrant flower or poisonous weed, whether it is anti-party or anti-socialist. Politics should focus on this." (Zhou 1984[1961]:337; cf. Mackerras 1981:68-69)

Indeed, following this new political framework, in an important 1978 speech CCP Chairman Hua Guofeng emphasizes the need to 'pluralize' (*duoyanghua*) the arts by "expanding literary and artistic programmes, and enrich cultural life" and "developing the unique styles of all nationality literature and art." Yet in the same breath, the Chairman makes an equally strong statement regarding the boundaries and limits of this artistic expression when he states that even with reform the arts must continue to support the 'mass line' (*qunzhong luxian*) by "serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers" and that cultural workers "should have the ambition to create excellent works reflecting the glorious achievements of [...] the course of the people's revolutionary struggle under the leadership of our Party." (Hua 1978)

As the above quotes illustrate, though creative artistic expression was no longer confined to strict revolutionary ideology, neither could one disregard it. Nevertheless, in that same year, a group of influential scholars worked to reinstitute folklore studies, and with the Fourth Congress of Literature and Art Workers in 1979 were given explicit direction as to their role as folklorists, its collection, and subsequent responsibilities to 'scientifically' analyse and develop it. For in that year, the Supreme Leader Deng Xiaoping himself outlined chief responsibilities of literature and art workers to be a collaborative struggle against any ideologies that may jeopardize scientific development and modernization, requiring these workers to continue to "criticize the influence of exploitative class thought and the conservative psychological influences of the petty bourgeoisie", and to "actively contribute to the construction and development of a socialist spiritual civilization." (see Chapter 1) Literature and art workers would be expected to "expand the public enthusiasm of socialism", contemporary political ideology and patriotism, and "safeguard national unity", but also execute their work through "revolutionary ideals and a scientific mentality". (Deng 1983[1979]:179-186)

In this same spirit of culture work, at the 1982 “First XUAR ‘Jangar’ Academic Forum,” the Vice-Chairman of the XUAR Literary Federation directing the Jangar workgroup clearly outlined the political space in which Jangar work had heretofore been executed. There he directed Jangar workgroup members to continue following folklore-collection policies outlined in the “First National Congress of Folk-literature Workers” of 1958 under the formulation “comprehensive collection, focus on revision” so as to create “spiritual nourishment” for the Chinese nation (Yin 1988:3; cf. Bata 1988:6-7; Mao 2012). He states workers should “utilize the correct Marxism/Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought framework to discuss issues regarding the folk heroic epic Jangar” and that “regarding the development of Xinjiang’s various ethnic groups, we should critically inherit and carry forward the excellent nationality literary and artistic traditions to promote the development of socialist nationality literature and art.” (Yin 1988:3)

In terms of folklore collection, ‘revision’, and publication, the theme that runs through each of these speeches suggests that cultural and academic work should be conducted ‘scientifically’ (*kexuede*), analysed and framed ‘objectively’ (*keguande*), so as to produce ‘correct’ (*zhengquede*) representations of ‘traditional’ culture.

a. “Comprehensive Collection, Focus on Revision”

As the above illustrates, Reform era folklore-work was to be theorized and performed within a political arena defined by a specific ‘scientific’ rationality demarcated through strict official interpretations of Marxism/Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (*malie zhuyi he mao zedong sixiang*). Underlying this discourse itself are several key assumptions concerning society, culture, and history. The basic premise that underlies this ‘scientific’ research outlook presumes that any objective reality—including social phenomena—expresses unique characteristics of its own existence and ideally evolves linearly and unidirectionally over time. Applying principles of dialectical and historical materialism, scholars may then observe and analyse phenomena through class-theory. Therefore, though fairytale-like qualities of folk-stories were once again accepted, early Reform-era Chinese interpretations of Marxism-Leninism ignored folklore’s ‘absurdities’ (such as ‘magic’, monsters, etc.), instead recognizing these merely as heuristic tools for demonstrating ‘scientific truths’ of developmental realities (Wang 1981:59-60; cf. Mackerras 1981:207). Simply put, myths and legends are to be perceived metaphorically rather than literally, creatively expressing the historical progression of class-conflict and class-consciousness. Folk-literature, then, are “abstract philosophical and scientific concepts coated in layers of literary glory and artistic brilliance, allowing for greater understanding and acceptance by the masses.” (Wang 1981:59-60) Yet, it is the responsibility of the ‘scientific’ scholar to correctly deploy officially recognized interpretations of Marxism/Leninism and Mao Thought to "study folk-literature from a scientific perspective, revealing the monster of class-division, and distinguish truth from falsehood in folk-literature." (Jia 1981:3-4)[41] This 'scientific' worldview, then, refers to a number of indisputable *a priori* assumptions that mediate between official political discourses and knowledge production.

Importantly, whether scholars personally 'approve' of dominant government and Party ideological discourse is of little import. What is critical is the proper deployment and reproduction of this discourse (Tuohy 1991:195). Indeed, one of the most prominent Chinese folklorists and founding member of the pre-Liberation Chinese Folklore Movement, Zhong Jingwen was purged during the Anti-Rightist movement of 1957 for voicing opposition to state politicization of folk-culture (Schimmelpenninck 1990:10, 1997:8; Pieke 2005:63-64). Yet after rehabilitation, Professor Zhong would become one of the more ardent proponents of 'scientific' folklore research methodologies (e.g. Zhong 1981, 1982). In fact, Chinese academia of the day disregarded any non-official folklore scholarship in toto due to a lack of a Marxism/Leninism and Mao Thought intellectual framework (e.g. Jia 1981:5; Zhong 1981:1 1982:407) often even referring sarcastically to contrary scholastic views in inverted commas (e.g. Wu 1980:31-32; Zhong 1982:10; Wei 1984). In this context, in contrast to claims of a 'heteronomous shift' of discourse-performance within socialist institutions (Yurchak 2003), I suggest that it is relatively unproductive to analyse Chinese academic discourse as '(in)sincere' or in terms of genuine 'belief in' indisputable political genres. Instead, we must recognize the expectations of scholars to perform uncritically 'as if' officialised interpretations were indisputable truth (Seligman et al 2008).

Within this 'scientific' theoretical foundation and worldview, scholars then are called to undertake 'objective' interpretation and analysis; yet unsurprisingly, the notion of 'objectivity' in Chinese scholarly discourse has remained inseparable from politics from the start. On the one hand, Marxist materialism emphasizes consciousness as a reflection of material realities, and that 'truth' is the 'correct' reflection of objective things and physical laws in the consciousness of human beings (Yu 1979:13; Dai 1991:30-31). Yet on the other hand, according to a Maoist reading of 'objectivity', though objective reality is contingent on materiality and principles of nature, emphasis is given rather to sociopolitical particularities of context. In this sense, Mao's crypto-classical interpretation of Marxist materialism again comes to the fore (cf. Schram 1989; Nave 1994).

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[41] For an example of Chinese 'scientific' analysis of folklore translated into English see Sayintana (1994).

As mentioned in previous chapters, the relationship between language and correctness in Chinese political discourse is a crucial aspect of Chinese governance, and this has historical theoretical precedence in the practice of the 'Correcting Names', or *zhengming*. For example, when his student inquired as to how Confucius would rule a state, he answered

> I would begin with the Correction of Names […] For when a name is incorrect, speech is untrue. If speech is untrue, the affairs of the state will be unsuccessful. If the affairs of the state are unsuccessful, ritual and music (*liyue*) will not prosper. If ritual and music do not prosper, punishments and penalties will be biased. If punishments and penalties are biased, the people know not how to behave. (Kongzi 2005:128)

'Correction', then, is a form of discursive authority that elicits an ideal politico-symbolic ordering of reality in China through safeguarding and controlling discourses and their performative power over social practice (Nylan 2008:270-271). The principle of Correcting Names then associates ritual performances (*li*, see Chapter one) and language within highly contextualized situations, creatively realizing "new worlds" in "emerging circumstances" where "both 'appropriate' ritual action and the 'proper' use of language require personalization and a making over fitting to one's own specific conditions." (Hall and Ames 1987:273-274)

When asked what it means to govern, Confucius answered unequivocally "a ruler Corrects [Names]." (Liji 1947:143) Though Mao certainly prioritizes 'practice' (*shijian*) over classical 'idealism' (*guannian lun*), his interpretation of Marxism clearly draws on the spirit of this and other classic governing principles (Mao 1993[1939]:110; cf. Nie 1992:110; Dong 2015:322). In an important speech 'Transform our Study', Mao elaborates on his view of 'objectivity' by drawing on and reinterpreting a classic Chinese scholarly idiom, 'seek truth from facts' (*shishi qiu shi*). Though seemingly contradictory, Mao executes an innovative theoretical movement toward particularization of universalistic Marxist principles by declaring that all 'truth' is at once contingent on universal material 'facts' but also local contexts and class consciousness, and that the responsibility of constructing the correct 'objective' framework to interpret reality ultimately lies with the Party (Mao 1971[1941]319-322). In this sense, Mao's understanding of 'objectivity', then, begins in the *a priori* assumptions of Marxism/Leninism, but nevertheless recognizes 'correct' study to be performed through a specific framework agreeable with contemporary Party discourses and policy interests. And while many of the political pressures of the Mao era had been lessened, these basic principles of 'science' and 'objectivity' nevertheless persisted into the Reform era, constituting both implicit and explicit generic forms and allowing for indexical frameworks of varying flexibility for the construction of 'correct' knowledge products (e.g. ZGZYWXYJS 1997; cf. He 2001:421).

During the 1980s and continuing even until today, within this framework it is assumed, then, that through the course of history as societies evolve from 'primitive' to 'feudal/capitalist' civilizational development that folk-literature will inevitably be influenced by reactionary ideology, polluting 'authentic' representations of the people in folk-arts. Folklorists were expected to separate the 'healthy' (*jiankang*) from the 'reactionary' (*fandong*), and "in regard to these backward and reactionary elements, [scholars] must criticize them and in our revision work eliminate them." (Jia 1981:8-9; cf. Tuohy 1999:56) This practice is illustrated in one of the few direct translations into English of Chinese minority folklore research when the collector explains the revision process of Daur nationality folktales:

> When I was translating and collecting the materials for this book, I followed the principle of removing the artificial and wrong and choosing the cream. Most of the stories I selected are rich and healthy in content, of an educational nature, and characteristic of this ethnic group. Secondly, I emphasized literary and scientific value. (Sayintana 1994:73)

In both academic and official discourse, the most offensive aspects of folk-literature are often referred to as 'garbage', or *zaopo*. Literally describing the rotting leftover dregs of rice wine production, *zaopo* depicts the lewd, improper, or politically incorrect and is often paired with 'superstition' (*mixin*) to be explained away as the deceptive and oppressive influences of petty bourgeoisie, feudalism, etc. Neither 'garbage' nor 'superstition' are considered 'authentic' expressions of the people and are either removed from otherwise 'healthy' products or suppressed entirely (Jia 1981:307; see also Feuchtwang 1989; Feuchtwang and Wang 1991; Steinmüller 2013). Practically speaking, due to the fact that there is deliberately no clear definition for these terms, unless interested parties could prove historically recognized folk-behaviours or 'cultural' products to be 'valuable', any custom or performance (*minjian fengsu*) could potentially be deemed 'unhealthy' and politically suppressed.[42] For example, the last paragraph of the introduction to China's immense official collection of national folk-literature states: "Of course, folk-stories contain historical limitations and feudal garbage (*zaopo*), but adhering to the principle of critically carrying on nationality heritage, these elements are neither dominant in the stories, nor are they difficult to discover and eliminate." (ZGMJGSJC 1992:16)

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[42] In fact, as An & Yang (2015:284) illustrate, it was very much due to the official recognition of 'customs' as 'heritage' in mainstream political ideology in the mid-2000s (see chapter 6) that many 'folk-practices' once considered 'garbage' or 'superstition' were reevaluated as 'valuable culture', thus expanding the space for action through official endorsement.

As illustrated above, Xinjiang Mongol culture-cadres find themselves drawn into these overt acts of textual manipulation—practices in China that represent a specific form of 'socializing' power (Agha 2007:155) through complex processes of generic construction and control by means of overlapping and interlacing generic models. In the case of China, not only does the government have an interest in folk-literature as it promotes policies, but as we have seen scholars and culture-cadres too perceive themselves to have a stake when promoting the value of nationality folk-literature. For this reason, Chinese folk-literature and ethnological scholarship at once draws on explicit indigenous and Western-inspired literary genre such as 'epic', but also by both remaining within set ideological frameworks and drawing on vast reservoirs of either implicit or explicitly set-language, formulations, terminology etc., scholars and cadres simultaneously confirm the value of their work through its association with authoritative language genres while constructing state-sanctioned venues through which to disseminate their ideas to a wider public (Tuohy 1999:69). This highly reflexive practice of repurposing authoritative language scripts illustrates how in highly contextualized situations actors negotiate a multitude of interests by decontextualizing deployments of ritual language and recontextualizing it through the authoritative self-referentiality of ritualized speech (Briggs and Bauman 1992:149; cf. Chapter 2)

Similarly, anthropologist Asif Agha (2007) understands discursive 'reflexivity' as an aspect of "social regularity of recognition" (ibid.:65) in which actors become social and socialized by means of 'recognizable'—that is to say recognized as 'common' or 'shared'—discursive behaviour, and further describes how in practice such behaviour actually constructs contextualized social relations within normative regimes (cf. Lucy 1993). Put simply, 'reflexivity', or alternatively 'metasemiotics' (cf. Nakassis 2016:332), describes a specific discursive programme in which signs, both linguistic and behavioural, frame other signs as their objects, but also how the social positioning of the 'language-user' informs the unfolding of discursive events (Agha 2007:146). Reflexivity, then, describes the 'embodied' and 'entangled' contexts of these symbolic relations between 'sign' and what it frames, generating concurrent relationships between signs and throughout discursive 'events', "whereby otherwise nonpresent signs are made to stand as a virtual context to ongoing activity" (ibid.)—what some linguistic anthropologists have described as 'interdiscursivity' (e.g. Silverstein 2005; Wilf 2014).

Through a series of ethnographic examples, Agha illustrates that reflexivity occurs when users produce situationally specific messages about their messages through implicit indexical connections that resonate with and within social and cultural frames, or what he calls the discursive 'register' (ibid.:85). From this perspective, Agha argues that social relations are organized in part through this manifestation of generic indexical order and the processes of constantly recycled enregisterment on which it relies. It is by passing through a deeply historical cultural frame that language is 'enregistered' and transformed into "cultural models of action" that evoke specific indexical references that draw speech into particular generic regimes (ibid.:55) whereby users play a role in establishing "metasemiotic divisions of labour through which power asymmetries can be made to live through signs." (ibid.:185; cf. Silverstein 1993, 2005; Urban 2006). Yet, while Agha seems to imply that such processes often remain implicit and covert, as this chapter has attempted to illustrate in order for texts to be considered 'correct' and receive the institutional backing for promotion through centrally controlled and highly restrictive media organizations or even educational institutions, discourse surrounding specific folk-genre itself must be similarly 'socialized' and restricted to a politically correct generic register—yet done so through the reproduction of often overt textual performances (see Chapter 3).

The same principles appear to be at work in the revision of Jangar. For example, in a report given at "The First Jangar Summit" Mongolist and translator of Jangar S. Dorj goes out of his way to explain away the appearance of monasteries and Buddhist spirits in performances, noting that these are unimportant to the overall plot and "[t]herefore, as classic Mongol nationality literature, Jangar is fundamentally ideologically and artistically healthy." (1988:282-283) Similarly, in likely the most authoritative academic work on Jangar in China to date, Renqin's *Discussing Jangar* draws on historical materialism to build on the established theory that Jangar's development over the centuries is visible through textual traces of past historical terms, organizational principles, and political institutions, positing that a stable 'traditional' version of Jangar emerged in the 17th century, and represents largely a reflection of 'traditional' Mongol 'shamanism'. He then argues that it was only after the introduction of Buddhism in the 16th and 17th centuries that performances would begin to echo the incorrect biases of performers, where Buddhist elements would 'augment' the epic, overlaying superfluous Buddhist symbology over 'traditional' shamanistic ones (Renqindorji 2007).

For instance, Renqin traces this evolutionary pattern first through an unrelated 'Mongol creation myth' in a so-called 'lesser-epic' (*xiaoxing shishi*) then compares this with the 'Preface to Jangar' in two Russian Kalmyk variants and a Xinjiang Oirat variant. The introduction to the lesser-epic "The Valiant Aboralto Khan" states:

> Long ago, in a happy time,
> When the sun first rose.
> When the leaves first turned green,

And the moon first ascended.
When the pine trees first made seeds,
And there were still few stars in the sky.
When goats were still only kids,
And wild horses and donkeys still colts […] (quoted in Renqindaoerji 2007:110)

"This reflects a primitive Mongol creation ideal," Renqin claimed. Yet, without offering any evidence, he then affirms that this quintessential example of Mongol 'shamanistic' imagery of a young earth was subsequently augmented with 'Buddhist' symbolism and ideology when due to the transmission of Buddhism among the Mongols from the 16th century onward the following lines including the central mountain in Buddhist cosmology and an associated lake were subsequently added:

When Sumeru mountain was just an earthen mound,
And Sumeru lake was still only a pond […] (ibid.)

Renqin claims that the Russian Kalmyk variants of Jangar experienced similar instances of augmentation:

Kalmyk 'Preface to Jangar' variant #1:

Long ago, in the earliest age,
In the earliest era of Buddhism's promotion […]

Kalmyk 'Preface to Jangar' variant #2:

In the ancient Golden Age,
In the earliest era of Buddhism's promotion […]

According to Renqin, the phrase "long ago, in the earliest age" described in the first Kalmyk variant represents the same 'shamanistic' young earth as that described in the 'lesser-epic' above, whereas the variant that included "in the ancient Golden Age" illustrates a later development reflecting the Mongol Golden Age of heroes, ostensibly from 13th-15th centuries. He concludes that, like in the lesser-epic above, the phrases "in the earliest era of Buddhism's promotion" were similarly added to reflect the post-16th century Mongol conversion to Buddhism and subsequent evolving feudal society (ibid.:111). Renqin's example of a Xinjiang Oirat 'Preface to Jangar' variant read as follows:

When the heavens were still like a plate,
And the earth was still like a hearth.

> When Sumeru mountain was just an earthen mound,
> And Sumeru lake was still only a pond.
> When the lush Bodhi Tree (Mo. *galabar zanden modun*) was still a sapling,
> And the phoenix (Mo. *garudi shovuun*) still only a chick […] (ibid.:111)

For Renqin, despite Jangar's clear association with strong Buddhist symbolism such as the Sumeru mountain and lake and the Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha himself is said to have attained nirvana, this nevertheless does not represent Buddhism's influence on Jangar. He explains:

> The first two lines are traditional Mongolian verses, and the last four lines are under the influence of Buddhism. But they mean the same thing […] they reflect the cosmology of Mongol shamanism and illustrate the ancient Mongol creation mythos [*chuangshi guannian*]. (ibid.)

Without a comprehensive review of all episode variant recordings and comparing them with original transcription notes, subsequently published 'internal materials', and then the final 'literary epic', the extent to which aspects of 'feudalism' or other perceived *zaopo* were altered or removed, is impossible to assess. Indeed, such a project would be infeasible without strict supervision and would require substantial resources and time. Yet it is obvious that through the process of creating a literary epic, at the very least, some variants were chosen to serve as model episodes over others, and through the revision process were altered to suit specific aesthetic tastes. For example, the literary epic contains nothing resembling overt Buddhist iconography found in the Xinjiang Oirat variant of 'Preface to Jangar' described above. Nevertheless, this is not to say that collectors and publishers consciously worked to fabricate a 'Jangar Epic' free of Buddhist influences. Indeed, aspects of Buddhist symbology such as lamas, monasteries, associated spirits, etc. are found in numerous episodes, and though the above variant was not published as part of the literary epic, nor was it made available to the public, it was published as 'internal materials' and available for review by select scholars. Nevertheless, through the revision process, collected performances were nonetheless filtered through specific genre-producing mechanisms by selecting and reconfiguring oral performances into a cohesive whole as representative literary art and then re-narrated through academic analyses to suit a specific politically correct worldview.

In each instance, the construction, interpretation, and presentation of "The Heroic Epic Jangar" were explicitly filtered through a specific 'scientific' framework, presented 'objectively', and produced 'correctly' to suit a particular ideal and 'healthy' model of 'epic literature' for socialist China. Indeed, Enkhbatin himself spoke openly regarding performers' ignorance of what constituted 'correct' Jangar as well as having to create 'standards' during the revision process to suit an imagined 'traditional' Jangar that was somehow lost to history. These particular perspectives evince what may be considered a 'devolutoinary model' of Jangar (Honko 1990:3), where an ideal 'traditional' Jangar unpolluted by alien religion and ideology was gradually tainted by undesirable 'feudal' elements found in today's imperfect performances. For the workgroup, it was their duty to salvage this fading original that was coincidentally also remarkably compatible with contemporary socialist values.

Conclusion: Jangar and 'Genre-effects'

I began this chapter with a rather grand claim—that 'genre' is generative (cf. Dyer 2007:176). Genre, I claimed, in certain circumstances, assists in the construction of social worlds. In short, though I recognized genre as a classificatory system and not a universally valid *sui generis* reality, I tried to show how genre nevertheless assists in constraining not only textual poesis, but also how we conceptualize and interact in our social worlds (Briggs & Bauman 1992:136; Agha 2007:1-2; Frow 2015:14). In the case of the 'discovery' of an 'epic', this metaphor seems particularly apt. However, as I argue throughout this thesis, in order to better think about China we must think *through* China, and therefore, it would be unwise to take this metaphor too far. Indeed, the term 'genre' is yet another clumsy Western category that is difficult to directly translate into Chinese. *Ticai* (literary or musical 'kind') or *leixing* ('type' generally) are the closest translations in the Chinese lexicon and not necessarily interchangeable with 'genre' in all situations. Nevertheless, I believe that 'genre' as it has been elaborated in anthropological literature over the last decades can provide considerable insight into the wider 'genre-effects' of this textual power. This 'text power' described in the previous chapter and elaborated in greater detail above is predicated on particular shared assumptions and interpretive and representational conventions important in shaping practice observed in both official and everyday discourse. Furthermore, Chinese scholars have incessantly worked to overlay foreign generic models onto indigenous contexts for more than a century and quite explicitly use artistic genres as state-directed forms of social engineering (e.g. McNeal 2012). This chapter has followed one such Reform era project through the 'discovery' and indeed 'construction' of the Heroic Epic of Jangar.

Through a brief discussion of the 'messy' procedure that this collection project represents, I introduced the peculiar and highly personalized circumstances that Jangar came to be valued as a cultural object and 'salvaged'. In this process, political interests were intermixed with personal ones, and where interests of politicians, cadres, and academics began to blend together into a massive state-centred project of cultural creation. Even Jangarqi themselves were drawn into the state through their invitation and participation in the collection process, and where many folk-artists would subsequently even be inducted into local and regional People's Political Consultative Congresses (a governing body similar to a legislative upper-house with limited practical influence).

Once enough episodes had been compiled, it was then the responsibility of scholars and culture cadres to 'revise' the materials and do so 'scientifically' and 'objectively' to produce 'correct' representations of 'traditional' culture. As described above, this process required materials to be filtered through a number of indisputable *a priori* assumptions that mediate between official political discourses and the production of contextualized knowledge, and where personal approval of these discourses mattered little. It was, rather, through the accumulation of countless uncritical, yet highly reflexive contextualized performances 'as if' these were indisputable truths that that certain realities were realized and an 'epic' was manufactured as an 'authentic' representation of nationality folk-literature. Furthermore, political terminology such as (but certainly not limited to) *zaopo* and 'superstition' in folklore were treated as markers of exceeded limits of acceptable political space that threaten this strictly defined subject-performance constructed textual reality. Much like the 'three forces' of Chapter 3—but to a significantly reduced degree—*zaopo* and 'superstition' are defined as unscientific and unobjective and, therefore, a threat to an ideal construction of national reality and re-presented as foreign pollution to be carefully eliminated.

Indeed, these calls for 'scientific' and 'objective' engagement with a politicized world permeate Chinese academic and official life even today. I myself was often subject to reminders that as long as my research was 'objective' there would be no problems; asked to analyse and write about Xinjiang 'objectively'; and even received the awkward request that I form 'objective opinions' (*keguan xiangfa*) about the 'actual situation' (*xianshi qingkuang*). This chapter has presented a few examples of the infusion of political genre into processes of knowledge production, and indeed everyday life, illustrating what I have termed 'genre-effects' that produce a unique form of power that at once constrains behaviour, but also simultaneously allow for a framework in which complex negotiations of political boundaries permit creative expression deemed productive and/or meets certain goals.

By combining the anthropological understanding of genre as an imminent, highly socialized mechanism for creating generalizable order and unity while simultaneously recognizing its highly particularistic and reflexive deployments dependent on individual negotiation in diverse contexts with the highly centralized means by which Chinese institutions strategically position textual power, I propose that viewing the above examples through this alternative vocabulary may be helpful in recognizing the position of this unique mechanism for patterning and ordering society in relation to contemporary culture-politics in China. In this way, we are better equipped to view knowledge products such as the Heroic Epic Jangar not in terms of 'artificial' or 'authentic', Chinese 'folklore' as perhaps superficial facsimiles of Western models, or Cultural Construction as a question of 'state' versus 'society', but rather as a cooperative—albeit potentially coercive—project in which all theoretically contribute and negotiate whilst simultaneously both legitimating and sustaining a governing mandate through proper performance within defined, yet occasionally porous political boundaries.

Chapter 5: Constructing Culture

Introduction: “Select from the Refined and Discard the Garbage”

As I have attempted to show, the Xinjiang Oirat long-form narrative poem that came to be known as The Heroic Epic Jangar seems to have been a complex, fairly wide-spread, and highly ritualized oral performance. Though criticized as ‘old’ under the Maoist regime, post-Reform the performance came to be recognized as a valuable folk-epic and subject to ‘scientific’ revision, extracting it from its imbricated social context and re-contextualizing it as ‘excellent’ minority culture representative of the Mongol nationality’s great contribution to ‘Chinese National culture’ (*zhonghua wenhua*). Yet as with most minority folk-literature, during the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Heroic Epic Jangar remained primarily an object of academic, rather than public, appreciation. However, beginning in the 2000s, Jangar would come to be seen as a central aspect of Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County’s cultural, educational, political, ideological, and especially developmental agendas—a change that has roots in a fundamental reevaluation of culture and culture-power in China after 1989. For under President Jiang—Deng’s successor—the notion of ‘culture’ began undergoing yet another major shift.

As previously discussed, Post-Reform China began to downgrade political revolution in favour of economic reform, and though Mao Thought remained a pillar of Party governing theory, Mao’s writings were gradually re-interpreted and re-theorized through the language of post-Reform leadership priorities and changing national interests. Importantly, particularly as a result of rapid economic development, mass nationwide protests of 1989, and the unexpected dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s, ‘culture’ again came to be renegotiated in at least two important ways:

First, while ‘culture’ had long been conceived as a tool for political indoctrination and a ‘weapon’ deployed through a so-called ‘cultural army’ (*wenhua zhanxian*), particularly after the Tian’an Men incident of 1989, Chinese central authorities began to increasingly view ‘culture’, and especially ‘Western culture’ as a tool for international domination to be defended against domestically.

In the early 1990s, through a series of speeches, President Jiang announced a shift in cultural priority from recognizing ‘culture’ merely in terms of domestic politics to a more overt defensive struggle for Chinese hearts and minds—particularly Chinese youth. For example, in his “Speech at the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference”, clearly targeting ‘Western culture’ as a potentially threatening polluting force, President Jiang emphasized the importance of instilling “correct public opinion” and “particularly in young people, strengthening patriotism, collectivism, and socialism as central content … [and] particularly in young people, guide correct ideals, beliefs, worldview, and values, oppose money-worship, hedonism, and extreme individualism, and resist the corrosive decadence of capitalist and feudalist ideologies.” (Jiang 1992) Deliberately marrying propaganda, ideological, and cultural work into a single agenda, Jiang required cultural workers to “approach our nation’s traditional culture and foreign cultures in a scientific manner[…]” Seemingly self-consciously deploying the rhetoric of ‘cultural heritage’ (*wenhua yichan*) he continued, “we must select from the refined (*jinghua*), and discard the garbage (*zaopo*) to properly pass down this valuable cultural heritage.” (ibid.) Indeed, according to Ai Jiawen, it was in this decade that Chinese theorists and policymakers would come to understand ‘cultural power’—an important aspect of so-called ‘soft power’—not as a passive influence found in the subtle attractiveness of an objectified ‘culture’ or political ideology as it is often understood in the West (e.g. Nye 2004), but rather as a tool of international politics to be actively cultivated “more like a weapon to counter or exclude Western influence than a tool to attract Western followers” (Ai 2012:135). This conceptual trend has been evident in each subsequent administration, and particularly in the current president’s key concept of ‘Cultural Confidence’ (*wenhua zixin*) which takes a borderline bellicose tone against foreign cultural influences and was instantiated into the PRC constitution in 2018 as an important part of a larger ideological programme officially designated “Xi Jinping Thought” (Xi 2014; 2016; Chen 2017; ZYRMZF 2018).

Second, in part due to the unequal distribution of economic prosperity after the initial execution of Reform development policies where wealth materialized most evidently in the Han dominated coastal regions (Vogel 2011), and in part due to a wider global perceptual shift in cultural preservation discourse in the 1990s from 'culture' to 'cultural resource' (e.g. World Bank 2001; cf. Yudice 2003; Shepherd 2006, 2013), national government development strategies have attempted to leverage 'culture', and primarily 'excellent nationality culture' as an economic resource for development at local levels. Indeed, as Tim Oakes (1998, 2006) shows, it was in the early 1990s that 'culture' was added to the central government development agenda, illustrating a major shift from previous Maoist and Reform era culture-power rhetoric (cf. Blumenfield & Silverman 2013). Yet similar to the 'anti-politics' of development discourse (Ferguson 1994), this political project is masked through the rhetoric of 'science', 'objectivity', and 'correctness' (e.g. Wang 2007; Wang & Chen 2008; cf. Chapter 5).

As previous chapters have illustrated, China has expended significant resources developing a comprehensive administrative mechanism for the management of 'culture' and, indeed, its construction. Yet since its international re-engagement post-Reform, China has attempted to both incorporate and integrate its cultural construction mechanisms into globally recognized cultural preservation discourses and associated institutions through so-called global 'heritage regimes' (Bendix et al. 2012; Blumenfield & Silverman 2013). China's unique historical and ideological considerations discussed in previous chapters all contribute to an equally unique outlook on 'traditional culture' and 'heritage', and it is precisely due to this unique history and development process that Chinese cultural heritage preservation concepts differ from globally recognized standards—particularly in the case of Jangar and 'folk-culture' generally, now re-articulated through revised global preservation nomenclature as 'intangible cultural heritage', or ICH.

Yet where contemporary international institutions such as those championed by UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage understand 'intangible heritage' preservation ideally to begin at the 'community' level with local recognition of cultural heritage seeking support from governments, NGOs, etc. so as to preserve, develop, transmit, and even promote heritage that local stakeholders themselves perceive as 'valuable' and endangered (UNESCO 2003, art.15; cf. Deacon et al. 2004; Blake 2009; Foster 2015), in China the process is quite the opposite. Chinese conceptualizations of 'heritage protection' begin with Party and central government institutions, which are then filtered down to regional (Beckett & Postiglion, 2012) and local governments, and finally to the common people. That is to say, the central government formulates policies requiring lower-level governments to seek out and identify local cultural heritage to be valued, protected, transmitted, and promoted (Ai 2012; Bodolec 2012; Yan 2016).

Further, Laurajane Smith (2006) argues that institutionalized global heritage discourses have been determined by what she terms a ‘Western authorized heritage discourse’ that naturalizes a predominately European understanding of heritage, thereby not only predetermining the ‘meaning’ and ‘value’ of ‘heritage’ but also methods of preservation, thereby reinforcing an objectified ‘culture’ through “a global hierarchy of values” (Herzfeld 2004:3). Disregarding the distinction between ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ heritage, Smith instead argues that all ‘heritage’ should be recognized as a highly socialized *process* rather than product (cf. Harvey 2001:320). That is to say, ‘heritage’, like ‘culture’ is a “set of practices and performances” that reinforce and reify a dominant socio-political worldview (Smith 2006:11; cf. Smith & Campbell 2016:443). Yet in the case of Chinese state-centric approaches, through its active involvement in international heritage regimes and quiet renegotiation of Western concepts of ‘preservation’—and indeed the notion of ‘heritage’ itself—the Chinese government has begun to develop its own ‘authorized heritage discourse’ and its carefully choreographed ‘performance’ (cf. Zhu & Li 2013; Lu 2017:131).

To be sure, it is obvious that this alternative outlook and system of practice has developed a radically different understanding of ‘culture’ reinterpreted through the appropriation and manipulation of global ‘heritage’ discourses—and has yet to be properly theorized. As this chapter attempts to illustrate, The Heroic Epic of Jangar would become embedded in a programme to at once construct ‘world-class’ culture to compete with a perceived threatening Other (West) through the appropriation of universalizing discourses of Western-modelled heritage regimes, but also materialize as a new mechanism to meet local political goals. As such, Part I of this chapter attempts to, in part, explain the historical processes at work in developing a uniquely Chinese regime for cultural management. In turn, through a series of ethnographic anecdotes, Part II endeavours to illustrate the complexity of imbricated interests involved in Chinese heritage management practice and does so through the case of ‘Jangar Cultural Development’ in Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County.

As should be evident, the boundaries around what is conceived as Chinese ‘traditional culture’ and its discursive partner ‘heritage’ is a highly politicized and strategic project defined by the highest levels of Party leadership and shaped to suit ‘local’ political and social circumstances at lower levels—yet this complex and highly authoritative state-centric system of cultural management remains fractured, poorly defined, often clumsily executed, and subject to translation and interpretation through local, sometimes even personal interests. In this context, it has been in part through the legitimating discourse of international 'heritage protection' that the PRC has more deeply and effectively extended its surveillance and management mechanisms into previously unexplored areas of Chinese society (cf. De Cesari 2012).

I. From 'Traditional Folk-Culture' to 'Immaterial Cultural Heritage'

As discussed in previous chapters, due to the wide-spread cultural 'vandalism' of the Cultural Revolution (Sofield & Li 1998:369; Silverman and Blumenfield 2013:3; see also Balakian 2013:59-60), with Reform and Opening the new modernizing ideology officially supported and promoted the preservation of 'culture' deemed 'excellent' and 'valuable', leading to what has come to be known as the 1980s 'Culture Fever' (*wenhua re*, cf. Zong 1996; Wang 1996; Gan 2006) which not only included the widespread collection of domestic 'folk-culture', but also introduction to and active participation in international 'material heritage' protection regimes—most significantly the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention (WHC) to which China became a signatory in 1984. Though China did register some important sites to the World Heritage List in the 1980s—such as the Great Wall, the site of the so-called 'Terra Cotta Warriors', etc.—the developing priority to have China's cultural influence recognized abroad is evident, where from 1990 to 1999 the number of listings would expand nearly fourfold to 23, and where today China is second only to Italy in the number of inscribed sites at 53 (versus Italy's 54). It is in part through such institutions that China at once projects and legitimates its cultural power through a globally recognized 'outstanding universal value' of cultural sites and artefacts (WHC 1972), while simultaneously negotiating and reifying its own national and historical narratives (Shepherd 2006:250). In fact, it would be through its vigorous involvement in such institutions that China would come to re-articulate its 'excellent' national(ity) folk-culture and develop comprehensive new mechanisms for its management, protection, and development as 'immaterial cultural heritage'.

a. Cultural Heritage, Universal Value, and Authenticity

In recent years, 'Critical Heritage Studies' has fairly comprehensively reviewed the 'heritagization' of cultural space and practice (e.g. Walsh 1992: 135-140; Herzfeld 2004, 2005; Smith 2006; Bendix et al. 2012) and will not be discussed in detail here. Yet, several important aspects of this Euro-centric, yet globally institutionalized process of World Heritage inscription politics are particularly relevant to the current discussion—namely the consequences of promoting a state-centred approach to recognizing (1) 'outstanding universal value' and (2) ‘authenticity’ of certain aspects of cultural heritage and its influence in shaping Chinese political discourse.

First, according to the 1972 Convention, ‘cultural heritage’ is defined narrowly as ‘monuments’, ‘groups of buildings’, and ‘sites’ which “are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science” (UNESCO 1972: art. 1) to be determined “in accordance with modern scientific methods” (ibid.: preface); and though left relatively vague in the original document, over the decades ‘outstanding universal value’ would come to be conceived as an “outstanding response to issues of universal nature common to or addressed by all human cultures” (Von Droste et al. 1998:221). That is to say, the ‘outstanding universal value’ of ‘cultural heritage’ is defined objectively as an innate quality of select material artefacts—both man-made and ‘natural’—that are ‘scientifically’ verifiable and to be valued equally throughout humanity.

The second concern is the primary role of ‘authenticity’ in determining World Heritage listings. Though the WHC does not directly mention ‘authenticity’, what Sophia Labadi (2010) calls the ‘four degrees of authenticity’—that is the ‘originality’ of materials, workmanship, design, and setting—have become central standards for determining World Heritage (ibid.:69), and where “most dossiers analysed refer to authenticity as an objective and scientific notion inextricably linked to the original state and form of the property” (ibid.:114). Therefore, ‘outstanding universal value’ and ‘authenticity’, then, imply highly technocratic, ostensibly state-centric approaches to recognizing and validating what is—or often more importantly, what is not—‘valuable’ heritage.

However, with the gradually increasing influence of non-Western actors in the international arena, this decidedly Euro-centric view of ‘cultural heritage’ as necessarily ‘material’ came to be challenged (Larsen & Marstein 1994; Smith 2006; Akagawa 2016) and the already controversial notions of ‘outstanding universal value’ (Smith 1988; Byrne 1991; Blake 2000) and an objective and measurable ‘authenticity’ of ‘cultural heritage’ based in pseudo-evolutionary rhetoric of ‘originality’ (Lowenthal 1995; Haltorf & Schadla-Hall 1999; Labadi 2013) were critically reassessed. Recognizing both the concept of ‘cultural heritage’ and methods for its management as “primarily Euro-centric in its origin, premise, and praxis” (Silva & Chapagain 2013:i), global institutions sought to readjust existing international mechanisms to better recognize and ‘safeguard’ alternative forms of ‘heritage’.

It was in part through the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (henceforth referred to as ‘the Convention’) that international actors attempted to pluralize ‘cultural heritage’ models and provide a legal mechanism for the protection and cultivation of 'heritage practices'. Indeed, the title of the Convention itself illustrates the extent of this sea change in mentality. For example, as early as 1989 the value of 'folklore' and its need for 'safeguarding' had already been recognized through the UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore; yet despite this clear precedent, the terminological choice of 'intangible cultural heritage' over 'folklore' was deliberate, illustrating a developing sensitivity to historical 'folklorisation' of 'culture' and the resulting ossification, exoticization, romanticization, and indeed its use for nation-building purposes (Bendix 1997; Labadi 2013:132). Likewise, the preference for 'intangible' over 'immaterial' demonstrates the authors' attempts to pre-empt dichotomizations between the 'material' (objective) and 'immaterial' (subjective), rather recognizing that all 'heritage'—physical or not—must first be ascribed social 'meaning' to be considered 'valuable' and is therefore primarily 'intangible' (Deacon et al. 2003:10-11).

Similarly, recognizing the problematic ethnocentrism of the 1972 WHC's universalistic rhetoric, drafters of the Convention instead advocated sensitivity to cultural relativity. By consciously recognizing the dynamism of 'heritage' as a co-constituting relationship between perceiver ('community') and perceived ('heritage') in constructing 'value', the primary standard of 'outstanding universal value' was withdrawn, merely requiring heritage listings to be 'representative' of a specific culture, and where the 'authenticity' requirement was eliminated altogether (Labadi 2013:132; Cameron 2016:323-324). In fact, arguing that all heritage should be considered equally valuable, the very notion of an international 'listing' system similar to the WHC was reportedly particularly contentious, claiming it tended to hierarchize 'heritage' while criticizing it as "a tool that itemizes, folklorizes, touristifies, and ultimately globalizes culture" (Bortolotto 2012:267); nevertheless, an ICH list was eventually incorporated into the final draft. Furthermore, by identifying 'authenticity' and 'value' to be dependent upon the particularity of social context, in a significant departure from the WHC, the Convention was ultimately conceived as a mechanism to decentre the primary role of 'experts' and states in determining and safeguarding ICH, instead prioritizing localized 'community' stakeholders by requiring signatories to "ensure the widest possible participation of communities" (UNESCO 2003: art.15; cf. Blake 2009).

Although from an anthropological perspective, any such institutionalization and essentialization of 'heritage' is clearly problematic (e.g. Hottin & Grentet 2017:63), it is evident that the Convention was perceived as a radical shift away from the universalizing, standardizing, and objectifying logic of the WHC. However, while China has been one of the most proactive state actors in world heritage regimes, as this chapter intends to show, Chinese mechanisms for ‘intangible cultural heritage management’ have creatively rearticulated the centrality of state over ‘community’ and, rather than destabilizing the universalizing discourse of the WHC, so as to meet set political-economic goals, have actively reinforced it.

b. Chinese Heritage Management with Western Characteristics

China’s embrace of ‘cultural heritage’ regimes illustrates post-Reform moves toward ‘international integration’ (*guoji jiegui*) and ‘modernization’ through involvement in international organizations and the management of its own past. At the same time, China’s participation has also been widely seen as a tool to further national interests. For China, through the ‘objective’ recognition of the ‘outstanding universal value’ of ‘Chinese culture’, UNESCO World Heritage has not only provided a convenient means to legitimate internationally a highly politicized national narrative of historical continuity, both national and nationality unity (*guojia tonyi* and *minzu tuanjia*), and the myth of an ahistorical *zhonghua minzu* within the narrowly defined parameters of Chinese political discourse (Chapters 2, 3 and 5; cf. Duara 1995), but has also given quantifiable evidence of China’s cultural greatness on par with or even surpassing ‘the West’ (Yan 2016:230). That is to say, China’s participation in both the WHC and the 2003 Convention is viewed as a means of creating what the Director of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, Liu Yuzhu (2017) recently called a “World Heritage Great Power” (*wenhua yichan qiangguo*), where China is not so much a container of ‘world heritage’ but a producer of ‘world-*class* heritage’ (cf. Nyri 2006:52).

However, the conceptual refocusing of ‘cultural heritage’ away from the state and objectifying and universalizing narratives outlined in the 2003 Convention would seem to challenge the Chinese government’s strict control over public discourses of nation, nationality, and history. Yet rather than avoid the Convention, China has become one of its most active participants, amassing nearly as many UNESCO ICH inscriptions as the next two countries combined (40, compared to Japan’s 21 and Korea’s 20) composing nearly one-in-ten of all current ICH inscriptions as of 2018. At the same time, while the Chinese government has actively engaged an institution that self-consciously attempts to destabilize the role of ‘experts’ and the state in favour of empowering an idealized (yet poorly defined) ‘community’ in ‘safeguarding’ ICH, and though both the professional and political jargon of culture-politics in China has, in turn, changed substantially, as this section endeavours to demonstrate, the mechanisms, methods, and ideological foundations in which the Chinese government perceives and interacts with ‘culture’ as ‘cultural heritage’ have not.

Indeed, articulation of concepts outlined in the Convention into Chinese law are consequential for understanding how items now discursively represented as ICH are 'used' in China, highlighting the strategic mobilization of ideological concepts so as to creatively read previous cultural policies into Convention principles thereby integrating them into an existing national ideology. In fact, the genealogical development of China's ICH regime self-consciously traces its roots to early CCP folklore-work by conceptually reinterpreting all previous 'folk' or 'traditional' culture-work as ICH protection, where even today terms such as 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua/wenyi*), 'folklore' (*minjian wenhua/wenyi*), and ICH (*fei wuzhi wenhua yichan*) are often virtually interchangeable. For it was the mass folklore collection, revision, and publication work pre- and post-Reform and Opening discussed in part in Chapter 4 that helped China define itself as a world leader in 'ICH protection' and its subsequent leadership in developing legal mechanisms for the management of 'traditional culture'. For example, influenced in part by the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore noted above, China passed its 1997 Regulations for the Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts, outlining for the first time a clear policy on folk-art protection, and established a programme for official recognition and support of "Masters of Traditional Arts and Crafts." Later, in collaboration with the National People's Congress Committee on Education, Science, Culture, and Health, the Ministry of Culture developed a draft text for an omnibus so-called Law for the Protection of PRC *Minzu* Folk-Traditional Culture. This law, however, would be temporarily shelved.

Nevertheless, in lieu of a definitive law, in 2004 the Ministry of Culture in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance issued an 'Implementation Plan' for the "Programme to Protect *Minzu* Folk-Culture," elaborating and expanding upon previous policies and laws, attempting to develop a more coherent national strategy for 'traditional culture' protection. The Plan states that its 'object of protection' is the 'excellent culture of the *zhonghua minzu*', and defines this through widely recognized political formulae as "the treasured *minzu* folk-tradition culture that contains historical, cultural, and scientific value" that promotes "advanced socialist culture", "enhances [socialism's] appeal", and "embodies the vitality, creativity and cohesion of the *zhonghua minzu*, and is the basis for maintaining national unity and nationality unity" (article 1). However, taking a decidedly 'Clash of Civilizations' worldview (Huntington 1996), the Plan continues by stating that the 'protection programme' is intended to "defend our nation's cultural sovereignty and cultural security" in the face of overwhelming threats of 'competing Western values' on the Chinese 'cultural region' (ibid.). Furthermore, the text not only makes direct reference to UNESCO's 2003 Convention but also connects itself to the above "Draft

Law for the Protection of PRC *Minzu* Folk Traditional Culture” (article 2) which later that year would be renamed the “Law for the Protection of PRC *Intangible Cultural Heritage*”, ostensibly preempting China’s ratification of the Convention and evincing the Chinese government’s acceptance of this new global heritage taxonomy.

However, it is notable—yet rarely recognized—that immediately after China ratified the Convention in 2005, rather than soften its ideological and decidedly belligerent political rhetoric or decentre the position of the ‘state’ in relation to localized ‘communities’ as might be expected of Convention signatories, the General Office of the State Council—the highest authority in national government—issued its ‘Opinion on Strengthening the Protection of China’s Intangible Cultural Heritage’. There, the State Council called for a ‘System for ICH Protection with Chinese Characteristics’ (*zhongguo tese feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu zhidu*) which reinforced not only previous opinions and policies but also the role of the state and state-sanctioned ‘experts’ by forcefully underscoring the ICH-work principle that “government leads [and] society participates” (*zhengfu zhudao, shehui canyu*). Further, seemingly almost in spite of the Convention, the Opinion for the first time explicitly states the need to ‘scientifically’ identify ICH and requires cultural workers to “distinguish the authentic from fake” (*jianbie zhenwei*) thereby simultaneously strengthening rather than destabilizing the perceived objective and universal value of ‘excellent’ (read ‘outstanding’) culture while subordinating the role of communities in ICH work to state interests.

While much of the literature regarding ICH in non-Western contexts describes ‘translation’ or ‘vernacularizaion’ (e.g. De Cesarior 2012; Labadi 2013) of domestic ICH and ICH regimes, this section has attempted to illustrate that though some important government mechanisms for cultural work have certainly incorporated the language of global ICH discourse, the contemporary Chinese ICH regime can hardly be seen as merely a ‘translation’ or ‘vernacularization’ of UNESCO institutions. Instead, Chinese ICH regimes have refunctioned global ICH discourse into preexisting mechanisms for cultural management and production, presenting the practice of an integrated global heritage management in form, but with distinctively Chinese content—often seriously conflicting with and even contradicting rather than supporting the Convention’s intent. Indeed, rather than be considered ‘ICH management with Chinese Characteristics’, to paraphrase (and perhaps mischaracterize) Jeff Adams (2013:277), it may be more accurately described as ‘Chinese ICH management with *Western* Characteristics’. For it has been through the legitimizing language of international institutions that China has naturalized the politics of ‘culture’ as ‘heritage’, redefining its ‘value’, mechanisms for its ‘preservation’, and indeed the concept of ‘heritage’ itself while redeploying ‘cultural heritage’ as a specific set of “practices and performances” (Smith 2006:11) that reinforce and reify dominant political ideologies through the strictly controlled celebration and ‘use’ of cultural difference.

As this chapter attempts to illustrate, regional and local governments have actively participated in this newly reconceptualized cultural management regime, and in doing so connect national ideology and goals to regional and local interests. Through the case of Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County’s so-called ‘Jangar Culture Development Programme’, the following sections attempt to elaborate the complicated re-articulation of local interests through these developing discourses, where ‘culture’ comes to be redefined as a ‘resource’ and the ‘immaterial’ materializes is sometimes surprising ways.

II. Jangar—From ‘Cultural Heritage’ to ‘Cultural Resource’

“The most important question is, ‘Who was Jangar?’” Guamjav, a retired cadre and amateur historian said matter-of-factly as he ushered me into his study. For the next hour, the Hoboksar native attempted to convince me that Jangar was actually the story of an ancient Xiongnu Emperor, Modun Chanyu (239BCE-174BCE), and by logical extension that he had ‘proven’ the ‘Jangar epic’ to be couched in more than two thousand years of unbroken ‘Torghut’ transmission and its conception and development located in present-day Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County. Though the elderly man’s claims are disputed in Chinese academic circles, that Jangar is a product of a specific historical trajectory of a defined group (often described as an ‘encyclopaedia of Mongolian culture’ including the evolution of ‘Mongol values’, personalities, economy, migration patterns, etc.) and territorially bounded (conceived, developed, and transmitted within present-day Xinjiang and the PRC) maintains his research within a recognized genre of Chinese academic work. However, what is of more interest to me is Guamjav’s experience as the longest-serving County Magistrate of Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County since Reform and Opening, serving eight years as Magistrate throughout the 1990s and was an influential local communist for more than a decade prior.

Recognizing the sensitivity of cultural work in the current political climate, I only gradually refocused the conversation from his present-day historical writings to his past political work. Yet what seemed most surprising to me was that although Jangar is discussed as a central aspect of Hoboksar Torghut ‘culture’ and life, while describing his contribution to the collection, publication, and promotion of ‘folkways’ (*fengsu xiguan*), Jangar was only given passing reference. In fact, other than claiming to provide shelter and funding to outside academics engaged in collection work and to have accompanied Jangarqi to Beijing in 1989, Old Guamjav had very little to say about Jangar related work. And while collection of Jangar was "supported by the highest echelons of leadership" (*jida lingdao dou zhongshi*), his administration's contributions to 'folkways' research and preservation efforts were confined to the then more widely recognized 'representative' Mongol cultural artefacts such as Long-Tune songs, felicitations, folkstories, etc., and also the collection of material objects that he described as "things that Mongols used" for museum display, illustrating the primarily academic focus of 'protecting traditional culture' at this time. Nevertheless, under the new national priority of displaying 'excellent' nationality traditional culture, it was during this time that the Hoboksar Mao Thought Propaganda Troupe was renamed the 'Hoboksar Ulan Muqir Art Troupe' after the Inner Mongolian troupes of the same name, illustrating the county's emphasis on cultivating its Mongol *minzu* distinctiveness.[43] And though the troupe's purpose remained ideological and policy education through policy formulations, these were to be presented through colourful performances that highlighted representative Mongol nationality cultural characteristics.

Importantly, while the above suggests that 'traditional culture' was indeed a priority in the county during the 1990s, despite contemporary claims to the contrary, Jangar seems to not have been locally recognized as the centrally important artefact that it has become. For example, during a conversation with a retired troupe member, when I asked about Jangar-related performances in the 1990s, the member stated matter-of-factly that he could not recall any, claiming that "Jangar was not yet a priority [for Hoboksar]." In fact, it would not be until the mid-2000s that Jangar would once again be given importance by the county government and widely popularized due to its recognition as 'National-Level Immaterial Cultural Heritage' (*guojia ji fei-wuzhi wenhua yichan*) in 2006. Nevertheless, it was precisely during this time that the language of 'cultural heritage' (*wenhua yichan*) began to infiltrate Chinese political vocabulary, specifically through China's active participation in the UNESCO's World Heritage Convention and related cultural regimes.

In actuality, the Hoboksar government's initial relationship with Jangar was a somewhat schizophrenic, on-again-off-again one. According to one cadre directly involved with the early development of 'Jangar culture', in 2000 there had been some interest in highlighting Hoboksar's unique Mongol culture by emphasizing Jangar cultural artefacts, and even established a 'Leading Small Group' to conduct a comprehensive survey of Hoboksar's 'Jangar related culture'. Though an office was set up with two full-time staff, almost as soon as the project had begun, top county leadership was replaced, and a new Magistrate and Party Secretary were installed—both of whom expressed little interest in either 'Jangar' or Mongol folklore generally. And so, the project was terminated. Yet after only three years, the government was once again replaced. Their successors—particularly the Magistrate, Mr. Wuyinshan—would not only emphasize local folklore, but through China's newfound interest in 'intangible heritage' would strategically utilize significant political resources to obtain regional, national, and even international recognition for Jangar, and began a systematic plan to locate Hoboksar at its centre.

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[43] Interestingly, county archival materials have virtually eliminated the title 'Mao Thought Propaganda Troupe' in its description of historical performance culture-work, instead anachronistically referring to all such troupes as 'Ulan Muqir Art Troupe'.

a. Building a 'Jangar Brand'

Brand-making is a process of story-making and narrative control, and since the early 2000s the branding of places in China has become a nationwide and highly politicized process connected both to regional development (Oakes 2012; Wen & Sui 2014) but also—and in some cases perhaps more importantly—to prestige (Harrell 2013:292). Indeed, as discussed in previous chapters Chinese national and regional leaders promote vague concepts in the form of set-phrases or political formulations to guide policy implementation to be executed at lower levels, the most significant of which are intended to define a globalizing governing ethos. Similarly, local government leaders also promote ambitious political projects to which underlings are expected to discursively connect their work, and where the success or failure of such projects can define political careers.[44] In regions with limited economic resources, these projects often highlight the unique characteristics and value of a locality so as to attract outside attention and investment. For Wuyinshan, the crucial 'project' of his term would be in "constructing a Jangar Brand" (*dazao jiangge'er pinpai*), presenting Hoboksar as "Jangar's Hometown" (*jiangge'er de guxiang*) and an inseparable piece of its history.

b. Constructing Jangar's Hometown

Though there is no official documentation of the process by which Wuyinshan would select Jangar as Hoboksar's representative 'culture', one vice-bureau-level cadre involved in early county 'Jangar development' explained that it was on an official visit to Urumqi that the newly instated Magistrate would find inspiration. There, the Hoboksar native was said to have observed a performance by Jangarqi of the neighbouring Chahar dominated Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture. He was enthralled by the exciting performance and convincing mix of song, movement, and instrumental accompaniment, yet insisted that historically Jangar was Torghut culture, not Chahar, and that Hoboksar was the original location for the inception and development of Jangar. The cadre recalled that it was upon Wuyinshan's return to Hoboksar that Jangar work would begin.

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[44] Where the national-level discursively defines governing direction, at local levels this direction is rearticulated into local interests through the practical execution of policy and given significant freedom for development in local contexts (known as 'carrying out' [*guanche*] or 'making workable' [*luoshi*]). Local-level leaders announce governing policies that are again expected to in turn be 'studied for comprehension' (*xuexi linghui*) through the filter of regional or national policy and rearticulated into executable plans at lower levels.

Building on much of the work started under the first "Small Group," Wuyinshan would establish a "Jangar Culture Project Leading Small Group" to research and collect Jangar related materials and to create a development strategy for 'Jangar Culture'. Though admittedly "located anywhere there are Torghuts," through surveys and 'selective use of history' (Zhou 2013:253), related individuals would 'prove' Jangar's historical significance and work to territorialize it within the boundaries of contemporary Hoboksar County. Evidence included a recorded section of Jangar sung by a local performer that situates Jangar's Khanate, Bumba, "West of the Altai Mountains," which not coincidentally, it was argued, is the location of present-day Hoboksar. Furthermore, as briefly discussed in Chapter 2 a local legend regarding a small *ovoo* in the mountains locally known as 'Jangar Bai' claims that the structure was dedicated to a famous Jangarqi prior to the mass migration of Oirats to the Volga region in the 17th century (Batunasheng 1984:43), effectively 'disproving' some previous claims that Jangar only arrived in Hoboksar after their 'return' a century later. Scouring through historical materials and documents, local historians and cultural workers found whatever evidence of Hoboksar's longstanding, unbroken line of Jangar transmission while actively working to 'disprove' any accounts to the contrary. In fact, in an unpublished introduction to Jangar's history provided to me by the county Cultural Bureau and compiled and written by the official county historian, it was claimed that this evidence "proves the viewpoint that Hoboksar is the authentic hometown of Jangar" (cf. Ye'erda 2008:42-54).[45]

It is important to note, however, that within the complex Chinese state administrative system, 'government' leaders—be it the Premier, a governor, a mayor or magistrate, or even director of a government bureau—are always subordinated to the *de facto* highest political official, the Party Secretary. In contemporary Chinese politics, the Party is responsible for policy formulation, and the government for its execution. Therefore, the power of government leaders to directly influence policy construction is structurally limited. However, in the case of Magistrate Wuyinshan, almost as soon as Jangar work had begun, it was said that Wuyinshan was able to strategically manoeuvre himself into the very rare dual-role of *both* County Magistrate *and*

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[45] The 'fact' that Hoboksar is the 'birthplace' of The Heroic Epic of Jangar is now widely accepted—a perspective even officially endorsed by the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the PRC. Accessed January 27, 2019 at http://www.seac.gov.cn/seac/ztzl/201207/1067933.shtml.

‘acting Party Secretary’, providing him with even more influence to meet his political goals by not only formulating the county’s policy direction but also overseeing its execution. As the official county historian recalled, “when [Wuyinshan] became Magistrate and Secretary, that’s when they started to *really* pay attention [to Jangar].”

Connecting his Jangar strategy to the national Implementation Plan, and later to the ‘Opinion’ on ICH etc. described above, in 2005 Wuyinshan would align himself with the retired XUAR Chairman Mengke (discussed in chapter 4, now President of the Jangar Research Association) in collaboration with Xinjiang’s other two Mongolian Autonomous Prefectures to compile an application to add Jangar to the newly conceived First List of National-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage. For in China, it is not possible for an individual, group, or even a local government to apply for ICH recognition—only a provincial-level Department of Culture (*wenhua ting*) has nomination power. For Wuyinshan’s administration, this was a critical step in elevating his political programme—and in doing so, his own political capital. By strategically framing his political interests within those of authoritative political discourses and national and regional interests as a matter of ICH development and promotion, Wuyinshan’s program to construct a Jangar brand was perceived as a unquestionable success.

Luigi Tomba argues that it is precisely this kind of ‘framing’ that constitutes a key aspect of Chinese state-society relations (Tomba 2015:14). By correctly deploying authoritative political discourse, groups and individuals are capable of harnessing state text power to frame interests that at once meet individual goals while simultaneously defining themselves as legitimate subjects within the existing system of power relations (ibid.). Further, such practices are hardly exclusive to Hoboksar’s political elite. Indeed, most local residents were constantly manoeuvring to discursively align their interest with dominant authoritative discourses. For example, during my stay, despite the state’s legal obligation to provide Mongolian-language education to local Mongol students, due to pressures from regional-level policies, Mongolian language education was gradually being squeezed out of the local curriculum. Though most local Mongol residents with whom I spoke applauded and actively supported the revival of Jangar education in schools as being ‘patriotic’, contributing to nationality unity, etc., virtually all Mongol parents and educators simultaneously also openly claimed that Jangar is critical because it ensures that Mongolian stays in the schools despite language policies perceived as detrimental. Yet it is important to note that, despite its obviously strategic nature, local residents understood such manoeuvring to be pragmatic responses to obstacles rather than modes of ‘resistance’. As Tomba notes, these modes of ‘framing’ interests are active measures in which citizens work to "define themselves as legitimate subjects within the existing system of power relations rather than producing alternative or revolutionary worldviews." (2015:14)

c. Jangar as Hoboksar's 'National-Level ICH'

The initial application process for recognition as National-Level ICH was relatively straightforward, yet the procedure itself highlights some conceptual implications of ICH with 'Chinese Characteristics'. For instance, within the dossier contained a clear narrative of Jangar's unilinear historical evolution as evidence to support the claim that 'her'[46] origin is within anachronistically defined boundaries of contemporary China, and further territorialized it within set contemporary administrative zones (Hoboksar, Bayingolin, Bortala etc. of Xinjiang, PRC). Further, the dossier attempts to discursively create a pseudo-professional category of listed Jangarqi as always-already existing 'transmitters' with straightforward 'genealogies' (*puxi*) of linear transmission, both carrying and passing down a relatively 'solidified' (*guding*) version of the 'Jangar Epic' as 'oral literature'. Finally, the dossier defines this artefact of heritage's indisputable positive 'value', outlining its literary, historical, cultural, and 'use' value, declaring that "[Jangar] enriches the cultural life of the masses, improves the cultural quality of the masses and nationality self-esteem, strengthens a sense of national pride and spirit of self-improvement, promotes the construction of a spiritual civilization (*jingshen wenming*), and is important in facilitating the construction of a socialist harmonious society." Indeed, this proclamation of Jangar's 'value' not only links Jangar's historical development to a variety of contemporary political set phrases but also to the construction of a 'harmonious society'—the flagship ideological formulation of the then-President Hu Jintao. In fact, the dossier's section intended to prove the 'value' of Jangar is even longer than its 'protection plan'—three pages, versus the 'protection' section's two. Nevertheless, through this collaborative effort, and with the support of a nationally recognized political personality, Jangar's application passed from local to provincial government, and from provincial to national government, and in 2006 was officially incorporated into the 'First List of National-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage'.

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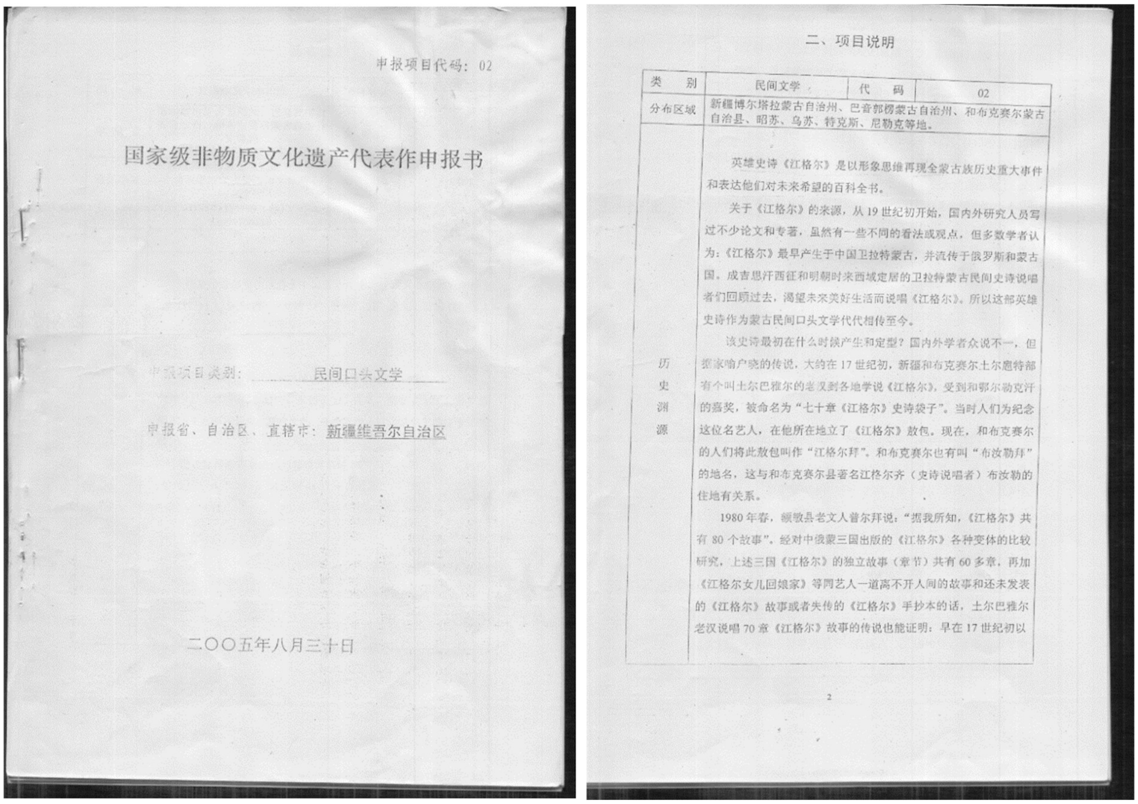
[46] The dossier does indeed feminize an objectified Jangar by referring to 'it' with the feminine "她" character, rather than the neuter "它".



申报项目代码：02

国家级非物质文化遗产代表作申报书

申报项目类别：民间口头文学

申报省、自治区、直辖市：新疆维吾尔自治区

二〇〇五年八月三十日

二、项目说明

类别	民间文学	代码	02
分布区域	新疆博尔塔拉蒙古自治州、巴音郭楞蒙古自治州、和布克赛尔蒙古自治县、昭苏、乌苏、特克斯、尼勒克等地。		
历史渊源	英雄史诗《江格尔》是以形象思维再现全蒙古族历史重大事件和表达他们对未来希望的百科全书。 关于《江格尔》的来源，从19世纪初开始，国内外研究人员写过不少论文和专著，虽然有一些不同的看法或观点，但多数学者认为：《江格尔》最早产生于中国卫拉特蒙古，并流传于俄罗斯和蒙古国。成吉思汗西征和明朝时来西域定居的卫拉特蒙古民间史诗说唱者们回顾过去，渴望未来美好生活而说唱《江格尔》。所以这部英雄史诗作为蒙古民间口头文学代代相传至今。 该史诗最初在什么时候产生和定型？国内外学者众说不一，但据家喻户晓的传说，大约在17世纪初，新疆和布克赛尔土尔扈特部有个叫土尔巴雅尔的老汉到各地学说《江格尔》，受到和鄂尔勒克汗的嘉奖，被命名为“七十章《江格尔》史诗袋子”。当时人们为纪念这位名艺人，在他所在地立了《江格尔》敖包。现在，和布克赛尔的人们将此敖包叫作“江格尔拜”。和布克赛尔也有叫“布汝勒拜”的地名，这与和布克赛尔县著名江格尔齐（史诗说唱者）布汝勒的住地有关系。 1980年春，额敏县老文人普尔拜说：“据我所知，《江格尔》共有80个故事”。经对中俄蒙三国出版的《江格尔》各种变体的比较研究，上述三国《江格尔》的独立故事（章节）共有60多章，再加《江格尔女儿回娘家》等同艺人一道离不开人间的故事和还未发表的《江格尔》故事或者失传的《江格尔》手抄本的话，土尔巴雅尔老汉说唱70章《江格尔》故事的传说也能证明：早在17世纪初以		

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Figure 11: Cover and first page historical introduction from the original application of the ‘Heroic Epic Jangar’ to the National-level ICH list.

Under the auspices of both preserving and transmitting a ‘healthy’ and ‘positive’ artefact of Chinese ICH, building on this recent national recognition Wuyinshan planned a flurry of activities to capitalize on the newfound fame of this previously obscure ‘epic’ from a little-known Mongol region, including: a national media blitz, receiving attention not only from the largest regional news organizations, but also Chinese Central Television and both national and international media broadcast groups; directed the Culture Bureau to develop a Jangar inspired theatre production to go on-tour, and hosted on Xinjiang’s prestigious Urumqi People’s Theatre; sponsored the publication of seven Jangar related books that emphasized Hoboksar, including both academic manuscripts and popular titles; hosted the first International Jangar Conference, inviting folklorists and Mongolists from around the world to discuss academic questions surrounding the ‘Jangar Epic’—but also Jangar ‘branding’; sponsored numerous Jangar related academic research programmes with regional universities; and in cooperation with Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, established a Jangar ‘field-base’ (*tianye jidi*) and ‘training-base’ (*peixun jidi*). In this way, Hoboksar county officially began a campaign to brand itself ‘Jangar’s Hometown’ (*jiangge’er [de] guxiang*) (ZYRMZF 2007), even going so far as to register a trademarked ‘Jangar logo’.

Clearly represented in official documentation, through the vocabulary of ICH protection and local development these and other Jangar related activities represent an aggressive political push to claim 'Jangar Culture' as a privileged 'cultural product' of Hoboksar in what is often referred to locally as "snatching culture" (*qiang wenhua*)—a possessive, semi-exclusionary branding phenomenon that emphasizes a specific product, be it cultural, industrial, agricultural, etc.[47] to be associated with a single place and continues to this day, especially among smaller underdeveloped minority areas. And in what amounts to a mostly symbolic act, as discussed in Chapter 1, the central annual festival of Hoboksar County, *naadam*—historically a summer festival held in most Mongol dominated regions in Inner Asia that often features 'traditional' sport and 'folk' activities—was renamed the "Jangar Culture and Tourism Festival and *Naadam* Festival" (*jiangge'er wenhua lvyou jie ji nadamu dahui*) highlighting the priority of Jangar over all other forms of regional cultural development.

Overall, the strategic management of elevating this Oirat narrative performance and subsequent 'snatching' of the recently recognized National-Level Heritage so as to re-brand Hoboksar County was perceived a resounding success, placing the construction of a 'Famous Culture County' (*wenhua mingxian*) through 'Jangar Cultural Development' at the centre of Hoboksar development policy (Lei 2012:51). Yet before he could see his comprehensive plan to reconstruct Hoboksar into a Jangar themed tourist destination, in 2007, Wuyinshan would be promoted to vice-governor of Xinjiang's largest prefecture—the oil-rich and highly influential Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture. In his stead, his vision would define the future development direction of Hoboksar for which all subsequent administrations would follow.

d. The Economy is the Stage, Culture Performs the Opera

"Where is it…?" Mr. Lu asked rhetorically as he casually lifted random folders and sifted through piles of paper. Having been transferred from '*nei di*' (lit. 'inner lands', an ambiguous term often used by local Xinjiang people to describe any Chinese region east of Xinjiang) to Hoboksar less than a year prior, Mr. Lu had only been in the role of County Tourism Bureau Director for a short time but was now responsible for some of the county's most ambitious development plans to date.

"Ah, here it is." As Mr. Lu walked back over to his desk with a large, two-inch-thick tourism development plan, he stated matter-of-factly, "The government says, 'culture is the spirit or tourism,' (*wenhua shi lvyou de linghun*) and this is quite right." He continued, "Hoboksar is a

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[47] *Qiang* is often translated 'to steal', however the word implies a certain level of conscious malicious intent and physical violence that 'stealing' does not necessarily convey. Therefore, I have chosen to translate the term as 'to snatch'.

‘Famous Culture County’, so tourism development must be at the centre of county development.” He further explained that, as per the government’s motto, ‘the economy is the stage [and] culture performs the opera’ (*jingji da tai, wenhua chang xi*), before ‘culture’ can contribute to economic development, ‘economics’ must first invest in culture. Mr. Lu claimed that to date, the county has invested “a million here, a hundred thousand there” but with little effect, explaining that for a town with a population of little more than 30,000 in a secluded region located on the furthest edge of the country that has been designated ‘closed to outsiders’, attracting tourists is particularly difficult and requires more investment.

He set the book down in front of me, coolly encouraging me to examine the pages upon pages of high-gloss before-and-after photos and computer representations of the collaborating planning companies’ vision for Hoboksar’s future. Turing the pages, I stopped at a dual-page frame depicting recreational vehicles parked in the centre of a Jangar themed park, with blonde-haired, blue-eyed tourists enjoying picnic lunches on blankets as an ecstatic child plays atop a Mongol ‘siege engine’. Reaching over me, the director turned the page revealing maps outlining construction plans for two massive cultural theme parks encompassing what appeared to be at least one-quarter of Hoboksar town.

“We just signed the contract.” He told me, eyeing the planning book from over my shoulder. “Construction will begin soon.” After investigating his claims, I would later discover that the contract to which Mr. Lu was referring is between the county and several coastal and Inner Mongolian tourism and construction companies, amounting to an RMB4.7 billion investment (USD800 million/GBP600 million) (TCDQZFW 2016), roughly twice the total county GDP in 2016 (RMB2.7 billion, TCDQZFW 2017).

Though certainly an extreme example, this recognition of ‘culture-as-resource’ (Yudice 2003:9-10) where economic investment can produce returns is not unique to China, or at all uncommon. Indeed, the World Bank and even UNESCO itself have encouraged the utilization of ‘culture’ in economic development (World Bank 2001; Deacon et al. 2004:6). As Rosemary Coombe argues:

> “[W]e are witnessing a new dominance of market ideologies in heritage management and in its means of ‘valuation’ with an increasing emphasis on *investment* in cultural resources and human capital so as to yield economic returns, adding value to them so as to encourage tourism, foster foreign direct investment, encourage product differentiation, and promote new commodifications of cultural ‘resources’.” (2012:378, emphasis in original)

Though perceptions regarding the practice of ICH commodification vary from country to country, official Chinese government discourses tend to emphasize investments in culture as processing ‘immaterial culture’ into a material resource. As Chinese tourism expert Tang Debiao explains, “*Minzu* cultural resource is a process of the materialization of *minzu* culture… [o]nly when the commodity economy enters the market development stage and the condition of *minzu* culture is sufficient in-and-of-itself can *minzu* culture be transformed into *minzu* cultural resources.” (Tang 2008:84) Therefore, the act of materializing utilizable resources out of ‘immaterial culture’ is at once aimed at rendering ICH progressively more manageable, but also merchandisable, highlighting an apparent dualistic, even dialectical relationship between the ‘immaterial’ and ‘material’ of ICH in China. One such ‘ICH item’ (*feiyi xiangmu*) that the county enthusiastically promoted during my stay was the so-called ‘skill of Mongol nationality milk wine brewing’ which is illustrative of this situation.

A process of producing a kind of distilled koumiss known as *arkhi* (Ch. *naijiu*)—but for some Oirats/Kalmyks also *chigan* (Atwood 2004:321)—milk wine brewing was listed as provincial-level ICH in 2012 and locally officially designated an important element of ‘Jangar Culture’ and promoted through county sponsored workshops, exhibitions, and milk wine brewing competitions. And though most residents with whom I spoke publicly approved of the county’s preservation and promotion efforts, at least some practitioners feared that the county’s methods and goals emphasized too strongly milk wine as ‘product’ rather than its crucial position in local Torghut social reproduction.

Indeed, this clear (Mo. *har*, lit. ‘black’) milk-based alcohol has historically played an essential role in much of Mongol ritual life, including life-cycle ceremonies, religious rites, guest-host relations etc. (cf. Serruys 1974). Furthermore, milk wine was locally described as the ‘purest’ of alcohols (*chunjie zhi wu*), even to the extent that many claimed it to contain no alcohol whatever but was in fact something entirely different—though what this meant was never clearly articulated. Although some residents claimed that the social value of milk wine was simply due to its ‘traditional’ place in social life, others, especially the (mostly female) brewers themselves, claimed that it was due to milk wine production’s role in various aspects of domestic reproduction. That is to say, milk wine brewing not only produced milk wine, but yoghurts and creams, essential calorie-rich butters and hard cheeses consumed during Hoboksar’s harsh winters, medicinal ‘yellow water’ used to treat high blood pressure and heart conditions, and much more. But more importantly, brewing was also intimately connected to various other practices and ritual behavior including mastery of the knife for properly dividing meat for feasting, until traditional knives were forbidden. Yet, some brewers claimed that ‘milk wine brewing’ as ICH either deemphasized these ancillary products and practices or ignored them entirely. As one woman explained, complaining that milk wine is now marketed and sold in convenience stores rather than produced through collective household labour, “Now [milk wine] is just another drink, but with Mongol flavor.”

In Hoboksar, there were two main methods of milk wine production. The first uses a large wooden or metal barrel to cover the heated koumiss, whereby cool water is poured into a bowl covering the barrel to assist in distillation. This is the most common method in the Mongol cultural region, yet locally was said to have only recently arrive in Hoboksar from Inner Mongolia.

The second method, said to be more ‘traditional’ and unique to Torghut Mongols, involved heating the koumiss directly over the hearth in a large metal bowl covered by wooden lid with two small holes. An approximately 1.5m long wooden tube wrapped in white fabric, or less commonly white rope, was then used to connect the first opening to a small kettle half-submerged in cold water, situated to the right of the hearth. As the koumiss was heated, the wooden lid and tube were covered with fresh cow dung to create an airtight seal. Over the second opening, a teardrop shaped figure topped with a small thimble-sized notch called a *joombag* was fashioned out of fresh cow dung and ash and set over the second opening, completing the seal. The alcoholic vapor then traveled through the tube into the cooled kettle, becoming milk wine. In fact, this second process is nearly identical to that described by the 18th century scientist and adventurer Peter Pallas in his *Collection of Historical Reports on the Mongolian People*, where he claimed this method unique to Oirats (*Kalmüchen*) (Pallas 1776:132-138).

Interestingly, though the County actively supported both methods in its preservation efforts, neither the provincial-level nor the national-level applications for milk wine brewing included the second technique—even as it was recognized as unique to the region. Furthermore, though the County had fairly comprehensively documented both above brewing methods, the ICH applications, promotional materials, and public education activities almost entirely ignored the highly socialized and ritualized aspects of milk wine production, reducing it to the ‘merely technical’ recipe for brewing (Ingold 2000:289). Indeed, Tim Ingold argues that in contemporary society “technical relations have become progressively disembedded from social relations” (ibid.:321-322), and knowledge transmission simply the mechanical reproduction of recognized preexisting designs and procedures (ibid.:386). Yet for some local Torghut brewers, proper brewing technique was synonymous with properly socializing the procedure through ritual and etiquette. This was because to properly brew milk wine, Torghut households were expected to respect numerous taboos and rituals.

Indeed, activities associated with the brewing process were highly regimented through numerous regulations and prohibitions; yet many most had little to do with the technical aspects of brewing itself. For example, while brewing all vessels and other containers were expected to be placed upright, a practice associated with respecting the sky.[48] Another requirement was for the *ger* door to remain closed as some claimed milk wine to be such a good thing that it attracts unfriendly spirits into the home. Other prescriptions and proscriptions included manner of feeding the hearth, how to eat certain things, songs that could be sung etc. But likely the most notable to me was the great respect and ritual importance given to the *joombag* throughout the brewing process. For prior to sharing freshly brewed milk wine, a final ritual was executed in which felicitations and a small alcohol sacrifices were presented to the hearth fire, the *joombag*, and finally to the sky.

The felicitations to fire and sky are hardly surprising. After all, Mongol Tengrism and associated 'cult of fire' have been widely studied and constitute central aspects of Mongol cosmology (e.g. Heissig 1980; Atwood 1996). Yet, even as the *joombag* had very little to do with the brewing process, it was nevertheless given symbolic status nearly equal to that of the hearth fire and sky.

According Peter Pallas, who called them '*araten'* or '*chapchal'*, 18th century Oirats also vested these figurines with great social significance, and claimed that Oirat women fashioned them with care as their quality was said to influence proportionately the quality of the household's milk producing animals (1776:134-135). This was not a claim made by Hoboksar brewers, but the brewers with whom I spoke could nevertheless not explain the significance of the *joombag* other than that it was a *joombag*. As one elderly brewer told me, a *joombag* is important because "without the *joombag* there is no milk wine."

Nevertheless, these socially significant aspects of brewing described above were ignored in the county's ICH applications and preservation efforts. That is to say, though the county claimed to be preserving Torghut milk wine brewing 'skill' as 'cultural heritage', the result of preservation policies was an overemphasis on milk wine as a 'material' product that overlooked the social context and network of socially relevant practices and knowledge associated with the 'culture' of milk wine brewing. Therefore, anything not perceived by county experts as directly related to manufacturing the final product was ignored. And, though certainly connected to political and economic interests, this material/immaterial dichotomization may also be in part related to issues of translation.

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[48] This particular upside-down vessel taboo was widely recognized in Hoboksar in many social circumstances but given additional emphasis when brewing.

Indeed, the official Chinese translation of ‘intangible cultural heritage’ is in fact ‘*immaterial* (*fei wuzhi*) cultural heritage’, where the closest approximation of ‘intangible’ in Chinese is roughly translated ‘not able to be touched’ (*mo bu dao de*), which is simply a descriptive phrase and inappropriate for bureaucratic use. And though from an academic perspective the key theoretical arguments against dichotomizing the ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’ in heritage discourse is entirely comprehensible, what is often overlooked in contemporary Chinese heritage management studies is that for the average bureaucrat tasked with ICH management—a practice that is necessarily filtered through specific ideological discourses and political interests—these complex and highly abstract theoretical concerns become not only politically problematic but almost unintelligible, and therefore are ultimately overlooked. Rather, contemporary Chinese bureaucracy necessitates rendering ICH ‘legible’ (Scott 1998), simplifying both ICH management and ‘heritage’ generally into measurable quantities so as to produce evidence of practical results (see Chapter 6). As is evident in the case of Hoboksar’s ‘cultural development’ programmes, this is often done through the materialization of immaterial culture through investment in large-scale projects and events. And though Mr. Liu’s scheme may represent one such venture, the county has undertaken numerous construction projects—such as constructing a ‘Jangar market’, a ‘Jangar park’, a ‘Jangar theatre’, a government-sanctioned ‘Jangar *ovoo’* etc.—in the name of ‘ICH protection’. Yet, the ‘Jangar Cultural Development’ project that is likely most representative of these intersecting interests is not the Jangar Theme Park described above, but rather what is now considered the crown jewel of Hoboksar’s contemporary ICH development programme—its museum.

e. Materializing Jangar

After passing through security, Oyunchimeg and I stepped onto an enormous granite plaza roughly two and a half football fields wide and another two deep. The breathtaking scene of this massive ‘Jangar Culture and Art Palace’—a series of three circular structures resembling intricate Mongol *gers* a dozen meters high—inlaying an emerald green pasture and mountain landscape gave me pause. “Ms Oyunchimeg!” I yelled as she walked ahead. “Wait a moment! I need to take a photo…” As the director of the office responsible for county museums,

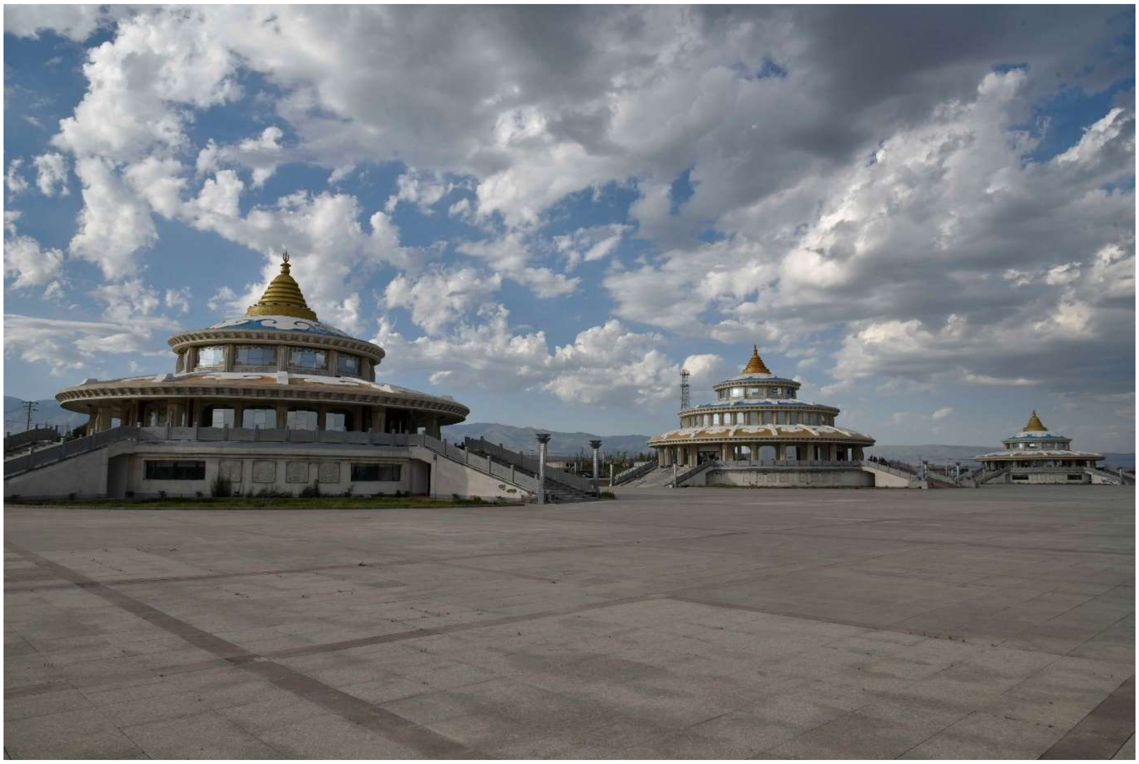

Figure 12: Considered today the most representative location in present day Hoboksar, the Jangar Culture and Art Palace occupies 6048.5m2 of space, consisting of three themed pavilions.

Oyunchimeg had offered to give me a personal tour of this important landmark—and for my benefit as a researcher even waived restrictions on photography and video recording.

The plaza contained numerous bronze and marble statues centred around a large display representing Jangar and his twelve mounted heroes, ostensibly galloping away from the palace toward their next epic adventure. To the left of the heroes was an equally large and intricate statue of a bowl being carried by several dozen men. Oyunchimeg explained, "This represents the bowl welcoming the Hero Hongor. Hongor drank seventy bowls of *airag* (milk wine) so large it needed to be held up by seventy men." Smiling, she waved me toward the museum. Yet I was curious about an unusual chimera-like, half-horse half-dragon creature to the heroes' right flank. Of similar size and stature, the prominence of this sculpture made it appear to have at least some symbolic significance—yet I could not recall any such creature in the story itself.

"Oh, that one." Oyunchimeg paused. "It's not in the epic. It represents nationality unity (*minzu tuanjie*)—the unity of a horse and a dragon, Mongols and Han." She explained that the horse is representative of the Mongol *minzu*, and the Dragon "representants our *zhonghua minzu*," apparently not recognizing the ironic inconsistency of this particular set phrase. We continued into the museum.

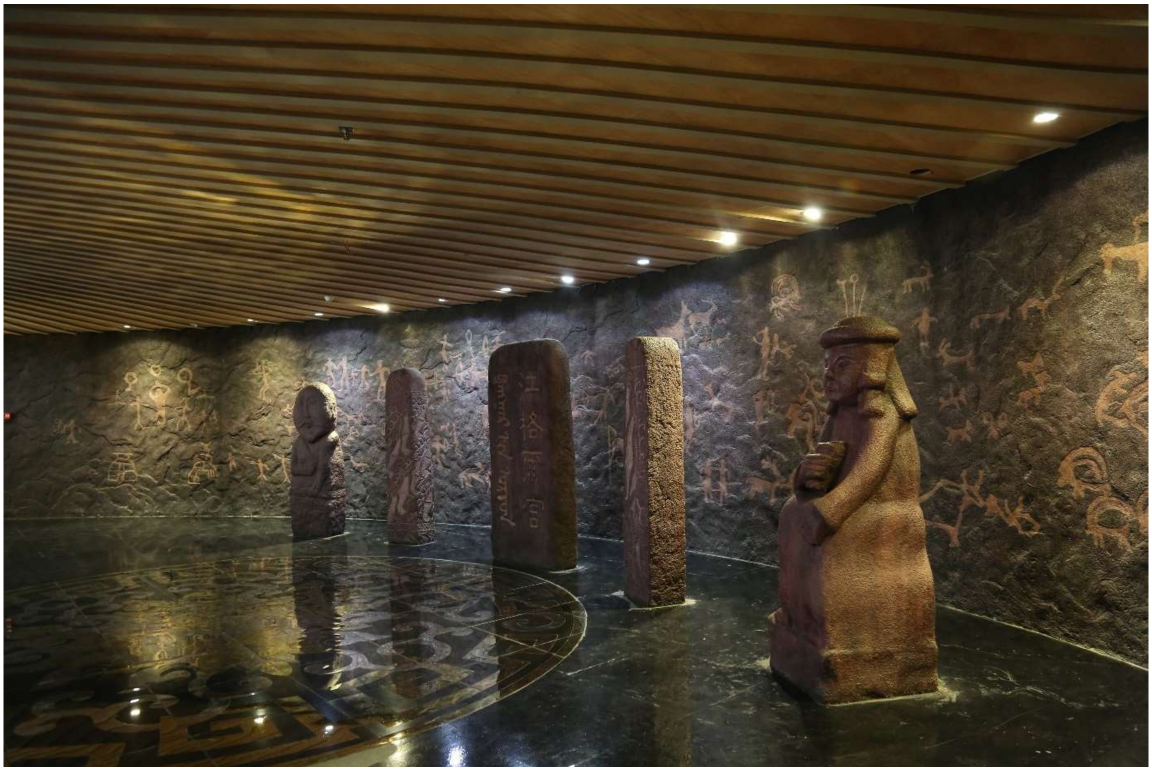

Figure 13: At the ground floor entrance, one is first met with a reference to Marxist historical materialism representing “humanity’s entrance into the era of civilization”.

To begin, at the entrance, one is immediately met by stereotypically primitivizing replicas of cave paintings and ancient ‘stone men’ artefacts discovered in and around Hoboksar, immediately followed by an introduction to the epic—seemingly implying a connection between these prehistoric artefacts and the epic’s development. “This represents humanity’s entrance into the era of civilization (*wenming*),” she explained, guiding me to the first interactive exhibit.

She commanded a young employee to switch-on the display, telling me that this scaled three-dimensional model is of the valley in which Hoboksar is located. Hoboksar, she explained, is a steppe situated within three important mountains forming two ranges with only one passable entrance, making it an ideally fortified place for a warrior khan to build his khanate. Using a projection system mounted in the ceiling, the exhibit first attempted to recreate the great battles between Jangar and the demon armies depicted in the epic and then the formation of his utopian khanate, Bumba—directly over present-day Hoboksar and in High-Definition. “As I explained to you before,” she continued, “Jangar is sung and not able to be touched. Those who understand it know, but a tourist can’t understand.” She points to the displays across from us. “So, in this ICH museum, we present [the story] in videos, artistic paintings, and models.”

Oyunchimeg takes me around to view the miniature wooden models of siege weapons Jangar ‘may have used’, such as catapults and siege towers, then introduces an intricate panoramic painting she claimed describes the sequence of Jangar's rise. "We bring together all of the story into a single [panoramic] painting…and finally to the establishment of the People's Republic of…" perhaps recognizing the Freudian slip she stutters, then continues, "the paradise of Bumba."

The museum not only represents a materialization of the 'Jangar Epic', but also proudly, if not somewhat awkwardly incorporates a number of recognized county-, regional-, and national-level Mongol *minzu* ICH programmes such as Mongol leather sculptures, materials for yoghurt and *airag* production, and stereotypically flowery Mongol costumes and jewellery—even videos regarding *ger* construction and the Mongol 'three manly sports'. Tucked in a corner one could also view a photographic representation of a 'traditional *ovoo* blessing' event, complete with 'life-size *ovoo* model'—but where the 'religious' aspects of the event had been deemphasized, highlighting rather the physical ritual activities such as sprinkling *airag*, circumambulation, felicitations, and hanging of multi-coloured *khadag*. And though I was told that the museum was expected to begin training courses for children and an interested public in some of the above recognized ICH programmes, these courses were not available prior to my leaving Hoboksar. Nevertheless, similar programmes were, in fact, available free of charge (or for a very limited fee) at the Hoboksar 'National-Level Culture Centre' located just across the street.

Yet not to ignore Hoboksar's vast mineral resources, in addition to ICH the second floor of the museum features a geological exhibit, displaying numerous mineral resources currently mined in Hoboksar county. In fact, Hoboksar has billed itself as 'China's Concentrated Resource Region', and by discursively connecting its mineral and cultural resource wealth potential, it now officially describes its 'cultural resources' to be as valuable to regional development as traditional resource extraction (GCDXWW 2011). In fact, Hoboksar officials often discuss 'mining' or 'excavating' (*wajue*) '*minzu* culture' in similar terms to, and often in the same breath as, developing its current extraction industry and investment.[49] Illustratively, museum guides often deploy similar rhetoric when discussing ICH, and especially the 'value' of Jangar to the county.

In this way, the 'Jangar Culture and Art Palace' museum illustrates the perspective that 'culture', political ideology, and economic development are not mutually exclusive—a view that would likely be described as irresponsible—but rather always-already co-constitutive and a necessary mechanism for the promotion of social cohesion.

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[49] For example, when presented with conference materials regarding a Jangar conference held in 2016, on the conference bag contained a map with visual representations of tourist destinations, the Jangar brand logo, and the phrases: "China's Concentrated Resource Region" and "Excavate *Minzu* Culture to Construct Quality Tourism Products" (*wajue minzu wenhua, dazao lvyou jingpin*)

f. “Connecting History and Reality”

Since its completion, the Jangar Culture and Art Palace has become *the* representative architectural landmark for Hoboksar, and where in virtually any visual representation of ‘Jangar’s Hometown’ the museum is present. With an investment of RMB60 million (approx. GBP6 million/USD9 million) and completed in 2014, in total the museum consists of three ‘related’ pavilions. To the west, the ‘primitive man’ pavilion, including prehistoric artefacts and the famed ‘stone-men’ statues discovered around the county; to the east, the ‘Eastern Return’ pavilion, featuring exhibits of the great ‘patriotic’ return of the Torghut Mongols from the Volga region located in present-day Russia to Xinjiang in the late 18th century; and of course, the Jangar pavilion located at the centre. Taken together, these three pavilions construct a Marxist materialist historical narrative of Jangar as a profoundly significant aspect of local Hoboksar Mongol *minzu* history and its eventual and inevitable connection and contribution to the *zhonghua minzu*, and socialism itself.

This materialization of ‘Jangar Culture’ through the museum—but also in its numerous other representative manifestations—closely follows the recent national and international inclination toward commodification of ‘culture’ as exploitable resource (Yudice 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Silberman 2013). However, as this chapter has attempted to illustrate, ‘culture-as-resource’ in China is not limited to development economics. Likewise, much as described in chapters 3 and 4, the practices of processing ‘culture’ into a ‘cultural resource’ are confined within strict discursive boundaries, defining what is ‘objective reality’, and ultimately ‘correct’ displays of culture through the complex politics of inventing an apolitical cultural space.[50]

Through the processing of ‘Jangar ICH’ into a ‘Jangar Brand’, ‘Jangar-as-resource’ behaves as a means to at once attract tourist dollars and investment into the county, but also—and perhaps more importantly—to construct a ‘correct’ narrative surrounding the ‘Chinese ICH’. In this way, the Heroic Epic Jangar performs as the county’s small contribution to a nationwide entertainment-indoctrination cultural industry within a marketplace that does not merely value development of a ‘material’ economy but emphasizes heavily the development of a correct ‘spiritual’ one (Zhao & Timothy 2015; Zuo et al. 2016; cf. Chapter 1).

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[50] E.g. In a co-published article in the influential Party theoretical journal “Seeking Truth” by the then Ministry of Culture’s Director of the Center for ICH Wang Wenzhang (later Deputy Minister of Culture), when describing ‘scientific’ and ‘correct’ identification of ICH states unequivocally that “the identification of intangible cultural heritage projects should be scientific,” and precludes that ICH can be political by stating: “the identification of cultural manifestations are only artistic manifestations” that do not “identify other cultural manifestations.” (Wang & Chen 2008)

To be sure, the construction of the ‘Jangar Culture and Art Palace’ strongly reflects China’s so-called ‘museum-fever’ (Cao 2008), where from the 1990s onward the number of museums in China would grow from mere hundreds to nearly 4,000 by 2014 (Wang & Rowlands 2017:258). Yet despite this, anthropological surveys have only just begun emphasizing China’s utilization of museums for national narrative construction and economic development (e.g. Shepherd 2013; Shepherd & Yu 2013); however, that museum sites are conceptualized as intimately connected to present-day ideological and policy concerns in China should be of no surprise. In fact, government policy guidance and indeed the museums themselves have always presented this view quite openly (e.g. Li 1982; Guo & Cheng 2007; ZYRMZF 2016) recognizing the presentation of history and culture to be as much a moral project as an academic one, thereby applying strict control over museum content (cf. Lv 2009). In the case of the Jangar Culture and Art Palace, the purpose and goals of the museum were clearly outlined in a document titled “General Information on the Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County Jangar [Culture and Art] Palace” which reads as follows:

> The completion and opening of the Jangar Palace Museum has vital significance in properly connecting history and reality, developing local cultural resource advantages, constructing a distinctive regional culture, enriching the lives of county citizens, cultivating and carrying forward the core socialist values (*shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*) and the “Xinjiang Spirit” (*xinjiang jingshen*),[51] promoting cultural prosperity, nationality unity (*minzu tuanjie*), and social stability, etc. […] Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County’s Jangar Palace Museum is to be connected to reality, adhering to the theme of “Unity, Progress, Development”, to strengthen nationality unity (*minzu tuanjie*), and advance the spirit of patriotism. (HBKSEMGZZXWGJ 2015)

Clearly, the materialization of ‘Jangar’ as a cultural resource has been manipulated to suit a set of complex and overlapping goals that strategically display specific aspects of ‘healthy’ local practices while neglecting others. Indeed, anthropologists have long recognized the crucial role of the materialization of ‘tradition’ through its quiet ritual re-enactments through the participation that sustains identification with national culture in everyday life (Connerton 1989:74), but also, and perhaps sometimes more crucially, what is ignored, neglected, or ‘forgotten’ and its implications for moral and political life (Connerton 2008, 2009; cf. Katriel 2009). As Watson and Waterton note, heritage tourism is often characterized by "partial, and sometimes misleading" representations (ibid.:85) that work to "minimize the possibility that objects might be understood beyond their material presence and apparent intrinsic value. This secret life […] is key to understanding the significance of the past in the present and its role in forming political and nationalistic meanings." (2010:95; cf. Logan 2007:34)

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[51] Announced at the 18th National Congress session of the CCP, ‘Core socialist values’ is a key theoretical principle of President Xi Jinping. ‘Xinjiang Spirit’ was an important guiding principle of then XUAR Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian (2010-2016) that continues to be deployed even today.

In the case of the Jangar museum, these representations unambiguously reflect—often word for word—set political and ideological formulations describing the official historical evolution of Hoboksar, its 'culture', and its place as an integral part of united China. And though county officials are given great latitude to present 'Jangar Culture' in ways suitable to the 'protection and transmission' of recognized ICH, meeting local development goals etc., this process of constructing 'Jangar Culture' remains confined within strict structuring boundaries of national interests. Indeed, the Jangar Culture and Art Palace itself proudly displays its title as an official 'Patriotic Education Base' (national), in 2017 received the award "Model 'Nationality Unity We Are All One Family' Base" (*minzu tuanjie yi jiaqin shifan jidi*, regional) and is lauded again and again in official documentation and political speeches for its contributions to "promoting economic development" (local).

In this way, the case of Hoboksar 'Jangar Cultural Development', then, illustrates a highly centralized government-led cultural management regime, where mass projects such as the Jangar museum demonstrate the materialization of ICH management and protection practices subject to set, yet conceptually flexible vocabulary of interlacing interests. Yet as we shall see in Chapter 6, to view this process as simply a one of 'top-down' management misrepresents the complexity of Chinese governance.

Conclusion: Jangar and the Face of the State

In an up-scale Urumqi restaurant, Ilham—a well-dressed Uyghur manager of one of the largest minority-owned media technology companies in Xinjiang—leaned over the table with his tablet device to show me dramatic CGI filled video regarding his company's design of Hoboksar's Jangar Culture and Art Palace. He claimed that the entire planning and execution of the project took approximately five years to complete; however, for him, the real treasure was not the museum itself, but rather its 360-degree High-Definition movie installation featuring an action-packed computer-animated Jangar themed film his company developed as the centrepiece for the museum. Yet, while he claims that it was this production that helped catapult his company's regional fame as a computer animation company, the project was fraught with difficulty.

Ilham claimed that prior to developing the short film, in total company researchers spent nearly two-years studying Inner Mongolian and Xinjiang Oirat culture. "The Jangar Epic is very long," he explained. "Once [Jangarqi] start singing, they can sing non-stop for three days." He laughed, then continued, "[S]o we divided it into three [parts]," and after consulting with 'Mongolian experts' condensed 70 episodes into a fifteen-minute production. He explained that after completing the first version of the film, though his company was very happy with the final result, "the Hoboksar [government] people didn't like it." He suggested that this was because the original concept presented strong 'Arab' horses and tall, muscular heroes; however, blaming differing 'artistic values', Ilham claimed that the Director of the Hoboksar Culture Bureau wanted both the horses and people smaller and fatter—apparently more like the Director himself. Rolling his eyes, he laughed, "every hero we created became fat!"

As we sipped on our treacly 'Turkish tea', the manager continued to complain, claiming that the costly re-edits required four or five complete remakes before the Bureau Director would accept it. Amid this difficulty, the company's creative director devised an imaginative solution to their problem. Ilham explained: "The Hoboksar Culture Bureau Director didn't like the characters. We remade the characters again and again, but he didn't accept it." He paused for a moment, then continued, "Finally, we made [the face of Jangar] look like the Director…" he threw his hands in the air as if in disbelief, "and *then* he liked it!"

Through this process, however, Ilham's production company was not merely subject to the interests of Hoboksar's leadership or the aesthetics tastes of a narcissistic culture-cadre, but also went to great lengths to connect his company's interests to regional and national ones. For example, echoing the language of official culture-work political formulations described in the introduction and developed throughout this chapter, in an application to the Chinese National Literary Art Federation the company designated the films 'social edifying goals' (*shehui jiaoyi mubiao*) as follows:

> Through the implementation of this project, we will innovate and open up new channels for the modern dissemination of traditional culture, promote the awareness, proximity, and acceptance of the excellent traditional and modern cultures of Xinjiang minority nationalities, and especially among young people establish correct views of our nation, nationalities, and culture, strengthen the "Four Identifications"[52], consolidate the

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[52] The "Four Identifications" is a variant of an important political formulation in Xinjiang's public ideological education repertoire designed to defend against heteronomous—that is to say foreign or unofficial—political and cultural interests. The "Four Identifications" refers to (1)

> ideological basis of the Great Nationality Unity (*da minzu tuanjie*) of all nationality groups, work together for the construction of social stability (*shehui wending*), and endeavour to work together to achieve lasting political stability (*chang zhi jiu an*) for the development of a socialist Xinjiang […]

The film itself reflects some, but not all of the above ideological formulations. For example, so as to illustrate love of county, the film portrays the major hero Hongor as proudly pronouncing that he "lives and dies" for his county (patriotism). In another scene, Jangar proclaims, that it is "by the will of heaven and with the support of the people"[53] that he became Khan, and because of this he shall open the treasury coffers and provide the impoverished with blocks of gold (correct leadership and socialist egalitarianism) and eludes to the many disparate groups coming together under his rule (Nationality Unity). And while these are indeed all aspects of specific recorded episodes of the Jangar poem, it is through the selective narration of the film itself that Jangar comes to suit the officialised discourses described throughout this chapter (cf. Watson and Waterton 2010; Chapter 4). However, perhaps, more importantly, the new emphasis on public participation through public/private partnerships and 'community' involvement in these highly centralized and strictly managed programmes creates new avenues for these discourses to be disseminated. For the Jangar film was not only presented at the Jangar Culture and Art Palace, but so as to meet the standards presented in the above application, Ilham's company further spent a not insubstantial amount of resources presenting the film throughout Xinjiang and Western China to various audiences.

This specific narrative of Jangar as 'National Level Chinese ICH' presented through the 3D film was, then, introduced to both voluntary audiences through free showings at regional and local cultural facilities, but also to 'captive audiences' of pupils at minority nationality dominated schools and presented in a particular fashion so as to elicit specific, unambiguous reactions. As one pupil interviewed after viewing the film noted in what might seem like an almost sarcastically official manner:

> The Heroic Epic Jangar is one of our country's (*woguo*)[54] Three Great Epics, and it was of our country's first batch Intangible Cultural Heritage, but more so it is a precious

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"identification with the Fatherland" (*zuguo de rentong*); (2) "identification with the *zhonghua minzu*" (*zhonghua minzu de rentong*); (3) "identification with Chinese national culture" *(zhoghua wenhua de rentong*); and (4) "identification with Socialist Road" (*shehui zhuyi daolu de rentong*). (ZGXJWWEZZQWYHXCB 2011). After the recent addition of 'identification with the Communist Party', "Five Identifications" is now gradually becoming a more widely accepted formulation.

[53] 'By the will of heaven' was a fairly standard historical claim of the khan/khan-ly (imperial) authority. However, the addition of 'with the support of the people' is a presentist and revisionist insertion.

[54] '*Woguo*' is a marker of a highly politicized discursive register used in official ideological discourse to imply a specific 'correct' political perspective when referring to the People's Republic of China. It is often followed by specific political formulations or set phrases and is rarely used in unofficial circumstances.

> treasure of mankind's spiritual civilization. Xinjiang is the birthplace of the Jangar epic, and it is where it spread and prospered. Over the years, with the joint efforts of Party committees, government agencies, and related government departments at all levels, Jangar has seen [substantial] achievements in the collection, revision, research, and protection.[55]

From a non-Chinese, and indeed non-Xinjiang perspective this response may seem unusual, even staged. Yet this pupil's answer mirrors almost word for word the exact phraseology in which many young people in Hoboksar would 'correctly' describe the epic. Through programmes such as the one described above, 'community' involvement in China's programmes of 'intangible cultural heritage protection' illustrate how active participation is at once ostensibly (semi-)voluntary, but nevertheless is often passed through specific 'correct' discursive and behavioural filters defined by government mediators.

In her pioneering work *The Uses of Heritage*, Laurajane Smith argues that "[t]he discursive construction of heritage is itself part of the cultural and social processes that are heritage […] These practices, as well as the meaning of the material 'things' of heritage, are constituted by the discourses that simultaneously reflect these practices while also constructing them" (2006:13). With this in mind, I suggest that active participation in 'correct' performances of ICH protection in regard to Jangar Cultural Development described above, then, illustrates the intersection, hierarchization, and negotiation of interests that simultaneously 'constitute' and 'construct' Jangar as a 'cultural' product in the public sphere. Through this complex process, it can be said that Jangar as 'Chinese national culture' has, in some ways, literally taken the face of the state.

As this chapter has attempted to show, though many studies of contemporary Chinese ICH tend to deemphasize the process, Chinese 'heritage management' is indeed focused on legitimate 'heritage protection'—but 'protection' understood within the context of complex, often contradicting, but always officially intersecting political-economic interests. And while contemporary scholars of Chinese heritage regimes are right to focus research priorities on the systemization of 'culture' by governments so as to mobilize cultural resources for nation-building purposes and/or economic development (e.g. Oakes 2006; Blumenfield & Silverman 2013; Yan 2018), these studies nevertheless tend to homogenize 'government' and its interests under a rather simplistic measure, ignoring the often equally consequential personal and professional interests of those charged with its management and control, as seen in the case of Wuyinshan and the film company mentioned above. This is to say, ‘heritage’, at least in the case of Hoboksar’s ‘Jangar Culture Development’, may be better understood as a complex political negotiation in which potentially everyone is eventually implicated, and even benefit. And it is through the carefully choreographed performance of politically correct behaviour that ‘heritage’ becomes articulated so as to simultaneously satisfy national, regional, local, and even personal objectives, thereby transforming an otherwise fluid conceptualization of ‘culture’ into an objectified product with clear ‘use-value’.

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[55] This interview was collected by Ilham's company from a 'young person' (likely high school age) after viewing the Jangar animated film.

While Chinese cultural management discourses have indeed borrowed from the internationally recognized ‘authorized heritage discourse’ of global heritage regimes (e.g. UNESCO), these ‘heritage discourses’ have nonetheless been re-articulated in such a way as to buttress existing Chinese cultural management regimes—not to replace them. This ‘Chinese authorized heritage discourse’ then is a government-led programme that constructs what is and is not ‘excellent’, ‘valuable’, and ‘authentic’, by being filtered through a specific politico-ideological genre of ‘science’, ‘objectivity’, and ‘correctness’, and thereby institutionalized in state agencies and officially recognized loci of (re)presentation in which ‘communities’ are expected to actively participate. This globalizing and self-referential discourse now articulated through the internationally recognized language of heritage preservation, thereby assists in reifying existing Chinese ‘culture’ structuring mechanisms so as to produce specific results.

‘Cultural heritage’ in the context of Hoboksar’s Jangar ICH, then, should be seen as ‘valued’ predominately for what it does, rather than what it is. It is ‘authentic’ in its (re)presentation rather than in its inherent qualities. That is to say, in the case of Hoboksar’s execution of central ‘Cultural Construction’ policies through a comprehensive ‘Jangar Cultural Development Programme’, ‘value’ and ‘authenticity’ in Jangar ‘culture’ should be recognized as extrinsic rather than intrinsic—creating something rather than ‘being’ something. In the following chapter, I attempt to illustrate how culture cadres and everyday people attempt to navigate this vast network of intersecting interests through this complex and highly authoritative state-centric system of cultural management.

Chapter 6: Performing Culture

Introduction: "Centering on Beijing Road"

After weeks of sifting through untold numbers of documents and forms related to 'Cultural Construction' at the county Culture Bureau, I assumed that this document titled 'strategy plan' would be no different from the others I had read. However, as I skimmed the pages of the "Hoboksar County 2011-2020 Cultural Development Strategy Plan" I was shocked by the uncharacteristically comprehensive nature of this seventeen-page, point-by-point proposal: "By 2020 the Culture Centre, Library, Museum, and Culture Stations will all reach national-level standards above grade one," the document stated confidently. "Every living-community in the county shall construct an independent, public multi-purpose culture and entertainment [facility] with outdoor activity square of no less than 200 square meters," it continued.

As I read, I was struck by how ambitious these goals must have been but was also surprised at just how much of the plan the county had successfully implemented. Though the county had seen an economic boost from recently discovered fossil fuel deposits when this plan was written Hoboksar was still a recognized 'impoverished region'—yet since 2010 the county had indeed constructed a new Culture Centre granted 'national -level' status, a regionally renowned museum, and while perhaps not necessarily 200m^2 in size, had in fact built multi-purpose entertainment facilities with plenty of outdoor activity space in many of its newly developed community centres. Yet as I continued down the plan, I discovered a number of peculiarities.

For one, Chinese bureaucratic and administrative language is extremely rigid, where the simplest error in wording can have serious consequences. For example, though usage of terms such as city and town, village and hamlet in English may occasionally overlap and leave room for conceptual ambiguity, in China this nomenclature demarcates a clear hierarchy of 'rank' (*jibie*) with political consequences for how policy may be implemented and constitutes a minor obsession among cadres regardless of region or political relationship (Lawrence & Martin 2013:15). In the Chinese political pecking-order, provincial-level units rank just below the central government, followed by city-level units, then county-level, then town-level, etc.[56] However, Hoboksar is a county-level unit (*xian*), yet the document repeatedly referred to Hoboksar as a 'city' (*shi*). Despite this obvious error, I proceeded to the next section titled 'Construct a Business Tourism Brand'.

"Centring on Beijing Road, promote the historical and cultural resources of Zhongshan Road, Wenming Road, and Wende Road." With that, I stopped reading, double-checking that I had not collected the wrong document. This couldn't be Hoboksar's development plan for the simple fact that the county has no 'Beijing Road', let alone the others mentioned. Curious, I asked to use a free computer and typed the section into a search engine. The first result was a 2006 five-year cultural development plan for a district of the southern Chinese megacity of Guangzhou. Though only able to make an eye-ball comparison, it appeared that at least 80% of the document had been lifted directly from the Guangzhou plan, with only about 10% original work referring to Jangar and other county-related projects, and the remainder consisting of regional appellations, political formulations, and set language not included in the original.

With only minor alterations and masked by the ambiguousness of Chinese set language and formulations, the ten-year culture development strategy of a tiny, rural minority nationality (*minzu*) dominated county on the furthest edge of China literally copied—almost word for word—the development plan of a major Han-dominated metropolis in China's most populous coastal province. That is to say, the flexibility offered through the strategic deployment of Chinese bureaucratic language not only allowed for the transplanting of policy between two places with practically nothing in common but saw *measurable results*.

This is certainly an extreme act of plagiarism that, if discovered, would likely never have been officially condoned. Nevertheless, this practice is indeed quite common throughout Xinjiang and China generally. For example, when discussing media reporting of social disturbances, an Urumqi based journalist confessed that there are well-established models for writing about certain politically sensitive topics. This is not to say that government agencies, editors, or some ominous 'censors' formally established these models—though there are strict guidelines all reporters are expected to follow. Rather, journalists individually recognize a similarly sensitive article that has passed review and copy its wording and format. After much repetition, this gradually develops into a fairly set model for lick-and-stick applicability. Similarly, in Hoboksar's county, Culture Bureau young cadres would often request that I share documents collected from higher prefectural-level offices regarding culture-work to copy for county needs, ostensibly assuming a model prefectural-level document would likely be more correctly formulated than a county-level one.

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[56] Reference to 'level' here indicates administrative units of equal 'rank', e.g. 'provincial-level' refers to provinces, autonomous regions, special administrative zones, etc. all with technically the same 'rank'—though in practice political influence may vary. Importantly, the rank of governing units influences the rank of institutions and individuals working within these specific administrative units, outlining a clear political hierarchy that is theoretically transferable throughout the county.

Such acts of imitation and replication are not without historical precedent. Chinese ritualized deployments of set language, rigid literary format, and constant borrowing from past authoritative texts was a defining feature of dynastic China's literary etiquette—including official texts. As Charles Hartman notes, dynastic officials placed great emphasis on "the ability to compose an array of bureaucratic prose documents in an elegant and correct manner" and "the bureaucratic need to conform to mandated standards," (1998:93) where unapproved formulations could be construed as political dissent (ibid.:94). By clearly illustrating one's ability to ritually reproduce set phrases and themes, to call on the appropriate past master, and adhere to strict literary formulae, this rigid writing style tested one's ability and willingness to adhere to recognized norms of correct behaviour (Cai 2009:208). In fact, this formulaic rigidity would eventually develop into the infamous 'eight-legged essays' (*ba gu wen*)[57] of Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644-1912) era civil examinations. At that time, adhering to 'correct' writing-style in essays would be emphasized to such an extent that imperial examinees were required to memorize vast repertoires of Chinese classic canon, their vocabulary and structure, and reproduce the content often word for word, becoming what Benjamin Elman has described as "the 'byword for petrification' in Chinese literature" (Elman 2000:380; cf. Plaks 1986, 1994; Huang 2005).

As discussed in chapter 3, Chinese policy is vertically structured, and therefore as abstract policy formulations pass from one level of government to the next, interests accrue, and policies gradually begin to solidify. Further, textual formulations in Chinese politics are extremely precise, so much so that they are often described as 'scientific' (cf. Schoenhals 1992:7; Chapters 3-4)—and because of this, 'correct' deployments of these texts are highly consequential.

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[57] 'Eight-legged essay' is the literal translation of *ba gu wen*. The term is sometimes alternatively translated simply 'stereotyped writing'.

Therefore, examples of ‘plagiarism’ as described above do not necessarily reflect ‘laziness’ or lack of candour—though in some situations, this may indeed be the case. Instead, what they show is a conscious recognition of a strict regime of ritualized textual propriety and the active search for appropriate examples to imitate for ‘correct’ execution of one’s bureaucratic responsibilities.

Indeed, the importance of political-moral exemplarity in China has been emphasized in numerous studies (Bulag 1999; Cheng 2009; Kipnis 2012). Caroline Humphrey, for example, describes ‘exemplars’ as embodied models that transform abstract social norms into realizable aims and are constructed primarily through the ‘discourse of exemplars’—both textual and behavioural (1997:25). Humphrey suggests that (Han?) Chinese as well as Mongol morality is, in large part, constructed through conscious negotiations of numerous exemplars, allowing for the flexible manipulation of ‘self-cultivation’ to meet even mundane life goals (ibid.). Similarly, Børge Bakken (2000) convincingly argues that beginning in childhood educational pedagogy and continuing into adult social and political life it is the imitation of aspects of social life deemed ‘exemplary’ that are the very building blocks of Chinese moral life, constructing what he designates the ‘exemplary society’.

For Bakken, the Chinese ‘exemplary society’ is closely linked to ‘exemplary norms’ expressed in set ‘models’—yet these are norms that look to Others as a method of socialization rather than introspective contemplation. That is to say, Chinese socialization mechanisms are largely defined by a morality that emphasizes externalization of ‘correct’ behaviour as expressed in the emulation of recognized models rather than the internalization of idealized norms themselves (2000:91). Yet while by no means ignoring the more obvious ‘exemplars’ in the form of heroes, teachers etc. that Humphry and others tend to emphasize, Bakken highlights the micro-acts of exemplar imitation such as pedagogical practices of rote memorization, repetition, and reproduction. Drawing on his ethnographic work in the Beijing education system, Bakken claims that the historical Chinese socialization method of “‘learning how’ to imitate exemplary models” is “inscribed into the developing cultural script of the [Chinese] individual” (ibid:181) and extends far beyond the classroom walls. In fact, it is his contention that this historically situated ‘repetitive-imitative’ method remains a key principle of ‘Chinese’ political socialization, where historical forms of political practice reappear in a modified kind suited to pattern a contemporary, potentially disorderly population and “defines both socialization and development strategy” (ibid.:151). Seen in this light, then, the highly reflexive practices of decontextualizing perceived authoritative texts and behaviours and reproducing them to suit particular contexts in politicized social settings should be understood as a matter of diffuse normative structuring rather than the materialization of political indolence through inauthentic replication.

In the following sections, this chapter attempts to describe how this rigid normative regime both informs and limits the environment in which “practices and performances” (Smith 2006:11; cf. Ch 6) of Hoboksar Jangar ‘heritage’ are articulated, assisting in facilitating both national and local goals by means of creative, yet often confusing, and ‘formalistic’ (*xingshi zhuyi de*) means. Part I of this chapter attempts to describe the complex negotiation of ‘correct’ political practice in form, and how such practices influence culture-work in the county. Part II then illustrates how, through a perceived need to properly reproduce a set script of speech and behaviour in regard to ‘culture’ and ‘cultural development’ in the county, the ‘cultural spirit’ (*wenhua jingshen*) of Jangar becomes an ‘awkward exemplar’ as it is discursively forced into connection with various, often contradictory cultural narratives and political interests.

I. Form and ‘Formalism’

Although compared to the newly constructed fourteen-story ‘Government Building’ (*zhengfu lou*) across the street, the Culture Bureau is situated in a far smaller and much older structure, yet the county has maintained the facility to a relatively high standard. As one would expect, beside each of the brown steel office doors there is a sign that clearly labels each office and the names of the officers within, and above some doors are additional wall-mounted signage that often indicates secondary uses of each office. For example, above the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Office also included signage indicating the ‘Artefacts Management Station’ (*wenwu guanli suo*) responsible for so-called ‘unmovable cultural relics’ (*buke yidong wenwu*) unrelated to ICH work. However, a second piece of strangely worded signage had baffled me since my arrival. If taken literally, the second sign read “Nationality Construction Office,” (*minzu chuangjian bangongshi*) however, this made little sense since a county-level unit has absolutely no authority to redefine nationality in any way, let alone ‘construct’ one.

In a telling exchange, one day, I asked a woman working in the ICH office about the signage: “What does ‘Nationality Construction’ mean?” The young lady seemed confused, so I referred to the sign outside the door. “There is no such sign.” She laughed, then stated matter-of-factly, “I’ve never heard of it!” I took her into the hallway to see for herself. Chuckling, she walked

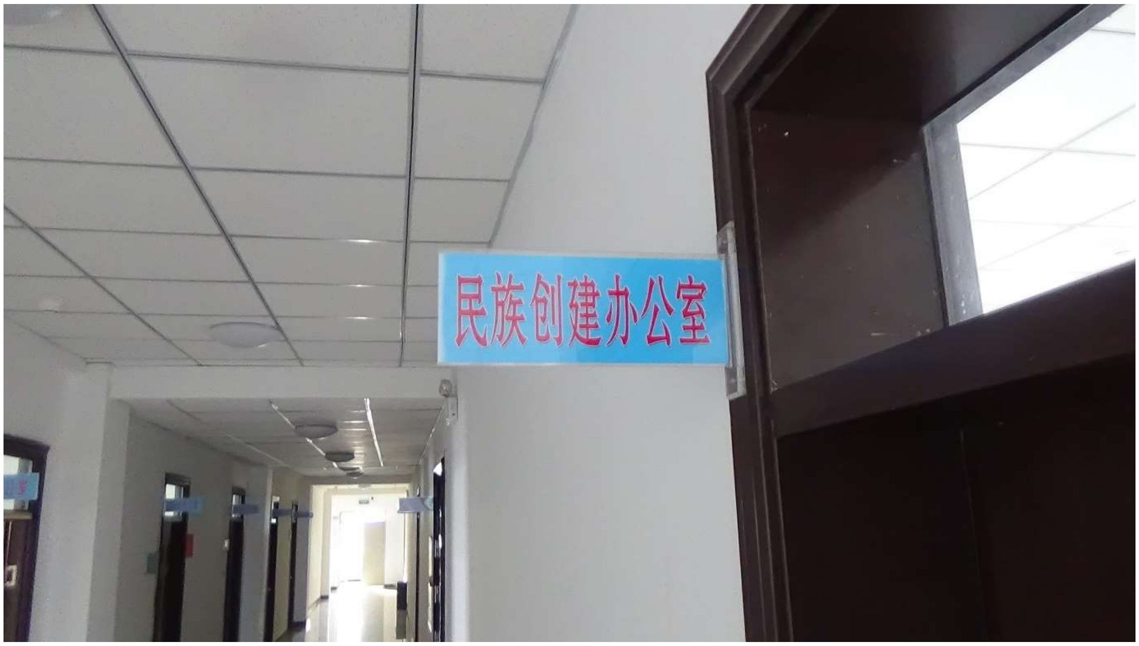


Figure 14: Signage for the ‘Nationality Construction Office’.

back into the office and called her colleague to come see. They both laughed and claimed to have never paid much attention to the sign before this. “Formalism!” (*xingshi zhuyi*) one told me. The other giggled, “There is no such office!”

I would later learn from the women’s superior that they did not recognize the ‘Nationality Construction’ signage because it was actually an abbreviation for ‘Nationality *Unity* Construction’, yet he claimed that there is no single office or officers responsible for this work. Rather, the responsibility for this central policy is dispersed throughout the Bureau and the county government at large, and like the ICH officers, he claimed that the sign was simply ‘in form’ (*xingshi xing*). Indeed, understood as acting ‘in form’ without meaningful content, ‘formalism’ seemed to be everywhere in the county—especially in this ‘sensitive’ time where behaviour is strictly monitored. And though people constantly talk about its existence as more of a nuisance than anything else, on a policy level, ‘formalism’ is widely criticized.

a. Formalism on Display

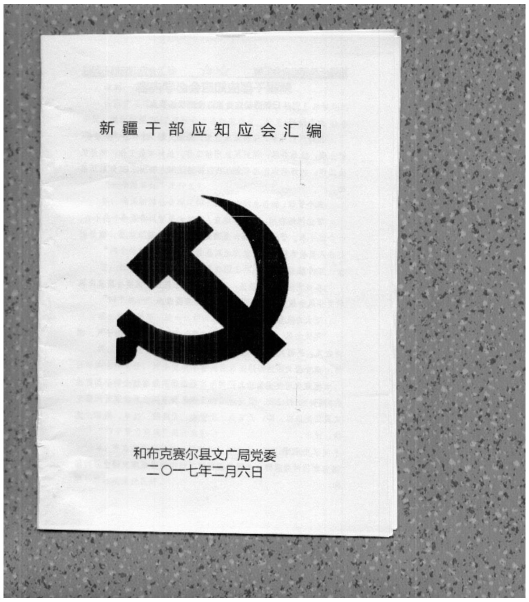
The politicization of ‘formalism’ in China is perhaps most famously associated with Mao’s important 1942 speech ‘Oppose Party Eight-Leggedness,’ which specifically chastised ‘empty’ Party writings. Mao complained that like the eight-legged essays of the Ming and Qing, the ‘formalism’ of early Chinese communist writings produced and reproduced stereotyped behaviours devoid of relational coherence, calling these “naïve, crude, vulgar, and mindless” behaviours masquerading as thoughtful policy implementation (Mao 1942). Ironically, Mao’s mass social engineering projects of the 1950s eventually culminating into the Cultural Revolution would come to epitomize exercises 'in form' and indeed its institutionalization (cf. Chapter 4). In what Cheng Yinghong describes as forced 'model emulation' (2009:5), in large part defined through stereotyped exemplary behaviour and language embodied in the 'correct' revolutionary form of semi-fictional 'revolutionary heroes,' 'red' literature and songs, and rigid 'model theatre' etc., citizens were forced to ritualistically reproduce specific revolutionary scripts in nearly all daily activities (cf. Leese 2011; DeMare 2015). Though the extreme rigidity of Maoist exemplarity has, in large part, abated, model emulation is still an ever-present fixture in Chinese social and political life.

Even today, countless speeches and articles are published denouncing the evils of 'formalism'. For example, following widely publicized recent criticism of 'formalism and bureaucratism' by President Xi, an editorial published in the Party policy newspaper *Economics Daily* described the problem as follows:

> "The essence of formalism is subjectivism and utilitarianism, which is rooted in a dislocated view of political achievement and lacks a sense of responsibility. It replaces solid implementation with practices of mere form while concealing contradictions and problems with bright and beautiful appearances." (ZGGCDXWW 2017)

Yet even in the capital, 'formalism' is on display—almost literally on every corner. In one instance, while waiting for a green signal to cross a busy Beijing intersection, I noticed a large LED screen extolling the achievements of the recent 19th National Congress of the CCP and displaying some obscure political formulation. Unsure what I was reading, I leaned over to ask an elderly couple waiting with me at the corner what this phrase might mean. "I also don't understand," the woman told me. "That's for the government to see [not us]!" (*zhe shi gei zhengfu kan de!*)

Yet unlike elsewhere in China, perhaps due to the perceived severity of the Xinjiang situation discussed in length in Chapter 3, in Hoboksar, the frequency of such displays 'in form' were magnified substantially. Cadre complaints included evaluations of 'leaders', where "even if we give them all bad marks (*quan chapin*) it wouldn't mean anything"—this was apparently an example of formalism. An exhausting rotating '24-hour duty' for all government employees on three-day cycles for hundreds of days on end, ostensibly to help 'combat extremism'—also formalism. Required weekly participation in flag-raising ceremonies where meaningless political speeches would repeat the same tired slogans, just in different order—more formalism. Propaganda posters covering nearly any flat surface in public spaces, some highlighting



新疆干部应知应会汇编

和布克赛尔县文广局党委
二〇一七年二月六日

Figure 15: ‘Collections of Required Knowledge’ culture-cadre study materials.

obscure slogans that few understood—in the words of one irritated cadre, “classic formalism!” (*jingdian xingshizhuyi!*) Even the activities and speeches *against* the evils of ‘formalism’ were deemed ‘formalistic’. Indeed, mirroring in part what Alexei Yurchak (2003) has termed the ‘hegemony of form’, in Hoboksar ‘formalism’ was everywhere—and not only were cadres responsible for it, they were required to participate or face often severe sanction (see Chapter 3).

Yet likely the most representative and widely criticized act of ‘formalism’ observed during my field-research were the all-important ideological ‘study sessions’ where cadres were not only required to a ‘study’ a vast body of ‘knowledge’ (*zhishi*)—including President Xi Jinping and XUAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo’s speeches, national and regional policy formulations etc.—but reproduce it word for word on examinations and in everyday life. In fact, so strict were the requirements that between the months of February and March 2017, cadres would be called on their mobile phones at random and were expected to answer questions related to study sessions correctly—even after-hours. If one was unable to respond properly, that individual might be subject to penalty. Because of this extreme emphasis placed on ‘study’, cadres spent hours per day reviewing numerous standardized print materials, including what are known as ‘Collections of Required Knowledge’ (*yingzhi yinghui huibian*).

In one such study booklet titled ‘Collection of Xinjiang Cadre Required Knowledge’, the first section included helpful lists of important policy formulations and their explanations, such as the ‘Six Grasps’ and the ‘Three Authentics’ without which the slogans themselves are incomprehensible. The second part included a ‘question and answer’ section, with examples such as:

> **What is the most important mass-work in Xinjiang?**
> Answer: Nationality Unity (*minzu tuanjie*) and religious harmony.
>
> **What are the Five Identifications?**
> Answer: Identification with our great fatherland (*zuguo*), identification with the Chinese Nation (*zhonghua minzu*), identification with Chinese national culture (*zhonghua*

> *wenhua*), identification with the socialist road with Chinese characteristics, and identification with the Chinese Communist Party.
>
> **What is the most difficult, most important, and most long-term problem in Xinjiang?**
> Answer: The problem of nationality unity.
>
> **What is the greatest enemy to Xinjiang's stability and long-tern political order?**
> Answer: Cadres not adhering to correct work-styles (*ganbu zuofeng bushi*).[58]

For the purposes of this chapter, it is the study material's second section that is of interest. For it is clear that the purpose of the 'knowledge' to be learnt in these study sessions is to 'harmonize' ideological focus by filtering political discourse through rigid and indisputable formulae, concretizing the subjective into the 'objective' through ritualized reproduction of specified discourses (see Chapter 4). Responses to specific discursive cues were, in turn, expected to be automatic and exact so as to produce a 'correct' view and unified front in policy execution. However, it is important to emphasize that this method of ritualized discursive reproduction is hardly confined to government work-units alone.

Indeed, though official figures were not made available to me, an individual with direct knowledge of the situation explained that of Hoboksar Town's approximately 30,000 population, only ten thousand of those were permanent residents, with the remainder considered 'floating populations' (*liudong renkou*) (cf. Li 2001). Of the permanent residents, more than half were members of government work-units. For that reason, almost no one was insulated from the influences of such study, in that even those individuals not employed by work-units requiring participation in such activities are nevertheless inevitably associated with those who are,[59] and where even school children proved adept at reflexively reproducing political discourse in even the most mundane of circumstances.

For example, in a locally operated café/fast-food restaurant, I overheard several 6th-year students discussing a school presentation. As is expected from middle-school students, the presentation was quite basic in substance—but I was surprised by the prolific usage of 'mixed' political formulations. Discussing PowerPoint presentation slides, they combined elements of existing slogans, effectively inventing new ones to suit their presentation. For example, slogans included, “We must work hard together and learn for the sake of the Chinese Nation!” (*gongtong nuli, wei zhonghua minzu xuexi*) and when discussing what they learned from the 19th National Congress noted a responsibility to “bring about the future [through revolutionary ideology]” (*kaichuang xiang weilai*), but rejected the phrase, “Discuss together, create together!” (*gongtong taolun, gongtong bianzao*) as an inappropriate innovation.

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[58] *Zuofeng* is understood to imply a work-style that includes proper expressions not only in 'ideology' (*sixiang*) but lifestyle generally.

[59] In fact, in 2017 Hoboksar County's Propaganda Bureau social media platform claimed that a full one-third of the county's population took part in either the oath to join the Communist Party or renewed their oaths in the month of July (HBKSELJL 2017), far above the national average party membership of under 7%. At least in the in the offices in which I was working, this was done through yet another 'formalistic' process of forcing cadres and related individuals to 'volunteer' handwritten oaths to join the Communist Party.

According to Bakken, understood as “the most basic and objective form” of moral behaviour, this exaggerated focus on memorization and regurgitation is institutionally recognized as ‘moral science’ in practice, reproducing ‘objective norms’ through ‘mechanical imitation’ of exemplarity (2000:134). As one commentator notes, authoritative writings in China are expected to be “*learned* rather than *studied* [and] a critical re-examination may be considered improper” (Schimmelpenninck 1997:17, emphasis in original). Indeed, the deployment of this ritualized ‘repetitive-imitative’ style it is not simply prominent in Hoboksar, it is ubiquitous, where from schools to work-units to the public sphere, it is recognized as an institutionalized element of proper social and political performance.

Yet unlike so many scholars of socialist performativity (e.g. Yurchek 2003, 2006; Cheng 2009; Rasanayagam 2011), Bakken does not suppose such ritualized inculcative regimes are intent on cultivating ‘sincere’ values or interiorized norms (2000:416). Nevertheless, Bakken concludes that such behaviours are ‘inauthentic’ and ‘feigned’, ‘hypocritical’, even ‘lying’, and ultimately ‘counterproductive’ (ibid.: 90, 101, 411)—a perspective that seems to presuppose ‘genuine’ beliefs as the basis for effective normative regimes (cf. Seligman et al. 2008). However, anthropologist and Chinese Classicist Michael Puett convincingly argues to the contrary, contending rather that participation in ‘ritual’ is not necessarily indicative of a larger worldview—nor is it intended to be.

For Puett, rituals ‘work’ not because they reflect or impart specific interior dispositions, but rather because they don’t. Rituals are effectual because they run counter to thoughts and behaviours of everyday life, and “it is precisely the tension between rituals and our lived reality that render them effective.” (Puett 2015:547) Instead, rituals instil norms by summoning the cooperatively realized ‘subjunctive’ worlds of ‘as-if’ realities clearly distinguished from the lived reality outside ritual space (see Chapters 1, 3), forging normative behaviours not in the ‘as-if’ space itself, but rather in the disjunction between the ‘as-if' space and lived experiences. Puett continues:

> “The guiding norm is rather a sensibility of responding to situations well—a sensibility we attain by working through the disjunctions between our common lived behaviour and the as-if worlds of rituals. Rituals are not the repository of norms but rather the

> ever-altering means to achieve norms […] what we are seeking is not to become more like the person we are in these as-if spaces. The goal is rather to learn to respond to situations well—an ability we gain through the endless work of training ourselves through ritual activity. (Puett 2015:550-551)

Building on the arguments surrounding 'ritual' and 'ritualization' outlined in Chapters 1 and 3 that describe 'ritualized action' as a process rather than event that is not necessarily removed from ordinary life (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Sax 2010; Stasch 2011), through Puett's understanding of ritual activity as a tension between lived experience and 'as-if' realities I suggest that ritually reproduced Chinese formulaic language should then be seen as a mode of patterning responses so as to strategically construct shared 'as-if' realities through the reproduction and negotiation of specific textually structured expectations. As the next section attempts to illustrate, in Hoboksar these realities often materialize in the proper execution of policy at local levels through strictly regimented authoritative discursive frames, with varying degrees of effectiveness.

b. Getting a Little 'Leggy'

In the case of county culture-work, the modes of discursive propriety described above were not only expected but institutionalized in practice. Indeed, though the county was given great latitude in deciding what activities to execute and where, nevertheless, 'themes' and often frequency of activities were strictly regimented from higher levels and expected to adhere to high-priority formulations. Political motifs such as 'De-extremification', 'Study Party Nationality and Religious Policy', and 'Oppose Cultism' were prominent in county culture-work—yet unquestionably the most dominant phrases remained 'Nationality Unity' and 'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' (*minzu tuanjie yi jia qin*). Though the mechanisms for ensuring proper development of culture-work in line with national, regional, and local policy were numerous, likely the most significant was the critically important 'Annual End of Year Assessment' (*niandi kaohe*) required of all government work-units. In a conversation with the director of the Culture Bureau Art Troup regarding 'making culture' (*zuo wenhua*), he described this top-down process.

Shuffling through paperwork on his desk, the director retrieved the government red-headed document outlining the goals of this year's 'cultural projects'. Though infused with a thick dose of political discourse, the outlined goals were quite simple, stating that the county is required to produce "80 [troupe] performances" throughout the county under this year's regional theme: “Nationality Unity We are All One Family, the Benefits of Culture Enter the People’s Hearts” (*minzu tuanjie yi jia qin, wenhua huimin ru renxin*). The director explained that though in the past the troupe only had about a dozen members and very few resources, today the troupe numbers over 40 and due to the county and regional government’s emphasis on cultural development, the art-troupe now has the resources to bring performances to each of the county’s towns, villages, and pastures.

Managing an artistic programme proudly named ‘Bringing Culture to the Countryside’ (*wenhua xiaxiang*) with a history in China dating to pre-Liberation revolutionary propaganda troupes (Mackerras 1981; Holm 1984, 1991; DeMare 2015), he claims that after receiving the red-headed document from above, the troupe then begins the process of constructing performances based on the given theme and social particularities of each area (e.g. ethnic, economic etc. considerations). Curious, I asked how one might ‘perform’ Nationality Unity. According to the director, due to the ‘low-level of culture’ among rural residents (*wenhua shuiping di*), performances cannot be overly abstract, and therefore in many cases, the ‘Nationality Unity’ themed routines must be quite explicit. For example, songs regarding ‘Nationality Unity’ are a staple performance, and there is always a banner behind the performers clearly displaying the theme. Nevertheless, in some cases it is appropriate to simply sing songs to suit local tastes unrelated to ‘Nationality Unity’ but perhaps sung in different languages, or dances in nationality costume of multiple minority nationalities, playing different instruments of different nationalities simultaneously or in sequence, or otherwise displaying the artistic harmony of performance in multiple stereotyped nationality styles. Whatever the display, the occasional speeches of local cadres and multi-lingual announcements throughout the performances make political and ideological messages unambiguous.

During the process, the art troupe is required to take meticulous records, including summaries of content, photographs, copies of scripts, and in the case of larger performances, may even be required to write extended summaries that include audience commentary. Picking up on ideological cues during the routines, interviewed audience members often reproduce specific set-language and political formulations while praising both policy and performance. Prior to formal submission of the assessment, records are revisited, edited for content, and filtered through proper ideological discourse.

Retired art-troupe members recalled that in the past, there were far fewer requirements, where all that was needed was simple documentation—work that few took particularly seriously. Yet beginning in the late-1990s and early-2000s, a new process of administrative reform began changing governing practice (Yang 2004; Zhu & Li 2012), contributing to what Marilyn

Strathern (2000) has called an ‘audit culture’ of contemporary bureaucratic institutions where discourses of ‘accountability’ come to dominate institutional practice. For Strathern, this specific management style works to transform highly contextualized practices into simplified and systematized forms that rarely suit the realities they are intended to measure, and where “only certain social practices take a form […] which will persuade those to whom accountability is to be rendered” (ibid.:1; cf. Scott 1998:46-47). In fact, as it was described to me, one key ‘ritual of verification’ (Power 1997) when assessing culture-work in Hoboksar was a checklist-style form meant to ensure, from village- to county-level, local leaders had met set goals—a practice that is now directly connected to cadre promotion prospects. By reducing complex culture-work practices into a standardized checklist, culture-work could then be simply and efficiently evaluated and entered into the annual assessment.

Though particularly from the standpoint of accountability and verification to higher levels, such a procedure certainly has its advantages, it nevertheless works to pigeonhole culture-work into ever more rigid and, according to some officers, occasionally highly problematic institutional boundaries. In the case of the art troupe, even if from a Euro-American standpoint such overt acts of politicization of ‘culture’ might appear empty, this programme to ‘bring culture to the countryside’ through artistically performed ideological indoctrination proved at least moderately successful in meeting set goals and achieved measurable results. Though very much ‘in form’, the creative reproduction of specified scripts was not only able to present a ‘cultural product’ for audiences to consume, but in the words of Michael Puett inculcated a shared ‘as-if reality’ in which both performers and audiences participated and reproduced in practice. However, as might be expected, this was not always the case.

Because of this emphasis on ‘checking-off’ extensive lists of required culture-work activities, programmes were sometimes awkwardly forced into forms that otherwise might appear unrelated or confusing. For example, in 2017, the Culture Bureau’s Culture Centre held “The First Annual ‘Nationality Unity We are All One Family’ Poker Tournament”, a “‘Nationality Unity’ Clothing Embroidery Exhibition” etc., to help fulfil its ‘Nationality Unity’ activities quota. In fact, these sorts of activities were so prevalent they were perceived as being entirely unremarkable. Instead, what would be considered remarkable—and likely highly inappropriate—is for any such programme to *not* be associated with a certain policy formulation or set-phrase. Furthermore, official documentation of these events would often infuse these otherwise ostensibly apolitical activities with long, complex, confusing, and often unconnected strings of political formulations to justify their existence. For example, the Culture Bureau’s official rationale for holding a similar programme named "'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' Football Match" read as follows:

> Following the theme that 'Nationality unity' is the lifeline of all people and nationalities in Xinjiang, focusing on the goal of social stability and achieving lasting political order, taking "allow the seeds of Nationality Unity to be planted in the hearts of cadres and masses of all ethnic groups, to take root, blossom, and bear fruit" as starting point and objective, by cultivating and developing the 'Tacheng League',[60] this fully embodies the superiority of unity, harmony, and coexistence of cadres and masses of all ethnic groups, and by recognizing that excellent traditions has uses in developing exemplary models for promoting Nationality Unity, and makes contributions to the realization of unity, harmony, prosperity, civilizational progress, and peaceful socialism, this 'Nationality Unity We are One Family' Hoboksar 'Tacheng League' football match is to be held.

If, to the reader, this particular rationale seems slightly 'leggy' and over-worded, you would not be alone. For when I approached a ranking culture-cadre about the matter, after considerable prodding the individual smiled and uncomfortably admitted with a chuckle that this was indeed an example of 'formalism' but was nevertheless an important aspect of county culture-work, adding "there's nothing we can do about it!" (*women mei banfa!*) Though certainly adhering to a specific normative regime based on political, ideological, and social exemplarity, 'formalism' in these cases, for the most part, failed to pattern social activities and behaviours. Instead, 'formalism' here merely acted as an overlayer of 'bright and beautiful appearances' to a poker tournament, embroidery exhibition, and football match.

In this context, then, I propose 'formalism' might be better understood as partial 'rupture' in the performance of 'as-if realities', where ritualized behaviours are forced to uncomfortably and unconvincingly adhere to certain behavioural forms as social practice yet are nevertheless expected to be accepted as propriety. Of course, 'formalism' is not an 'objective form', nor can it be mapped on a binary scale. Even in the case of the signage indicating a non-existent Nationality Construction Office, having such an object so prominently displayed does, to some extent, expressed content. And in the case of strictly regimented 'study sessions', though most cadres with whom I spoke found these the epitome of bureaucratic formalism, they nevertheless were highly successful in patterning behaviours of cadres and even common people. Nevertheless, this section has endeavoured to illustrate, regardless of context it is through this particular institutionalized means of repetitive imitation and model emulation that county culture-work endeavours to present culture and cultural activities in a specified 'form' agreeable to contemporary political contexts.

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[60] 'Tacheng' refers to the prefecture in which Hoboksar is located and the 'Tacheng League' is an informal regional football league.

In the following sections, this chapter attempts to show how in this context, the 'Jangar epic' as 'local Hoboksar culture' is primarily defined as an embodiment of local political interests and national solidarity as an 'exemplar' of local governance.

II. Jangar and Exemplarity

As discussed above, Chinese politics are very much founded in principles of 'repetitive-imitative' reproduction of set exemplary norms (Bakken 2000), yet such a rigid normative structure would seem to preclude any possibility of innovation, or in the most extreme cases even 'exemplarity' altogether. However, in contemporary China, the term 'innovation' (*chuangxin*) has become one of the most significant catch-phrases of modern development discourse (e.g. ZGQNW 2018). In fact, to at once adhere to expected norms while 'innovating' in a right and proper fashion so as to 'improve' (*wanshan*) upon the status quo are often considered the basic requirements for becoming a 'model' individual or institutional entity (cf. Shaw 1996).

Indeed, being almost completely subordinated to higher-level directives, a small county-level unit has few means of influencing policy outside its limited political purview. However, one of the few options for lower-level political units to influence regional, and even national, policy is to itself become a 'model' in some regard—a goal that lower-level government institutions are constantly striving toward. For example, after years of county-wide efforts and expending significant resources, in mid-2017 Hoboksar Mongolian Autonomous County was named 'National [Level] Hygienic County' by the State Council's National Patriotic Health Campaign Committee, validating its work and theoretically elevating Hoboksar's status to that of national model county for hygiene-related work (QGAWH 2017).

In practice, though this would likely increase the profile of some local cadres, may become a rationale for extracting or allocating additional resources to this or that office, etc. this award meant very little by way of raising the county's political profile, nor is there any available documentation suggesting the county's now nationally recognized methods were being studied, let alone implemented by outside government offices or officers. Nevertheless, what is significant here is that to be considered an exemplary model, it was not simply good enough for the county to adhere to 'correct form'. Rather, to be 'exemplary' implied the county's ability to improve upon the norm.

Speaking in terms of the exemplarity of the 'sage' in classic Chinese social theory, Seligman et al. (2008) note that to be exemplary in China is not simply a question of adhering strictly to ritual propriety but assumes exemplarity to be 'correct' behaviour even without ritual precedent. In the case of acting correctly under unprecedented circumstances, "a sage would also be seen as exemplary, and his actions would, therefore, come to be defined as ritual for later generations." (ibid.:36; cf. Puett 2010) In some cases, then, exemplarity must assume the possibility of superseding normative propriety by engaging in rituality without ritual precedent. That is to say, exemplarity assumes not only the possibility of behaving 'well', but better. And as Hoboksar continued to develop its 'Jangar Culture', local politicians attempted to locate an innovative form of governance in an unlikely place—the Jangar Epic itself.

a. Making a Model County

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Jangar epic had as early as 2003 become a central piece of local economic development strategy, and as such, had in many ways already been drawn into local politics. However, it would not be until 2011 that Jangar would become directly associated with county political ideology and a central element in articulating county policy. For it would be in that year that the then county magistrate would attempt to associate Jangar Culture with President Hu Jintao's core 'Harmonious Society' governing philosophy through his own local innovation, 'Harmonious Culture' (*he wenhua*).[61] In the years that followed, the development of Hoboksar's 'Harmonious Culture' would quickly begin solidifying into actionable policy. In 2015, an attempt to disseminate and popularize this local innovation, a leader of Hoboksar's key ideological education apparatus, the local Party School, published a concise outline of this philosophy in the XUAR capital Party School's academic journal. By deploying a loose set of political formulations, the author describes Harmonious Culture's conceptual development:

> 'Harmonious Culture' was introduced after a comprehensive summary of recent Party governing philosophy and its achievements, and is a scientific summary of the county's historical development and mainstream culture. It is based on factors such as Hoboksar's natural environment, history, folklore, and sociopolitical and economic realities, and is refined into a values orientation of ideological harmony. It prioritizes promoting, researching, structuring, disseminating, and implementing the philosophy of "the

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[61] This was certainly not the first time the term 'Harmonious Culture' (*he wenhua*) has been used (see for example Zheng 2005). Nevertheless, Hoboksar's 'Harmonious Culture' formulation was perceived as being a local innovation on a national policy.

> people's kindness, ethnic tolerance (*zuqun baorong*), political affability, cultural integration, and ecological harmony" as a cultural form. (Lei 2015:31)

She then justifies Jangar's direct association with local political ideology:

> 'Harmonious Culture' includes the Heroic Epic Jangar's idealized ultimate pursuit of achieving the 'harmony and prosperity' (*hemu fuzu*) of Bumba,[62] and even more so it embodies Hoboksar's political affability, harmony, and fraternity of the great family of nationalities, and the healthy and harmonious development of all walks of county life […] 'Harmonious Culture' is the spirit of the people of all the autonomous county's ethnic groups." (Lei 2015:32)

Furthermore, the article emphasizes that only ideologically appropriate 'culture' is culture, and as discussed at length in Chapters 1 and 3, this perspective is in line with Xinjiang's official viewpoint that anything that does not adhere to strictly defined notions of nationality, history, and culture are deemed dangerous and labelled 'extreme'. The author then concludes by highlighting Jangar and Harmonious Culture's use as an 'ideological weapon' against cultural counter-narratives as a mechanism of 'de-extremification' (Lei 2015:32-34; see also chapter 3).

These officially endorsed political assertions are interesting on a number of levels, but for the purposes of this chapter, only two will be highlighted. First, the county's overt connection of local 'culture', and specifically 'Jangar Culture' as an ideological tool for policy execution. Second, an explicit attempt to narrate 'Jangar Culture' as exemplary model for 'harmonious' social ordering. Implied in these claims is Jangar Culture's unique and 'healthy' brand of 'Nationality Unity' ideology. Indeed, though Hoboksar has long been recognized as an ethnically and religiously diverse place that has remained 'unified' in spite of perceived regional instability, Hoboksar has never been officially designated a 'national [level] Nationality Unity model county'. However, as the above article was being written and published, Hoboksar was undertaking an intense political effort to be designated one such Nationality Unity model county. For just months after this article was published, the county held its 'Construct a National [Level] Nationality Unity Progress Model County Work Conference' to push forward with these plans—plans that have continued to today (TCDQZFW 2015; cf. Zhu 2016).

Therefore, Jangar's association with this ideological project was by no means coincidence, but rather part of a much larger and systematic attempt to construct a 'Jangar Brand' that extends beyond economic development interests. With a clear sensitivity to national and regional ideological and policy interests, the county attempted to promote Jangar as an indigenous 'brand' of ideological education by rearticulating these programmes through supposed local 'values' said to be embodied in the Jangar Epic. Jangar, then, has in some ways been developed into an ideological form in its own right through county attempts to construct a ritualized normative structure of exemplary status to be emulated and reproduced both within the county and beyond.

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[62] As discussed in previous chapters, Bumba is the paradise said to have been constructed by Jangar Khan through his wars of unification and battles against evil demons and invaders.

b. The Spirit of 'Jangar Culture'

Just prior to my leaving Hoboksar, I noticed a new, hastily organized exhibition in the Bureau lobby that read, "Make Jangar Culture Become the Motivating Source of Nationality Unity" (*rang jiangge'er wenhua chengwei minzu tuanjie de dongli yuanquan*). The exhibit displayed photos of 'Nationality Unity' performances, programmes, study sessions etc. and included short descriptions and occasional statistics. Above a photo in which I myself was featured, a caption stated confidently, 'Allow the Unique Jangar Culture to Guide All Nationalities and People'. I took a few photos then went to the ICH office to ask what this was all about.

An officer explained that this exhibition was derived from a report completed the month prior regarding 'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' work over the past year. Rooting around her desk she found me a copy. And though most government documents are rather boring and printed on black-and-white paper, this one struck me as unusually 'fancy', with a bright red front cover, complete with the Hoboksar's 'Jangar logo', resembling more a brochure than a government report. The document introduced county 'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' work as follows:

> Our county is the hometown of the Three Great Heroic Epics [of China] Jangar, [whose] culture is profound and has a long history, and also contains many stories of national unity which are to be praised. Our bureau (*wo ju*) focuses on Jangar culture […] and through Jangar cultural activities, 'Bringing Culture to the Countryside', and cultural creation and exchange, continuously promotes the activities of 'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' […]

However, as I read, it became quite obvious that this report really had absolutely nothing to do with Jangar. Curious about this oversight I asked one of the officers who replied that those responsible for drafting the report really did not know how to connect Jangar to 'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' work—and government leaders were not happy about it. She suggested I direct my questions to the officer responsible for the report just down the hall.

As I approached the frustrated cadre, he explained that the phrase had been 'decided by the orders of top-leadership' (*shangmian lingdao de mingling*) in the local Propaganda Department, who tasked his office with connecting Jangar and the 'Nationality Unity We are All One Family' policy. He told me that after consulting with his Bureau's leadership, they were unable to convincingly connect contemporary work with the Jangar Epic. He explained, "This is a really good idea, and if we could do it, it would certainly be great." He grabbed the report from my hands and pointed to the cover, "But we just can't." He complained that after he informed his Propaganda Department superiors of this difficulty, "the leaders still made us do it." He wiped his face with his hand, then looked up: "It's going to be difficult." He groaned. In the weeks that followed, this work continued but was not completed before my departure.

Another major innovation came in the form of a directive to create 'Jangar Good-Governance Culture' (*jiangge'er lianzheng wenhua*) by means of 'mining' the narrative poem for examples of 'good-governance' that could then be used to build a local 'Jangar Good Governance Brand' (*jiangge'er lianzheng pinpai*). In the initial proposal, the County CCP declared the following:

> In recent years, the autonomous county has actively explored new ways to construct good-governance culture by mining the unique resources of Mongol good-governance proverbs, aphorisms, concepts, stories, etc. [...] we should use the "Jangar" cultural resources of the autonomous county to fight corruption and construct good-governance, and provide countermeasures and suggestions for the Commission for Discipline and Inspection to carry out the construction of a good-governance culture and anti-corruption work. (ZGHBKSEXWBGS 2015)

From this, a Jangar Good-Governance Culture Research Centre was established to assist in the publication of a series of books highlighting aspects of good-governance in the 'Jangar Epic' and related folk-stories (Song & He 2015). Though this directive came from County Party Commission for Discipline and Inspection, it was the Culture Bureau who was ultimately tasked with much of the organizing and execution of the programme. Prior to my departure, a single volume had indeed been published, but other than some grand praise for Jangar Culture's contributions to local good-governance in the introduction, very little Jangar related material was included.

In both instances, various county interests applied political pressure to reconfigure 'Jangar' to suit contemporary interests—interests that were subsequently repackaged into new, 'innovative' localized ideological products. However, in neither case did Jangar as 'folk-epic' fit neatly into these ideological formulae. Yet I would contend that this is not necessarily a failure.

In fact, throughout this branding process, the Culture Bureau sponsored a large number of events carrying the 'Jangar' name that were not necessarily connected to Jangar in any way. Smaller programmes such as a 'Jangar' chess tournament, 'Jangar' speech competitions, and even a "Remove Your Hijab [and] Salute the Jangar Epic" (*xianqi nide gaitou lai—xiang jianggeer shishi zhijing*) variety show were regular occurrences. The Bureau established unofficial organizations such as a 'Jangar Fitness and Boxing Team', the 'Jangar [Nationality] Costume Performance Group', and the 'Jangar Propaganda Speech Troupe'—which was organized by the county but made up of every-day citizens who travelled the county to give speeches about policy and to praise the Party. Though these events and organizations were associated with a county-wide branding effort, and though it was agreed that they contained little or no 'Jangar' content, nevertheless it was almost universally recognized that organizations or activities that took Jangar's name were representative of Jangar's 'cultural spirit' (*wenhua jingshen*) and embodied its 'values' (*jiazhi guan*)—however broadly defined.

For example, in 2012 the Hoboksar Art Troup described in the previous section took the Jangar name, becoming the 'Jangar Culture' Art Troupe, and outside its facilities proudly displayed an introduction to its organization noting that the group "passes on pure Mongol nationality music [and art] and uses it to narrate Mongol feelings and deliver pastoral blessings." It continues by describing their work as marrying 'original' (*yuanshi*) Mongol art with 'modern elements' to create 'a completely new form' of artistic expression (*quan xin de yanyi xingshi*). The introduction then displayed photos and summaries of 'traditional' performances, all directly connected to county interests such as activities between its large military population and local residents, performances supporting regional interests such as 'Nationality Unity', or programmes praising national interests such as President Xi multi-trillion RMB 'One-Belt, One-Road' international development initiative. The Jangar 'cultural spirit' here could be said to both reproduce contemporary ideological and policy discourse, and does so through a perceived indigenous 'cultural' vernacular—even if tightly bounded. Though the above examples may seem to suit 'Jangar Epic' only 'in form' that admittedly even those involve in the process found unconvincing, nevertheless, the Jangar Brand clearly represented a specific ideological disposition that was itself re-filtered through a renegotiated and re-narrated 'indigenous' (*bendi*) framework to suit local needs.

For veteran culture-cadres, there are no illusions about what 'culture' in culture-work implies, yet at the same time, there is also no clear distinction between the politicized nature of culture-work and the perceived 'objective' artefacts from which it is derived. It is hoped that by constantly rearticulating 'correct', yet abstract 'theoretical' (ideological) concepts through an indigenous filter in 'Jangar Culture' that politics can be learned and reproduced by the masses. Yet it is also understandable that an ancient Mongol narrative poem may not be capable of reproducing contemporary policy in every, or even most instances. Nevertheless, while the epic itself may be perceived as 'good' but fairly static, the 'Mongol values' embodied in Jangar's exemplary 'cultural spirit' are mutable and able to suit contemporary political form. That is to say, bounded in ritual deployments of correct political discourse, it is in the reciprocal force of policy 'vernacularization' (Anderson 1983; Merry 2006) in the 'cultural spirit' that Jangar proves innovative and becomes a potential ideological exemplar to be imitated.

Conclusion: Jangar, an 'Awkward Exemplar'?

With the stadium lighting dimmed, a deep voice poetically praised Jangar in Mandarin Chinese as laser projectors brought a darkened stage to life with high-definition CGI effects. As each stanza was narrated, 3D Chinese characters with Mongolian translation expand toward the audience as they emerge from storm-clouds and then pass through what appeared to be drops of molten lava falling from the stage's canopy. With every line, this ethereal voice grew louder and more impassioned until its dramatic climax:

> You are a poem, passed down from generation to generation.
> To construct Paradise, you rode horseback over 8,000 miles of crimson clouds.
> To realize this dream, wielding your sword you swept through 80,000 miles of smoke.
> You are Hoboksar's Jangar—allow the pride of all Mongols to live forever in heaven and on earth!

Suddenly, the stage went silent and black to reveal the words 'Hero Jangar' smashing through the screen, followed by a short laser-show and eerie music to the backdrop of what appeared to be the Milky Way. This was the introduction to *Hero Jangar the Musical*—a 7million RMB (approx. 700,000GBP or more than 1,000,000USD) production funded by the county government, which debuted at Hoboksar's 2016 Jangar Culture and Tourism Festival.

This production of *Hero Jangar the Musical* was part of the County's coordinated effort to promote the 'Jangar Brand' throughout Xinjiang and the country. According to an introduction in its elaborate playbill, this production was directly related to a clear hierarchy of political interests by first declaring President Xi's important 2014 speech at the 'Literature and Art Work Forum' in which he singled out Jangar's contribution to the 'Great Revival of the Chinese Nation' (*zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) and the need for 'active guidance' in cultivating the 'mighty spiritual power' (*qiangda jingshen liliang*) of Jangar and other aspects of Chinese

National culture as impetus for the play's development. This was followed by quotes from the then XUAR Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian who claimed cultural products such as Jangar central to 'Nationality Unity' work, as well as the prefectural Party Secretary's command that Jangar be recognized as a valuable 'cultural resource' and for Hoboksar culture work to "focus on the 'Jangar Series [of cultural products]'." Indeed, the goals of this play were made explicit when the statement concluded:

> This play is an innovative work of integration, togetherness, and unity of all Xinjiang nationalities (*minzu*) and promotes cultural prosperity. It will play an important role in further expanding the social influence of the Jangar Epic while vividly displaying Xinjiang's glorious and diverse nationality culture and support the Jangar Epic's application to the World Intangible Cultural Heritage [List].

It is clear that this production was intended as a device to greatly expand the cultural, but also potentially the political influence of this small border county regionally and nationwide. This was, in part, done by incorporating and negotiating specific genres of political discourse into this 'cultural product' to produce specific results—with varying degrees of success. With some outside support, the county administration sought out influential personalities in the predominately Beijing-centric Chinese entertainment industry including a script-writer from the Chinese National Art Troup, a famous television producer, and a director is best known for his work on Chinese Central Television's 'Spring Festival Gala' events—the world's most-watched annual televised event.

The nearly two-hour production, complete with elaborate—and costly—costumes that changed from act to act and intricate props with impressive detail on a custom-built stage, was designed to awe the audience through a combination of flowery performance, beautiful music, and high-tech special effects. Indeed, the music was written and scored by some of the most famous composers in Inner Mongolia, and in some instances, the laser projectors replaced the live-actors—such as in the Act Two epic battle between Jangar and *Mangus* monsters where the warrior khan soared around the screen in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* style fight-scenes, slaying monsters one-by-one. Yet, while certainly visually impressive, this musical production intended to introduce Hoboksar's 'Jangar Culture' to the nation was fraught with complications.

Though meant to be played and toured independently by the county 'Jangar Culture' Art Troup, the production was so large that it required more actors than the organization could provide. What's more, ironically, the custom-built stage was so massive that the play could

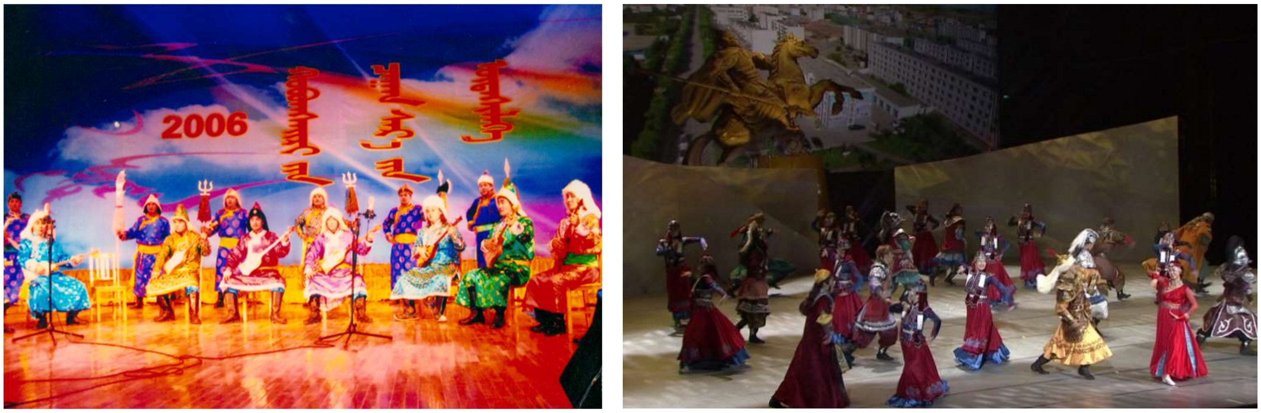

Figure 16: (Left) Scene from Hoboksar's 2006 small-scale musical production of Jangar was widely seen among Hoboksar locals as a tasteful musical adaptation of the Jangar Epic. (Right) The concluding scene of the 2016 musical with the elaborate costumes, large modern stage, and high-definition background and laser projections of the production are clearly displayed.

not be shown in Hoboksar's 'Jangar Theatre', but rather was moved to the newly constructed 8,000m^2 county sport stadium. In fact, the stage was so large that not even the famed Urumqi People's Theatre in the XUAR capital could support it, and in the entire provincial-level region, only one theatre had the capacity to hold it. Due to its size and elaborate design, one Bureau leader complained that it took ten days to set-up and another ten to take-down—and this would need to be done for every stop on the planned national tour.

The trouble did not end there, for while it is certainly true that each very 'busy' scene was indeed stunningly beautiful, the play seemed to lack a coherent story. From scene to scene, the musical pieces did little to explain the story of Jangar and at the end of each act the narrator's lines contained no more than one or two sentences for context. And though local opinions regarding the play varied greatly, in a conversation with two local Torghut office secretaries, even as they claimed to be very familiar with Jangar's story, the production left them 'confused'.

Taking the first act's enemy invasion of Bumba as an example, one of the women explained that a significant amount of emphasis had been placed on a woman holding a child struck by an arrow. The dead child was in the spotlight on centre stage, and a song sung about agony and death. She claimed that for many local Torghuts, this resembled a well-known episode of the epic in which Jangar Khan is struck by an enemy's poison arrow and must be brought back to life by otherworldly powers—yet here the child dies. She explains that it wasn't until several acts later that she discovered the child was not supposed to be Jangar after all, nor was this portion of the play even depicted in the epic. "I was completely confused from the very first act." She told me. Later, when I inquired about this 'added' scene, an Art Troup member explained that it was the product of the scriptwriter's artistic license and used to introduce the main plot—Jangar's war to 'unify Bumba' and create paradise on earth. The second secretary was less critical but added that she believed the county's 2006 musical (mentioned in the previous chapter)—though simpler and shorter—was far superior: "[Wuyinshan's 2006] musical told the story clearly, and even sang lines from the epic!" She claimed. "Perhaps [the 2016] version is 'too artistic' […] we just didn't understand it." She noted euphemistically, but then added laughing, "I don't think the people in Beijing even read [the epic]!"

Yet, if the play was light on story, county self-promotion and 'ideological' content was in surplus. For in the play, not only were Hoboksar's landscapes featured throughout, but it was repeatedly and erroneously implied that Hoboksar was/is the location of Bumba and that the 'Jangar Epic' is somehow unique to Hoboksar Torghuts. In fact, the play began by anachronistically featuring the recently erected statue of Jangar in Hoboksar's 'Jangar Square' and concluded with a slideshow of the Jangar Culture and Art Palace and associated sculptures. Clearly, this was representative of tourism and investment promotion efforts by county officials.

During this 'slideshow', in what was apparently an attempt to represent a now registered 'National-level Intangible Cultural Heritage' programme, so-called 'ritual felicitations' (*zhuzan ci*) claimed the Heroic Epic Jangar an embodiment of 'love of home and country' (*jia guo qinghuai*) and functioned to pass patriotic sentiments to future generations. As discussed in previous chapters, this claim is not at all unusual; but what was unusual was the subsequent connection of this recognized 'patriotic' work of fiction with an actual historical event—what is known as the 'Eastern Return of the Torghut Tribe' (*tu'erhute buluo dong gui*).[63]

Officially described in multiple formulations as 'a patriotic return to the fatherland' due to 'the Torghut people's devotion to country' so as to 'contribute to the national and nationality unity of the Chinese Nation' (Zhang 1999:153-156; cf. Ye'erda 2008; Naidai 2010), this so-called 'Eastern Return' describes the devastating 18th-century migration of the Oirats/Kalmyks from the Russian Volga region to present-day Xinjiang. The majority of 'returning' Mongols were settled with the Torghut Ubashi Khan in present-day Xinjiang's Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, but smaller groups led by lesser nobles were separated and settled in other regions—one such settlement was present-day Hoboksar. Indeed, contemporary Torghuts have become an important part of a nationalist historiography as they have been narrated into China's national story as the decedents of 'Heroes of the Eastern Return'—an event even portrayed in the popular period drama of the same name. Yet this event has virtually nothing to do with the epic in any way. Nevertheless, it is clear that this was an attempt to illustrate

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[63] This label is problematic, in that the 'returning' population was represented by nobles of multiple groups—most notably the Torghut, Khoshuds, and Dorvods. Also, influenced by Soviet and Eurocentric historiography this historical 'event' is alternatively known as the 'exodus' (Baumer 2018:96) or 'flight' (Atwood 2004:180) of the Kalmyks. See also Perdue (2005:298).

Jangar's educational value and reread its 'spirit' within existing ideological discourses in relation to numerous levels of national, regional, and county interests.

After a lengthy soliloquy regarding the painful, but undeniably 'patriotic' Eastern Return, the narrator concludes:

> The horn of Eastern Return still rings in our ears. The torch of the Eastern Return still shines in our hearts. Standing before Hoboksar's beautiful pastures, I understand why our ancestors sang Jangar to us and why we must transmit Jangar to future generations. This is because our nation (*minzu*) needs heroes; it needs courage; it needs patriotism and honesty. For the prosperity of our country, for the Revival of China (*zhonghua fuxing*), and for the unity of all nationalities, let us abide by the 'dream of Jangar' and live it in the world.[64] Let us pursue the 'spirit of Jangar' and follow it as we do the sun and the moon.

As the play's final declaration, this statement reflects well this chapter's key proposition that through the accretion of hierarchically defined interests and the incorporation of rigidly structured political formulations, contemporary culture-work works to draw recognized cultural products—including 'traditional' culture—into a flexible, yet nevertheless tightly bounded ethicopolitical realm of discourse that claims a monopoly on 'correct' representations of indigenous culture. For example, the above account not only attempts to associate the recognized 'patriotic' Eastern Return with Jangar, but Jangar's utility as a mechanism to realize President Xi's proclamation of a 'Great Revival of the Chinese Nation', as an indigenous re-articulation of the 'Chinese Dream' (*zhongguo meng*), and a positive cultural contribution to the construction of a Socialist Spiritual Civilization by living life in this reformulated 'spirit' of Jangar Khan. But while in Hoboksar, the recognized contribution of the 'Torghut tribe' to China is often a source of pride, for some locals this direct, and indeed unconvincing association of Jangar with the Eastern Return was cause for concerned.

For example, during a dinner I organized to discuss 'Jangar Cultural Development' in late 2016, the opinions regarding the play among Mongol participants varied greatly. One claimed that the play was 'exciting/stimulating' (*hen ciji*), while others were less enthusiastic. One middle-aged woman voiced her own concern: "What were they thinking!" She exclaimed while topping up the table's beer glasses. "Hoboksar is Jangar's Hometown, and [be the production] good or bad, it is our right to make this play." However, referring to Bayingolin's most populous Mongol dominated county, she continued, “But Hejing County is the *Eastern Return’s Hometown*!”

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[64] This 'Jangar Dream' is clearly an indirect association with President Xi Jinping's guiding theory of a 'China Dream' (*zhongguo meng*). For a fairly comprehensive collection of academic perspectives on 'China Dream', see Xu Menyou et al. (2016) *Research on China Dream and the National Revival.* Beijing: CASS (Chinese).

Widely recognized as the historic centre of post-Eastern Return Torghut influence, Hejing county has for decades claimed the title the ‘Eastern Return’s Hometown’ (*donggui de guxiang*), and for this reason the fact that the play seemed to imply that Hoboksar is the centre of Jangar Culture *and* the Eastern Return Culture proved a source of anxiety. “How can we take [*Hero Jangar the Musical*] to Bayingolin?” She asked rhetorically. Then, referring to Hejing as Hoboksar’s ‘big brother’, she stated: “[They] will think that we’re ‘snatching’ their culture!” While it is unclear as to how prevalent this sentiment was prior to her comment, most people around the table seemed to agree. Indeed, following on from her comments, the most senior man at the table lifted his beer glass and added, “Let’s hope [Hejing] doesn’t ‘snatch’ Jangar!” As illustrated above, opinions regarding the play varied greatly among the local population, yet some of the strongest sentiments came from Culture Bureau officials themselves.

In an interview with the ‘Jangar Culture’ Art Troup director a few months after its debut, though at first he praised the musical, as I gently pressed regarding some issues raised by interlocutors over past months the director began distancing himself from the production and finally admitted the play has ‘many inadequacies’ (*you bushao de quedian*). Like so many people, the director compared the 2006 version to this one:

> [The audience] could watch [the 2006 version] and they would know, ‘Oh, that’s how it was!’ It was really obvious […] after watching [the 2016 version], the audience may feel a little bit conflicted in their hearts (*xinli maodun*) [and they might ask], ‘What the heck is going on?!’ (*daodi za hui shi’er?!*)

Indeed, when watching *Hero Jangar the Musical* one almost gets the sense that each act of the play was designed to check a box off a list—and some acts more obviously than others. Tourism and investment: check. This important speech: check. That critical document: check. Education, ideology, nationality unity: check, check, check. As he discussed the problems with the musical the director became progressively more animated, complaining about what ‘they’ had done—yet ‘they’ always remained anonymous. At times, it seemed he was referring to individuals, at other times, offices, actors, or the Beijing creative team.

After a short euphemism laden tirade about the musical ignoring important aspects of the epic story, of local culture, neglecting to incorporate Jangarqi etc. while overloading the play with unrelated interests, he concluded: “I’m not sure what ‘they’ were thinking. ‘They’ had many ideas […] and then, in the end, it was all it just a wild mess (*luan qi ba zao*).”

Interestingly, while in previous statements it was fairly clear to whom ‘they’ referred, here it seemed that ‘they’ suddenly morphed into the myriad of vested interests that transformed this cultural product into a ‘wild mess’. In fact, the Art Troup director insisted that he planned to make major revisions to the play—and at great cost—so that it would be suitable to take on the road. However, it was also very clear to me that to the director the incorporation of such interests into Jangar was most certainly not improper, rather it was simply improperly executed. Indeed, though many seemed disappointed in the musical’s final product, no one with whom I spoke claimed to find the obvious politicization of Jangar inappropriate.

Borrowing from Turgen’s terminology outlined in Chapter 1, it may be said that these were recognized as a characteristic of the ‘cultural system’ (*wenhua tizhi*), that is to say, aspects of Jangar Brand construction that need not necessarily strictly adhere to the epic’s story provided it contains Jangar’s ‘cultural spirit’ (*wenhua jingshen*). Yet as this thesis has attempted to illustrate, despite often being described as unchanging through time, what constitutes Jangar and ‘Jangar spirit’ has been subject to flexible interpretation, rearticulation, and manipulation to suit contemporary goals and moral imperatives. The Jangar ‘cultural spirit’ depicted in *Hero Jangar the Musical* worked to reproduce contemporary ideological and policy discourses in a fairly straightforward manner, yet creatively re-filtered and renegotiated these materials by re-narrating it through a supposed ‘indigenous’ vernacular. As this example and others have attempted to show, various county interests attempted to reconfigure ‘Jangar’ to suit a vast array of political and ideological interests with the expectation that *Hero Jangar the Musical* might assist in popularizing a ‘Jangar Brand’ in its multitude of configurations to construct an exemplary model to be emulated, and in doing so expand Hoboksar’s prestige and political and economic clout. Yet despite tireless effort and substantial expense, at least in the cases explored above, Jangar has at times been clumsily and unconvincingly reformulated to suit various, often contradictory, cultural narratives and political interests to meet these goals. In this sense, Jangar has indeed become Hoboksar’s ‘awkward exemplar’.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Through Culture Transform Humanity

Rushing over a wooden bridge and through an ornate red and green glazed commemorative archway said to be engraved with the calligraphy of the great Qianlong Emperor, I hurried down the pristine gardens of Beijing's Imperial Academy. Finally passing a famous bronze statue of Confucius, I entered the 14th-century Yilun Hall, a structure recognized historically as an important lecture-hall for aspiring officials' instruction in the Classics, and even hosted lectures from emperors (Li & Gao 2010:35).

This week was the Confucian Temple and Imperial Academy's 'Traditional Chinese Culture Festival' hosting an invitation-only lecture by the celebrated Chinese classicist and philosopher, Chen Lai. I was lucky enough to be offered a ticket by a Beijing academic, which I presented at the door and was promptly seated in the centre-section alongside some journalists and just in front of a cluster of seemingly disinterested cameramen. The lecture scheduled for today was titled 'Traditional Culture and Core Values'—a clear nod to the current administration's vigorously promoted 'Core Socialist Values' ideology.

Historically, the Beijing Imperial Academy functioned as a key artery in the circulation and development of Chinese dynastic political thought and served as China's highest-ranking academic institution and education administrative arm from the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) onward (cf. Twitchet & Fairbank 1980:122; Man-Cheong 2004). Though now merely recognized as an important site of local heritage, it was clear to me that a government-organized lecture at this historically significant venue was intended to symbolically elevate the content of today's pre-approved presentation. Yet this ancient hall's golden walls and yellow upholstered lecture-seating wasn't at all what I expected, resembling, rather, something more like a loud conference centre at a luxury hotel than a pseudo-monastic place of learning. Nevertheless, as the speaker took to the stage, the audience quieted as they were seated.

Waiting for the talk to begin, I struck up a conversation with a journalist beside me. Recognizing that, despite being a foreigner, I spoke Mandarin and had at least a rudimentary understanding of Ruist works, she excitedly began berating me with facts and statistics. For example, she explained that Professor Chen was not only the Director of Tsinghua University's classical studies and president of the influential National History of Chinese Philosophy Society but that he was also the recipient of the Ministry of Culture's 'Confucius Culture Prize' for his contributions to Chinese philosophy, and in 2015 was even invited to lecture on Chinese 'traditional culture' and contemporary political values at the CPC Politburo's 12th study session presided over by Chairman Xi himself. "His influence is great!" She exclaimed as she jotted something down and the talk commenced.

Professor Chen began his lecture by highlighting its theoretical significance in relation to the current administration's emphasis on 'traditional culture' and its development as the historical foundation of contemporary society, its 'values', etc. But, perhaps more importantly, he emphasized traditional culture's role in catalysing the Party's promise of a 'Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation' (*zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) and to ultimately realizing Chairman Xi's goal of a 'Chinese Dream' (*zhongguo meng*)—both central aspects of contemporary Party thought.[65] He then continued by explaining the basic assumptions underlying his analysis of 'traditional cultural values' by defining his terms 'excellent traditional culture' (*youxiu chuantong wenhua*) and 'values' (*jiazhi*), both as analytical but also social concepts. And though not explicitly stated, his notion of 'culture' falls well within the officialised 'narrow' definition of culture as outlined in contemporary Chinese 'Civilizational' theory—discussed at length in Chapter 1. However, though drawing extensively from Xi Thought and a genre of literature amenable to contemporary Party ideology, his discussion was considerably more abstract than most 'officialised' discussions of 'culture' I'd read in relation to Cultural Construction and/or its development. For it was Professor Chen's contention that the catalyst for civilizational development lies not only in the interplay between civilizations through 'culture', but more importantly, in foundational ‘cultural values’. Looking up from his notes, Chen asked rhetorically: “Now, what are values?”

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[65] For an introduction to the 'Chinese Dream' and 'Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation' from a variety of perspectives see Kerr (2015).

By no means claiming his definition exclusive, through the familiar process of gradually repositioning the notion of ‘values’ within recognized politically correct discursive frames, Chen was successful in honing his notion of ‘values’ into a simple, and on the surface fairly unproblematic, definition that understands ‘values’ to be distinct preexisting orientations regarding what is ‘good’ in a country, a society, and among individuals. However, for Chen it is critical to recognize that ‘values’ are contextual and exist in relation to one another, with some emphasized over others and not all necessarily compatible. Therefore, Chen argues that above all, “values represent a kind of choice.” In other words, for Professor Chen, then, ‘values’ are definite and definable social artefacts set in opposition to one another and expressed through cultural models in practice and claims that it is the responsibility of the subject to actively choose values grounded in ‘excellent’ cultural models.[66]

After defining his terms, Chen claimed to ‘bring to earth’ (*luo di*) this highly theoretical discussion by illustrating how contemporary Core Socialist Values are not only firmly rooted in Chinese ‘traditional values’, but implied that they have always been the inevitable evolutionary trajectory of Chinese cultural values. For example, Chen interprets the Ruist concept ‘*gui*’ (贵) to be the closest translation to a contemporary notion of ‘values’, as in Confucius’s statement “of all things of heaven and earth, man is most valuable (*gui*)”.[67] Then, by asserting respect for human life a ‘core traditional value’, he claims that there is evidence of ‘ideological unity’ in this and Chairman Mao’s 1949 statement “of all things in this world, man is most precious.” (Mao 1968[1949]:1401)

Chen then attempts to illustrate this continuity of ‘Chinese values’ by dissecting the ‘three-levels’ of Core Socialist Values—that is to say the values of the ‘state’ (prosperity and strength, democracy, civilization, and harmony), ‘society’ (freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law), and ‘individual’ (patriotism, dedication, honesty, and amicability) as defined by the ‘core values’ ideology—and then rereading so-called ‘core tradition values’ of Ruist literature into this anachronistic cultural frame. Throughout his lecture, Professor Chen constructed an argument that Core Socialist Values are indeed founded in ‘excellent traditional culture’, yet nevertheless maintains that the stratification of Socialist Values into a state/society/individual distinction weakens its position in society. Claiming that ‘core traditional values’ of the Ruist tradition made no distinction between state, society, and individual, he suggests rethinking Socialist Values as a crosscutting (*guantong de*) 'virtue system' (*meide tixi*) of self-cultivation ritually reproduced and equally relevant at all levels. Paraphrasing from Chairman Xi regarding Confucianism and 'traditional culture' as a system of governance, Chen concludes: "Everyone—*everyone* in the Chinese Nation—must become subjects of this Chinese virtue system."

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[66] Chen (2015) discusses an earlier yet similar formulation of this argument in his book *The Core Values of Chinese Civilization*.

[67] It is notable that ‘*gui*’ in this context has been alternatively translated ‘noble’. See Legge (1990:476).

The lecture concluded with vigorous applause, yet I sat silent for a moment trying to collect my thoughts, for it appeared Professor Chen was making a subtle yet fairly radical claim regarding 'values'. That is to say, rather than understanding 'values' to be normative processes at least in part defined from below within a fairly democratic market of ideas, Chen appeared to imply that 'values' should be defined from above and founded in 'traditional culture' deemed 'excellent', and that these are the only reasonable 'choice' for a 'Chinese Nation'.

Curious about my opinion regarding the lecture, the adjacent journalist caught-up with me as I left the hall. Still somewhat confused, I inquired as to her interpretation of Professor Chen's conclusions: Was he claiming 'cultural values' not to be an expression of individuals' value orientations, but a force to *change* individuals' value orientations? Seemingly confused by my confusion, she replied matter-of-factly, "Of course [he was]!"

Perhaps recognizing my surprise, she explained Professor Chen was describing a uniquely 'Chinese' understanding of 'culture' as a force for transformation—something she claimed to be repeated throughout Chinese classic texts. "It is exactly as Chairman Xi says," she asserted in an unusually 'official' linguistic register. "We must *yi wen hua ren*."—we must 'through culture transform humanity'.

I. *Wenhua* and the 'Urge to Civilize'

The phrase *yi wen hua ren* was first introduced by Chairman Xi shortly after his ascension to General Secretary through a series of speeches regarding Chinese 'traditional culture' and culture-work and represents a brilliant discursive strategy to at once re-narrate 'culture' in Xi-era politics while simultaneously encapsulating the core of Party culture-policy since even before the foundation of the PRC through classical Ruist concepts and language (Xi 2014a, 2014b, 2015). But so as to better appreciate the significance of the phrase in contemporary Chinese culture-politics, before going any further it may be productive to more fully explore the historical context of the term 'culture' (*wenhua*) through the connection between the characters *wen* (文) and *hua* (化) in classic social theory. This is because until recently, *wenhua* has generally been conceived not as *being* something, but rather as *doing* something—as an ongoing process of 'patterning' and 'order' making.

In fact, contemporary Chinese scholarship often places the conceptual genesis of the term *wenhua* in the *Book of Changes* (ch. *zhouyi*) during the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) (cf. Di 2006:225; Qin 2015:3-4). There, *wenhua* is understood as a patterned ordering of heaven and earth, and therefore the book guides exemplary rulers known as *junzi* to "observes the rules/operations of the heavens (*tianwen*) to understand seasonal variation; Observe the rules/operations of men (*renwen*) to transform (*hua*) earth through education." (Zhouyi 2016:105)[68] Though this section of canon does not explicitly marry *wen* and *hua,* it nevertheless created a theoretical foundation for its conceptual development through its combination of the heretofore sperate characters *ren* (civilized humanity) and *wen* (patterning/order) and their association with social transformation (*hua*) (cf. Wang 1991:146; Di 2006:225). In this sense, the operations of human beings were understood as ritualized, rules-based order, in contrast to the social world which is subject to disorder (Tang 2004:1; cf. Puett 2010:103). By spreading the knowledge of proper 'operations of men', patterned order is brought to a world consumed by unpredictable, and ultimately disastrous effects of the untamed, uncivilized natures of men.

Importantly, while the above excerpt describes an order of ritualized social behaviour, *wen* describes above all *observable* qualities of 'order', both human but also non-human (cf. Ma 2014) and conceptually connected to *wenli* (纹理), or patterning (Ames & Hall 1987:322; Wang 2006:3-4). For example, when discussing the interpretation of trigrams to understand The Way (*dao*) of heaven and humanity *The Book of Changes*, notes: "Elements [of the trigrams] are mixed and order (*wen*) arises therefrom." (Zhouyi 2016:338). While the *Book of Rites* (ch. *liji*) deploys the term in the following manner: "[As with the five notes] the five colours form order (*wen*) and are without chaos." (Liji 1947:83) Moreover, *The Analects* (ch. *lunyu*) goes even further by conceptually detaching *wen* from human internalities altogether, claiming that inner qualities (*zhi*) must combine with outward ones (*wen*), and when properly refined cultivates the exemplary man, the *junzi* (Kongzi 2017:98).[69]

As these examples illustrate, *wen* should be understood as outwardly, observable behaviours of order, rather than inwardly essentializing qualities of people or things. *Hua*, in turn, indicates a process of becoming or transformation. For example, in his essay "The Chinese Urge to Civilize," historian Wang Gungwu explains *hua* as follows: "As for the word *hua* in

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[68] Interestingly, this section is also purported to be genesis of the term *wenming*, now translated 'civilization'.

[69] *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Analects* discussed above are three canonical texts of the "Five Classics and Four Books" (*sishu wujing*)—the authoritative Confucian texts written before 300 BCE.

wen-hua, its most common meaning is to transform, change, or absorb insofar as it meant to change people, customs, or ways of thought, there is something of the idea of the aggressive, expansionist idea of 'to civilize'." (Wang 1991:147) Explaining that the theoretical notion of *hua* developed gradually to describe a process of not simply change but of betterment and eventually Sinicization, he continues: "[T]he 'urge to civilize' is the urge to *hua*, 'to change others for the better'." (ibid.) That is to say, over time *hua* came to describe a civilizing process closely linked to acceptance and reproduction of ritual propriety in everyday life (see also Feuchtwang & Rowlands 2019:156).

Yet, according to Chinese anthropologist and historian Di Yongjun (2006), it was not until the Western Han period (206 BCE – 220 CE) that *wen* and *hua* were conceptually married through the works of the scholar Liu Xiang in the *Shuo Yuan*, a collection of anecdotes of good governance and security of kingdoms when it states: "The Saint's *(shengren)* rule over the earth is first through order and ethics (*wen de*) and last through force. Martial force arises out of recalcitrance. When this occurs, ethical civilizing (*wenhua*) is useless, and they [i.e. the unruly populace] must be eliminated." (Liu 1985:41; cf. Qin 1988:108; Huang 2004:6-7; Wang 2018:33).[70] Here, *wenhua* is clearly understood as a mode of governance, where the ruler is advised to utilize systems of ritual propriety*,* or *li* (see Chapter 1), to properly cultivate his subjects and promote social order. In this sense, 'culture' so conceived maintains the ritualized aspects of 'civilized' behaviour and is thus regarded as transformative and a processual constant.[71] Notwithstanding, it wouldn't be until nearly two thousand years later at the end of the 19th century that *wenhua* would begin to be conceived more as a state of being than a process of ritualized person-making (Wang 1991:146). It would be during this time that *wen* and *hua* would be terminologically fused as *wenhua* to take on a more familiar 'Western' appearance as something resembling a nominative 'culture' in large part due to intellectual and linguistic influences of Japanese translations and interpretations of these Western concepts (Huang 2011:4).

Consequently, by claiming to underscore China's own unique intellectual history, Chairman Xi's popularization of the phrase *yi wen hua ren* represents a deliberate attempt to conceptually expand the notion of *wenhua* beyond a 'civilizational' product described in Chapter 1 by emphasizing its arguably more important role as ethicopolitical processes through the strategic utilization of literary Chinese's grammatical fluidity. For in the phrase *yi wen hua ren*, grammatically speaking the character *yi* represents a sophisticated literary structure by behaving as a 'coverb' to a main verbal phrase, and here serves the same purpose as the English preposition 'through', 'by way of', etc. Yet due to the grammatical restraints of this four-character idiom, the character *yi* works to forcefully decouple *wen* from *hua* in *wenhua* (culture) by at once emphasizing *wen* yet requiring *hua* to serve as a verbal phrase in relation to *ren* (humanity). Thus, though the term *wenhua* remains recognizable, through the conceptual separation of *wen* and *hua,* this expression at once attempts to draw on the recognized historical literary tradition discussed above to bolster its legitimacy, while simultaneously representing a powerful semantic shift in emphasis. And though Chairman Xi did not invent the expression, by repeatedly evoking the phrase in relation to 'traditional culture' and culture-work Chairman Xi effectively elevated this reformulated theory to the level of national guiding theory as an aspect Xi Jinping Thought (Qin 2015:24). In this way, some contemporary Chinese politicians and Party theorists claim a direct intellectual genealogy from times immemorial to present and imply contemporary Party policy, firmly grounded in 'excellent traditional culture', to be the inevitable evolutionary product of a uniquely Chinese intellectual tradition (e.g. Zhao & Deng 2012; Feng & Liu 2016; Wang 2018). As one theorist notes, "From the Confucian classics, to Democratic-Republicanism, to Marxism-Leninism, to Core Socialist Values, '*yi wen hua ren*' has moulded humanity's intellect and spiritually supported individuals of all eras." (Li 2015:28)

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[70] In fact, this passage of the *Shou Yuan* is by far the most widely cited of Chinese texts in contemporary Chinese academic work related to definitions of culture and is often referenced as an example of China's 'cultural' uniqueness in relation to a Western 'culture' rooted in Latin based etymology of 'cultivation' and its association with European Romanticism (cf. Herzfeld 1988:53; Williams 2015:49-54).

[71] For example, famed Chinese classicist Peng Lin (2016) claims in his recent book *The Civilization of Ritual and Music and Chinese Cultural Spirit* argues that an emphasis on *li* is what distinguishes Chinese culture (*wenhua*) from the Western culture and argues that it is precisely in this distinction that China may provide a potential alternative to the West's cultural development model.

For this reason, I contend that understanding *wenhua* in the context of contemporary Party ideology, and re-read through indigenous concepts, presents a convenient heuristic encapsulating a wider concept of a ritualized social-ordering that can be useful in navigating analytically the complex co-constituting relationship between a discursively produced 'state' and 'society' through a Chinese vernacular. In this sense 'culture' as *wenhua* should not be understood as an externalization of shared interior dispositions (e.g. Geertz 1993:89) or essentialized social attributes from below (cf. Gellner 1983:8-14; Herzfeld 1988:53), but rather as a flexible yet supremely hierarchical ethicopolitical mode of governance through model emulation in which anyone may participate and cooperatively realized in practice (Wang 1991:151). Indeed, with particular attention to national 'ethical construction' Chairman Xi himself emphasized the utility of 'traditional culture and virtues' represented in Core Socialist Values to "effectively integrate social consciousness" and described it as "an important aspect of a national system of governance and governing capacity." (Xi 2014:165; cf. 2015; Gao 2017; Xue 2017)

Though as described above the phrase *yi wen hua ren* is influential in theory and policy circles, it would be an overstatement to claim it dominant in popular discourse—particularly among Xinjiang Mongols. Perhaps due in part to local Mongols tracing ethical lineages not to 'Ruism' but 'Mongol' alternatives such as the 'Jangar Epic', though I had certainly heard the phrase used in Hoboksar's Culture Bureau it was not prominent and primarily only deployed by more senior cadres (mostly when quoting speeches, etc.). Nevertheless, *yi wen hua ren* seems to illustrate well some central arguments of this dissertation regarding both implicit and explicit practices among Hoboksar culture-cadres. This is to say, though decidedly abstract, the *yi wen hua ren* proposition traces its own authoritative lineages not only in accepted Chinese-style Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Post-Reform political discourse, but consciously works to connect contemporary socialist ideology with an idealized, re-narrated 'cultural' past. *Yi wen hua ren* is at once an example of policy guiding theory but is also an exemplar of how 'cultural' concepts may be decontextualized by filtering them through specific ideological frames and recontextualized to suit contemporary political contexts. It represents the attractiveness of such ethicopolitical models for which actors actively seek connection to legitimize localized, and even personal behaviours and interests—something clearly evident in the construction of a so-called 'Jangar Culture'.

II. Jangar 'Centred': Review of the Chapters

Through an analysis of culture-policy formulation and execution in a Chinese border county, this dissertation has argued that 'policy' is itself an important social phenomenon through which to examine social relations. In each chapter, I have tried to show the various ways in which people navigate this highly consequential political discourse. Inspired in part by an 'Anthropology of Policy' approach, this dissertation has maintained that at least in the case of China the influences of policy are impossible to ignore since it encroaches on all areas of public, and even private, life. This thesis has illustrated numerous cases in which policy has indeed acted as an 'organizing principle of society', by generating social procedures that 'legitimate' and even 'motivate' conduct (Shore & Wright 2005:4). In the case of Jangar cultural development this has meant encouraging—sometimes forcefully—the reevaluation and reconfiguration of social relations 'to create new social and semantic terrains' (Shore & Wright 2011:2) for which Jangar, as 'excellent nationality culture', can be 'correctly' realized, appreciated, and promoted.

Though admittedly by no means comprehensive, nevertheless by tracing the conceptual development of a key term in Chinese policy discourse and its consequences through a specific case, this dissertation has attempted analyse 'culture' as what Raymond Williams (2015) might call a ‘keyword’ in Chinese policy discourse. Yet despite official narratives that present a fairly straightforward linear conceptual development of the term, this study has endeavoured to emphasize ideological variation, discontinuity, and what Irvine & Gal (2019:2) describe as the “locally and historically specific framings, suffused with the political and moral interests of the social positions and projects in which [it is] embedded.” This thesis has taken a local process of ‘Cultural Construction’ and cultural ‘development’ as a case study for how specific authoritative political discourses ‘work’ to organize society in contemporary China.

Yet while some studies of political discourse as a mechanism for social organization have focused on ‘linguistic governmentalities’, (Urla 2019; Rojo & Del Percio 2019), ‘language ideologies’ (Bauman & Briggs 2006; Irvine & Gal 2019), neoliberal ‘practice’ (Bourdieu 1998) etc., this thesis argues that at least in the cases discussed, the construction of authoritative political discourses in China and their reification in practical circumstances might be more productively viewed as a process of ‘ritualization’ of discursive practice (Bell 1992; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Seligman et al. 2008; Sax et al. 2010; Feuchtwang & Rowlands 2019). To illustrate this, each chapter has followed the ways in which people participate in this multi-level process from various vantages, attempting to engage analytically the busy interconnections between micro and macro processes in which ‘Jangar culture’ has been implicated (Clarke et al. 2015; Wright 2016). Chapter 1 began this journey by outlining the highly sophisticated and technocratic nature of the ideological discourses that underpin policy practices in China through a brief discussion of the ‘narrow’ officialised definition of ‘culture’ supporting national culture-policy. I then situate this deliberately vague and abstract theoretical material within Hoboksar’s culture-work by illustrating the painstaking effort of translating and rearticulating this language to make it ‘workable’ in relation to ‘Jangar Culture’, so as to suit local interests.

In Chapter 2, I presented Hoboksar County and the ‘Jangar Epic’ as spaces experiencing radical social change. Yet while the transformation of the county’s economy, ethnic make-up, and built-landscape is undeniable, I illustrated how locally Jangar is nevertheless discursively constructed as remaining unchanged over time—despite tremendous and quite obvious changes. This chapter illustrates that much like the *yi wen hua ren* concept described above, it is through the strategic process of decontextualizing and re-contextualizing ‘cultural’ discourses (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1992; Silverstein & Urban 1996) that Jangar undergoes a process of ‘entextualisation’ in which a new authoritative and ‘politically correct’ reading is produced to suit contemporary circumstances (Urban 1996:21)—a process known as *gu wei jin yong*, or ‘making the past serve the present’. To illustrate how policy discourses influence local conduct that, consciously or not, contributes to the government’s ideal model of subjecthood, I position this within the arguments of subsequent chapters by outlining three competing narratives regarding Jangar, its history, and its place as Hoboksar's local representative 'traditional culture'. Unsurprisingly, the seemingly generationally-defined competing narratives follow the overall development of national and regional culture-policy in recent decades.

To better contextualize policy at the local-level, Chapter 3 shifted focus by examining policy at the regional-level. This chapter illustrated how the extreme politicization of the region might contribute to the theorization of ritualized discursive practice by unpacking the notion of 'sensitivity' in Xinjiang. The goals of this chapter were twofold: First, by challenging the often unquestioned and conceptually separated 'domains' of domestic policy (e.g. 'cultural', 'economic', 'security' etc., see Strathern 2000) this chapter emphasized the complex web of interrelationships within historically situated policy actions and reactions by drawing attention to their often hidden, yet nevertheless co-constructive relationships (DeLanda 2006; Brady 2016). Second, through a brief examination of a consequential political formulation, this chapter introduced what I described as 'text power', arguing that ritually-reproduced authoritative political language behaves as a 'marker', delineating the borders of acceptable political behaviour and thereby constraining actions within the boundaries of formalized language. Building on the theoretical contributions to ritual theory in anthropology by Bloch (1975), Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994), Seligman et al. (2008), Puett (2015), Feuchtwang (2016) etc., through this rather extreme example I concluded that to ritualistically deploy formalized political language does not necessarily imply claims to 'truth', but rather indicates the political limits around possible realities autonomous actors may construct.

In her brilliant investigation into Qing dynastic 'Grand Sacrifice' rituals, anthropologist Angela Zito (1997) illustrates a key concept in dynastic social ordering known as "centring" (*zhong*) by which correct deployments of ritual (*li*) through stately ceremonies harmonized sociopolitical and cosmological order and worked to structure ritual hierarchies in China. Similar to the arguments developed in Chapters 1 to 3, Zito contends that *li* cannot simply be recognized as ritual action, but rather must be understood as a combination of both ritual text *and* its performance. She argues that in dynastic China, through *li* text, discourse, and behaviour were merged so that "subjectivity and language were organized to operate within the world rather than upon it," and the human mind "constantly performed itself into being through actions of significance," that is to say through the practices of *wen*—what I have translated 'patterned ordering' but Zito terms 'text-patterns' (1997:49). Zito argues that this powerful process of 'centring' became a "vehicle for perceiving and reinforcing continuity and connection where none is readily apparent" (ibid.:80) demonstrating "the 'reality' that things which seemed to be separate were, in fact, part of the same (that is, his [i.e. imperial]) domain and purview." (ibid.:154) Through circulation, hierarchical transmission, and expected emulation of ritual text/performance, ritual discourses worked to naturalize elementary categories and political hierarchies as actors participated in the 'centring' of the world by navigating within the countless ritualized moments of everyday life. As Zito notes elsewhere, as a highly dispersed civilizing project, "'Centering' thus constantly creates itself through the correct separation of upper and lower, the correct bounding of inner and outer." (1994:105). Indeed, Feuchtwang and Rowlands (2019) have recently argued that this notion of 'centring' has historically played a crucial role in defining a Chinese civilizing process and 'civilizational' project.

I find Zito's notion of 'centring' through text/performance ritualization helpful in collapsing a state/society distinction while maintaining a focus on a rigidly hierarchical political structure that self-consciously recognizes a 'centre' while simultaneously constantly performing it into being. Indeed, while it may be problematic to consider the ritualization of contemporary Chinese authoritative political discourse an antecedent to a dynastic notion of 'centring', the 'text/performance' of accommodation, absorption, and adjustment observed in the deployments of some policy discourses such as *yi wen hua ren* (described above), *gu wei jin yong* (described in Chapter 2), and discursive boundary construction through so-called 'text power' (examined in Chapter 3) do indeed work to mediate contradictions and emphasize connection through ritually enacting 'correct' reformulations of speech or behaviour to suit official orientations, and therefore resembles the concept in certain ways. However, for Zito *li* represents the possibility of collapsing a Cartesian mind/body distinction by claiming it to present the "intimate interpenetration of body and mind, meaning and action" (1997:56). And though this may accurately describe the cases investigated in her research, this dissertation suggests that this need not necessarily be so. Instead, following recent critiques of ritual theory, I argue that it may be more productive to focus analytically on the 'correctness' of the ritualized moment rather than ritual's ability to express meaning or cultivate interior dispositions (e.g. Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Seligman et al. 2008; Puett 2015). For while in the case of the Hoboksar youth's 'correct' description of 'Jangar spirit' outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g. Jangar as 'patriotic' exemplar or the Khanate of Bumba a 'communist' paradise) may indeed be an expression of 'genuine belief' (i.e. ritualized discourses affecting interior dispositions), as illustrated in Chapter 3 it is in the 'correct' reproduction and operationalization of set scripts in everyday life that limits of acceptable behaviour are set and the power of these discourses is realized. Though a by-product of ritualization may indeed include communication of 'meaning', harmonizing mind/body, or even collapsing this dualism, it has been the argument of this thesis that to dwell on interior/exterior (or in Zito's case, the mutuality of both) may at times miss the point. Notwithstanding, when slightly modified, to view this highly dispersed but nevertheless self-consciously hierarchical apparatus of interest alignment through the ritualized reproduction of authoritative political discourses in China discussed throughout this thesis as a form of 'discursive centring' may be a productive heuristic to explore these processes. Furthermore, the notion of 'centring' is useful in that its very definition implies the unification of diverse parts while recognizing heterogeneity and does not necessarily suggest ethnic or even cultural homogeneity.

Building on these arguments, Chapter 4 attempted to provide a case study of how state-sanctioned experts tasked with salvaging Jangar navigated this authoritative political language by utilizing oral narratives of surviving government agents. This chapter followed the politicized process of collection, 'revision', and publication of what would come to be called the 'Heroic Epic Jangar' and argued that Chinese political discourse is not only its own speech 'genre' but is itself generative through what I describe as the 'genre-effects' of these discourses. Constrained by contemporary political interests, actors operating in different sites and in unique circumstances interacted with and consolidated these concepts to ensure the 'epic' was filtered through a specific 'scientific' framework, presented 'objectively', and produced 'correctly' as a cultural product of the Chinese Nation.

On the surface, this might seem to follow recent critical studies of policy that have tended to focus on the so-called 'anti-politics' of policy discourse (Ferguson 1994), or what Tanya Li has described as 'rendering technical' the political (2007:123). Susan Greenhalgh (2008), for example, investigates the ascendancy of 'cybernetic demography' in China where between 1979-1980, the central government recruited missile scientists to formulate population control policy on a national scale—resulting in China's infamous 'One-Child' policy. Greenhalgh illustrates that by claiming 'objective science' could resolve China's population crisis, by assuming 'population' to be a biological rather than social category these engineers-turned-policy-technocrats ignored the shortcomings of their research and the dangers of applying such draconian policy prescriptions on the public (ibid.:272). Perspectives such as these seem to imply that policy is often recognized as 'objective' and 'scientific' and, therefore, morally and ideologically neutral, and perhaps even existing beyond politics (Shore & Wright 2005:7-8). Yet as Chapters 4 attempted to illustrate, despite claims to 'science' and 'objectivity', at least in the case of the culture-work in Xinjiang, policy is inextricably linked to, and self-consciously a reflection of specific ideological dispositions intimately associated with a clearly defined ethicopolitical orientation for social development—something elaborated upon in greater detail in Chapter 5. Rather than engineering conditions that 'naturalize' a particular ideology as ‘common sense’ (Shore & Wright 2005:18; see also Shore and Wright 2011; Shore 2011), this thesis has argued that the power of these discourses lies in their ability to structure social environments in ways that organize actors on a mass scale to behave *as if* these discourses are ‘common sense’ and beyond political debate (Seligman et al. 2008; Puett 2015).

The notion of ‘discursive centring’ through text/performance is certainly a useful heuristic to view this politicized process, for clearly it was through the correct reproduction and reconfiguration of specific discursive categories of ideological reference that the collection and revision process of Mongol nationality ‘folklore’ was undertaken and an ‘epic’ genre for the ‘Chinese Nation’ constructed. What’s more, as Chapter 5 illustrated, even global heritage discourses weren’t immune to this ‘centring’ process. Yet despite Zito’s textual focus, Feuchtwang and Rowlands (2019) convincingly illustrate the historical diversity of forms and multilocality of ‘centring’ in Chinese civilization construction. For as they demonstrate, ‘centring’ was a process that flowed from emperor to individual as a form self-cultivation through ritualized activity and even materialized in the ritualized reproduction of ideologically implicated infrastructural and architectural styles, reflecting what they describe as a specific ‘cosmocracy’ (cf. Feuchtwang 2018). They argue that historically though there was only one legitimate ‘centre’, ‘centring’ was possible anywhere and apparent in the design of temples and altars, sacrifices and ceremonies etc., and corresponded to “the ritual action of recreating an encompassing centre that is distinct from, but not a rival to, the political centre.” (ibid.:159)

I would argue that a similar process manifest in Chapter 5 when Hoboksar County leadership aggressively sought to connect its own local cultural, social, and economic interests to regional and national ones by effectively reorganizing county institutions to be in line with national interests, but realized through an officially accepted ‘local’ vernacular as ‘Jangar Culture’. Most illustratively, the chapter sought to demonstrate how specific sets of ideologically infused political discourse were imprinted upon county infrastructure, and highlighted the effects on a local Jangar museum explicitly designed to ‘connect history and reality’ by presenting a specific interpretation of Marxist-materialist social evolutionary history that draws a local non-Han population’s past into the inevitability of a unified Chinese Nation. This process represented just one part of a much larger, coordinated effort to ‘construct a distinctive regional culture’ that consciously connects and propagates an authoritative political worldview grounded in foundational ideology for which the local population is encouraged to actively participate and reproduce in everyday life. Yet, as revealing as these examples may be, they can hardly be described as reflecting a ‘cosmocracy’ (Feuchtwang & Rowlands 2019:180). Indeed, Feuchtwang and Rowlands warn of rendering past practices equivalence to present-day PRC as they argue this historical mode of governance through the combination of sage rule, model emulation, and self-cultivation no longer suits contemporary circumstances (ibid.:177-181). Nevertheless, I would suggest that viewing the examples explored in this thesis through a 'discursive centring' heuristic may evince a reorientation of ethicopolitical emphasis from 'self-cultivation' described by Zito (1997) and Feuchtwang and Rowlands (2019) to one of 'subject-cultivation'—something even eluded to by Professor Chen in this chapter's introduction.

An emphasis on 'subject-cultivation' over 'self-cultivation' under some circumstances in contemporary Chinese politics is made evident in Chapter 6 as I illustrate the complicated processes by which local culture-cadres attempted to operationalize a wide array of authoritative discourses representing a broad range of political interests. But where the construction of a 'Jangar Brand' described in Chapter 5 was widely recognized as a success, and on the local level praised as a source of local 'pride' (cf. Harrell 2013), Chapter 6 zooms-down to the local culture-bureau so as to 'contextualize, localize, and place in relationships' the messy processes through which culture policy was executed (Mosse 2011:22). Here, this chapter builds upon previous arguments to illustrate how as a social practice the correct reproduction of set scripts 'in form' can be valued over content in producing shared worlds of 'as-if realities' (Puett 2015) and how officials, common people, and even children actively sought such connection in their everyday activities. Yet I argue that in some cases, unconvincing practices of discursive centring expected to be accepted as propriety represent a potentially embarrassing 'rupture' in the performance of 'as-if realities', a practice known as 'formalism'.

Similarly, Hans Steinmüller (2013), in his ethnography of local ritual practices in rural China, describes the tension between ritual's significance in local sociality and the official representations of those practices (e.g. as 'superstition', Ch. *mixin*, see Chapter 4). Building on Michael Herzfeld's notion of 'cultural intimacy', Steinmüller argues that possessing a kind of 'insider knowledge' and participating in a process crucially important in local sociality while simultaneously recognizing it as condemnable styles what he calls a 'community of complicity' (ibid.:61). By examining the means by which locals navigate the socially implicated discourses surrounding ritual practice, Steinmüller illustrates the ways in which these 'coded tensions' are exposed and/or obscured through what he describes as 'embarrassment', that is "a practice that is both crucially important for local sociality and a potential source of external embarrassment." (ibid.:193) Yet, although Steinmüller focuses on local ritual practices such as gift exchange, 'Confucian' or 'Daoist' ritual, geomancy etc., I proposed that the ritualization of reproducing set authoritative scripts 'in form' may produce similar effects. For as we have seen in the production of 'Jangar Culture' and the performance of 'Jangar Spirit', 'formal' and even 'formalistic' behaviours create specific 'as-if realities' that are learned, ritually rehearsed and habitually reproduced externalizations of specific ideological scripts that are at once recognized as sociopolitical necessities but also possible sources of localized shame and ridicule. Nevertheless, recent anthropological engagements with similar ritualized practices in China have warned against viewing these behaviours as simply hypocritical or insincere, ironic or cynical, but rather as "a shared poetics of self-presentation" worth deeper ethnographic investigation and theorization (Feuchtwang 2016:14; cf. Steinmüller & Brandtstädter 2016)

But with regard to so-called 'communities of complicity', the term 'complicity' tends to elicit negative connotations, such as association with questionable individuals or collaboration with dubious motives. Yet in terms of taking seriously the practices observed throughout this dissertation, when recognized in Steinmüller's fairly neutral terms as the ritualization and externalization of intimate knowledge as a form of cultural intimacy, the notion of cultural 'complicity' may prove productive—but 'culture' as *wenhua.* For be it the border town of Hoboksar, the regional capital of Urumqi, or at China's political centre in Beijing, though perhaps articulated differently within various fields of contested interests, when constrained within specific political discursive frames 'culture' as *wenhua* acts to centre cultural expression as it is expected to adhere to relative congruency and meet specified goals. Regardless if it is a Han academic discussing Confucianism in Beijing or a Mongol culture-cadre producing a musical on China's farthest edge, though performed differently and through an officially recognize 'local' vernacular, once filtered through specific ethicopolitical set-discourses 'culture' as *wenhua* at once works as a mechanism to produce an 'official' national-political 'habitus' of unconscious dispositions, but is also a reflection of it. For this reason, *wenhua* can perhaps be understood not as something one 'has', but rather as historian Wang Gungwu notes as something in which one 'partakes' (1991:149).

If 'culture' may be understood in these terms, perhaps in some ways, we are all at times 'complicit'.

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Appendix

‘Prologue’ to the Heroic Epic Jangar

In the early days of the Golden Age
Buddhists preached and Jangar Khan,
The prominent sovereign Sage,
Was born in Bumba—the holy land.
Tangsug Bumba Khan his grandfather
And Uzeng Aldar Khan his father.
He was Takil Zula Khan’s descendant,
Orphaned young, now, independent.
Jangar turned out to be great,
His talent was beyond debate.
When he was only seven years old,
Integration of faith and state
Sage Jangar Kahn could hold.
He never lost an inch of land
With four hundred thousand people
His name was grand,
Reaching Four Continents,
Which were second to none,
Stretching oceans under the sun.
When sage Jangar Khan
Was just two years old,
Shara Mangus’ invasion
Wreaked havoc untold,
Attacking the clan so evil and bold
His parents were slaughtered,
Their bodies now cold.
After only three winters
He started to ride.
Aranzal, his three-year-old steed
Was a purplish-red horse so divine.

They broke through three cities,
Through fortresses strong,
And the rogue they called Mangus
Was forced to resign.
35. When he had reached
The young age of four,
Four more fortresses
Overwhelming all
Shara Mangus subdued,
40. His power no more.
The demon who'd murdered
His parents before.
When he was at the age of five,
In Taki captured five monsters alive.
45. But in that year there came defeat
In fighting Mongen Shigshirge,
Who was a weightlifter elite.
When he was six years
Old, he fought so hard
50. Broke one hundred lances.
After six breakthroughs,
He made Altan Cheji subdue.
In his grand Palace, then let him
Take the first seat in the right role.
55. At seven Jangar Khan they found
Had conquered seven kingdoms crowned.
And from then on no one compared,
For his great name spread everywhere.
Sage Jangar Khan was iron-cast,
60. With wisdom great and unsurpassed.
Orchirbani's power he possessed,
It flowed from off his regal head.
And Mahakala incarnation
Gave Jangar Khan his inspiration.

With Master Zongkaba's wise soul,
Jangar's wisdom now was whole.
Dragon Lustu's strength was bound
To Jangar's neck, round and round.
More than twenty goddess tones
In Jangar's throat home had found.
Seventy dragons' teeth he owned
In his broad blade-bones
Seventy elephants' muscle-tone
Was his possession, his alone.
God bless the world, for it was time
To welcome sovereign sage sublime.
A handsome man and full of song,
He gathered horses, all were strong.
With boldest heroes by his side,
The forty-two conquered kingdoms
Now became Jangar Khan's pride.
He was never aging, ever youthful,
Twenty-five, forever boastful.
His steed Aranzal, galloping arrow;
His gold-handled lance,
Was long and narrow.
Jangar a hero of hot blood,
With spirit at the flood.
Noyon daughters, forty-nine he shunned,
The one young heart left Jangar stunned.
Agai Shabdal was her name
Nom Toges Khan, a father's flame.
Jangar's new wife, such a beauty born,
While she faced east, night turned to dawn,
And fishes in the sea so many
Were counted under brightness plenty.
While she turned west, the sun renewed,
After fishes in the sea clear-viewed

Her face was delicate, white as snow,
And touched with crimson, sunset glow.
Her two plaits, sleek glossy, black,
Swinging gently down her back.
The silver buttons, pearl-inlaid
Shown on her coat and beauty blazed.
Fringed silver on plait tips moved.
Her skirt flowed left, then right, so smooth.
Her eardrops camel-hoof sized, they hung,
Glittering beside her neck, they swung.
Her head she wore a hat—Tibetan,
Dignified, no one forgetting.
The hat cut by her mother's care.
And sewn together by all queens fair.

* * *

Other kingdoms common, bland,
Comparing not with Jangar's land.
The Bumba sea's blue waves were sure
to lap against the long, broad shore.
And on his grassland, lush and green,
The wind it rose and fell so clean.
Exotic flowers were made the carpets,
Butterflies above were starlets.
On Mount Altai's vast western side
Like pretty peacocks in their pride
Were eighty thousand aged Sandal trees,
Among them Pearl trees in the breeze.
From toes of Sandal trees far and near,
Sweet spring water flowed out so clear.
Those who drank a draught for long
Would be kept forever young.
The snow-capped mountains with misty veil
Were bathed in twilight soft and pale.
Majestic towers in the skies,

Majestic presence at sunrise.
Ruby red, two rivers great,
Ran opposed to Sartag Lake,
135. So vast a water, never dry,
And rosy light would dazzle eyes.
The Dombu River, blue and clear,
Surged ahead for all the year.
Waves were lapping day and night,
140. Jangar drank with such delight.
Jangar's Bumba was a treasure,
Rich and fruitful, beyond all measure.
The orphan found a family here,
And poverty just disappeared.
145. No distinction "mine and thine"
The lives that people lived were fine.
There was no sickness for to groan,
No bitter suffering sorrow's moan.
No summer sweltering,
150. And no winter cold,
But only spring and autumn gold.
With gentle breezes, timely rain,
Five million people on Bumba's plain.
Traversing West to East you might
155. Ride five months both day and night.
In places, temples, everywhere,
A towering pagoda always there.
His fame spreading on all the lands
State and faith were in his hands.
160. Jangar Khan's famed warriors now
Approached his tent to make a vow,
"Your majesty we serve you skilled
A palace-temple to build."
Altan Cheji, Golden Sage, who knew
165. Ninety-nine years of history's page,

And ninety-nine in the future, too,
Gathered all Khans together to stage.
What place might palace stand?
All the Khans agreed a plan,
170. "Ten floors high for us so famed!
Nine colours shining, gems inlaid!
Gold as well will show our best,
Dazzling on Mount Altai's West."
It was such a beautiful palace,
175. Like a peacock, full of grace.
Under sun, hillocks flaming,
Twelve big rivers, slowly meandering.
Five-hundred aged Sandal trees
On the slope by Bumba Sea.
180. Altan Cheji grimly told,
His voice a giant bell so bold.
If the palace pierced the sky,
It would be folly perched so high.
Atop the palace build towers three,
185. Four eyes to view the lofty scene
And should they reach and touch the sky?
Nay, all should hold three fingers shy.
Then the lion-hearted hero Hongor made
Six thousand and twelve craftsmen
190. Immediately rushed to their trade.
In blessed month began construction,
One famous day they laid foundation.
Coral flowers paved the ground,
Pearls inlaid the walls around.
195. Red gems adorned the royal west wall,
Looking east within—colours all.
Four corners flaming mirrors stood
Steel-strengthened inside, craft was good.
Strong men, eighty thousand on the ground,

200. Eighty thousand Sandal logs bound.
Erected were seven thousand pillars so tall,
With one hundred million Six Mani Characters over all.
Lucky windows sixty-six
In the palace walls were fixed.
205. Wooden carving grave relief,
Adorning five upturned eaves.
Guzen Gumbe great diviner,
No one could have chosen finer
Artisans in ninety-nine,
210. Metal, wood and paint sublime.
His request of them now was told,
All the walls were made so bold,
Northern ivories, for milk good,
Southern antlers, for more food.
215. Palace roof was pestle-shaped,
Built of white steel, beaten plate.
Tigers and lions were designed
And carved on the palace gate—a sign.
Mane and tails adorned with pearls,
220. True to life, they looked superb.
In palace front a pavilion, pine,
Around it fruit trees, five in kind.
People as bees came to taste and roam.
Oh, what bliss! They forgot their home.
225. Jangar now illustrious more,
The ten storeyed palace
With nine colours soared,
It towered aloft,
Holding worlds old and new,
230. In all of forty-nine years
It would take to pass through.
And his foes raised not
Their bold heads more.

South of the palace,
235. A huge golden flag
Beat air never torn.
Once rolled in the sheath,
The flag shown lunar light;
Taken out, as seven suns bright.
240. There were forty-four legs
On the high Khan throne,
Gold-like satin was sewn.
Round-faced Jangar,
A heart full of oak,
245. Sitting, yet awesome,
In black satin-cloak.
The cloak had been cut
By his wife with such care
And all sewn together
250. By many queens fair.
Stroking his swallow-winged whiskers did he
Rest his sheepfold-sized palm
On his oaken right knee.
And to all the brave men
255. He did issue decrees,
Of political, religious,
strategic decree.
Jangar's larger voice
Rang out to them all
260. And brave men immediately
Answered the call.
They chanted the praises
Of that palace loud,
Colourful, radiant
265. Tall and proud.
Eight thousand men
Were ordered to call

His four hundred thousand
Great and small.
270. From four great lands,
From kingdoms they came.
Seventy days to honour the name.
Joyous the grand celebrations they had
Seventy days—not enough to be glad.
275. Eight thousand men gathered,
Eight thousand find
Purplish-red strong horses
Which they were to find
Were the first-born of mares
280. So proud and sublime.
They were offspring of horses
Immortal, divine.
Sweet wine was made
From young mares' milk,
285. A fragrant spirit fermented
And smoother than silk.
Poured into huge skins
That were loaded on beasts
Carried by camels to the famed feast.
290. As to the skins, it was Mongen Shigshirge
Took seventy buckskins to hand,
Old men had got them tanned,
Maids old yet sturdy well-known
Then saw the skins were all sewn.
295. Jangar feasted for 70 days,
The yellow wine skins
Convinced people to stay.
The drinkers all swooned
And others they tuned.
300. The Khan's merry-making
Was so divine.

And the feast not yet done
Jangar questioned Ke Jilgan
"From five tongues from west to east,
305. Who attends my great feast?"
Ke Jilgan, interpreter and lawyer,
Who could pass judgment so fair,
Advice he gave beyond compare.
Before the questions answer came,
310. Sabur, man as yet untamed,
Proposed a toast beyond control,
Then spirit filled the wooden bowl.
The bowl required seventy men
To carry it forward, presented, then
315. Ke Jilgan determined 'Yea'.
Sabur's toast was drunk that day.
Seventy-five bowls of wine,
Eighty-five were drunk in line.
Inside him low he burned so hot,
320. Inside him high he itched a lot.
Ke Jilgan asked Jangar aloud,
"What do you want to know about?
The past or the future, far or near?
I'll declare, I'll make it clear."
325. Altan Cheji gave his idea,
"Tell him something happened here!"
Maids politely served the guests,
From sage Jangar Khan
To eight thousand little heroes,
330. One by one without a close.
In china bowls, gilt-edged design,
The fragrant food within was fine.
The famous orator Ke Jilgan
His introductions soon began.
335. The guests from Bumba gathered all

Inside the gold-topped feasting hall.
The aged feathers grey beard and hair
Were in a ring all seated there.
Of them, who was number one?
340. It was Mongen Shigshirge,
He was Zula Aldar Khan’s son.
The aged mothers seated back
Grey-haired too, having a good slack.
To take the first seat who had worth?
345. It was Zandan Gushi Gerel.
When twenty-three, she’d given birth
To Hongor—the salt of the earth.
Obedient wives, among others,
Ringed behind the aged mothers.
350. They were tall, black-eyed, and meek,
With broad forehead and rosy cheeks.
Behind them still, a ring of girls,
All bright and pretty—lovely pearls.
Each of them had grace and poise,
355. And sweet the sound of high-pitched voice.
A crane-like neck so long and slender,
A tongue so pink and red lips tender.
A bee-like waist, high bridge of nose
Peacock brows fresh as a rose.
360. In the first seat was Zula Zandan
Daughter of Bural Mergen Khan.
He loved his daughter very much,
Apple of his eyes to touch.
Behind the girls sat in rings, three,
365. Eight-thousand heroes, free,
With manners in an awful state
To Shirki were subordinate.
Sage Jangar Khan’s good guards
And Bumba’s coming Brakve hussars.

370. In the first ring the chief was one
Hoshun Ulan, Hongor’s son.
Hoshun Ulan and his many peers
Grasping venom-quenched lances.
In the second ring of the chief was one
375. Batur Jilgan, Jangar’s son.
At pitching darts he was great
Seated by the grand west gate.
In the third ring the chief was one,
Alia Shonghor, Altan’s son.
380. He carried bows and arrows steady,
Crouching at the east gate ready.
The ultimate expounder Ke Jilgan,
Continued slowly as he began.
Altan Cheji—Jangar’s imagination,
385. Seated right-front, for inspiration,
Helm of faith and helm of state
Seventy, no less, kingdoms great.
Seated on black cushion square,
Settling matters legal and fair.
390. No matter how complex they were,
To Jangar no need to defer.
Behind him sat the iron one,
Herculean-strong Sabur, bar none.
His mount, a steed speckled-faced and brown,
395. Axe of eighty-one arm-spans long.
His demeanour threatened fiercest foes
And they fell from horse-back so.
So famous had Sabur become,
“Formidable”, his name was known.
400. Behind Sabur, comely Mingyan,
The peerless son of Erke Tug Khan.
He was great and rode so well,
Too many thousand paid farewell.

The mountain Ming now far away,
405. With gold-silver steed come what may.
Wife and daughter, both were aching,
Essentially all but forsaken.
At last the job he took was fine,
He was the man in charge of the wine.
410. Behind Mingyan the chief gateman,
Boro Mangnai with hat in hand.
His crescent axe was there to show,
There'd be no mercy for his foe.
Eight thousand men he could call,
415. His gold drum would reach them all,
Striking for twenty-one anywhere.
His booming voice was like a snare
Frightening a fearless bear.
And then sat Erke Hara Nidun.
420. Black-eyed hero, chief herdsman.
Every time his rope would fly,
It hit the target in his eye.
Ke Jilgan is not yet finished.
On the left front, distinguished,
425. Loyal Hongor, Hero of Bumba soil,
Backbone during times of turmoil.
Tubshin Shirki grandfather proud,
To Mongen Shigshirge father he bowed.
A face as red as dates he wore,
430. He led a million Bodong wild boar.
Their protective god he served alone.
Though harmed by Mangus, muscle and bone,
Seventy kingdoms he conquered alone.
Guzen Gumbe next in line,
435. Commissioned wisely to divine.
A millennium full of prophecy,
Promoting state philosophy.

With the sabre it was a game,
He had one enduring fame.
440. If he sat stretched wide
Fifty-two seats he occupied.
If he sat, back up straight
Twenty-five would hold his weight.
Bulingur’s son Hara Sanal third in line,
445. Speckled-faced horse his chosen kind.
By Jangar side he fought so strong,
Twenty days and one so long.
Across the desert of sight,
Across the grassland, day and night.
450. Hara Sanal in front of each turn,
Fifteen cuts did Jangar earn.
Upright seated Nachin Shonghor
Falcon man and banner’s anchor.
On black-grey mountain steed,
455. Six thousand and twelve
Campaigners did he lead.
He hoisted the banner,
Red struck the eye,
High it flew across the sky.
460. Never did the warriors cower,
They had fine skills
With magic power.
Neither sabres nor lances
Could whittle might.
465. The banner sandal handled,
Sending seven sun’s light.
By Shonghor’s shoulder famed,
Sangsar Hara Burgud acclaimed.
Hero too and falcon-like,
470. Rode by day and flew by night.
Ke Jilgan had spoken well,

Of all their wonders he did tell.
He sat cross-legged satisfied,
Beside his table pacified.
475. Salkin Tabag Batur, fast runner and chief scout,
Often high and looking out.
Turned around with tendon great,
Offered on a birch-wood plate.
He'd given Jangar Khan his best.
480. Then after praying his request,
The Boro Shusen feast began,
Eight thousand men to service ran.
Platters of mutton never ceased,
To find the mouths of guests with ease.
485. White heads, black heads,
Eight hundred each,
Roasted whole and all were pleased.
They sat cross-legged prepared to sup,
Rows and rows with sleeves rolled up.
490. With mouths wide open
They ate with pleasure,
Their appetites beyond all measure.
The pile of bones was like a hill,
All stomachs full, they ate their fill.
495. Agai Shabdal, Jangar's wife fair,
She played on strings into the air.
The Zither multi-stringedly made,
Head adorned with crystal jade.
Sweet floating songs rows ninety-nine
500. Twelve tunes like bird songs, so fine.
The one in charge of wine, Mingyan,
Renowned and honoured, a handsome man.
A toast to Jangar Khan it rang,
And then his voice a song that sang.
505. Badma Gerel aroused and moved,

From long times past an interlude.
The tunes he played were eighty-one,
On yellow flute the songs were sung.
Louder still the women's song,
510. Erke Hara Nidun joined the throng.
He played his zither from his row.
A distinctive touch, a fine solo.
Eight thousand service, standing up
They serve the guests,
515. They filled their cups.
Tasting well, wild mare's milk fine.
Drinking deep the fragrant wine.
The Heroes six thousand and one,
Brave as lion, spirited high,
520. Deep inside were hot and dry.
Eyes wide open, tight fists and teeth,
Announced as one, "are foes we meet,
We fly to places we must go,
We fly to Mangus to slay our foe.
525. When will be say the game is slain?
When shall we meet the beasts again?"
Noisy, rough, aroused were they,
So excited and loud, their play.
The noise so loud, a righteous din,
530. Made palace roof appear so thin.
At last stood son of Khan Shirki,
Atlan Ara a speech did he,
Offer all to close the feast,
Before each mounted his own beast.
535. "May eaten meat now live as men,
To multiply themselves again.
May wine consumed spring forth divine,
And bring us milk and bring us wine.
May happiness and bliss be more,

540. And dwell with us forever more."

Translation from Jamcha, T. (2010). *Jangar*. (pp. 94-109). Urumqi: Xinjiang University Press.