JANUARY 2024



My Father's Steppes, My Mother's Rivers

Brief Overview

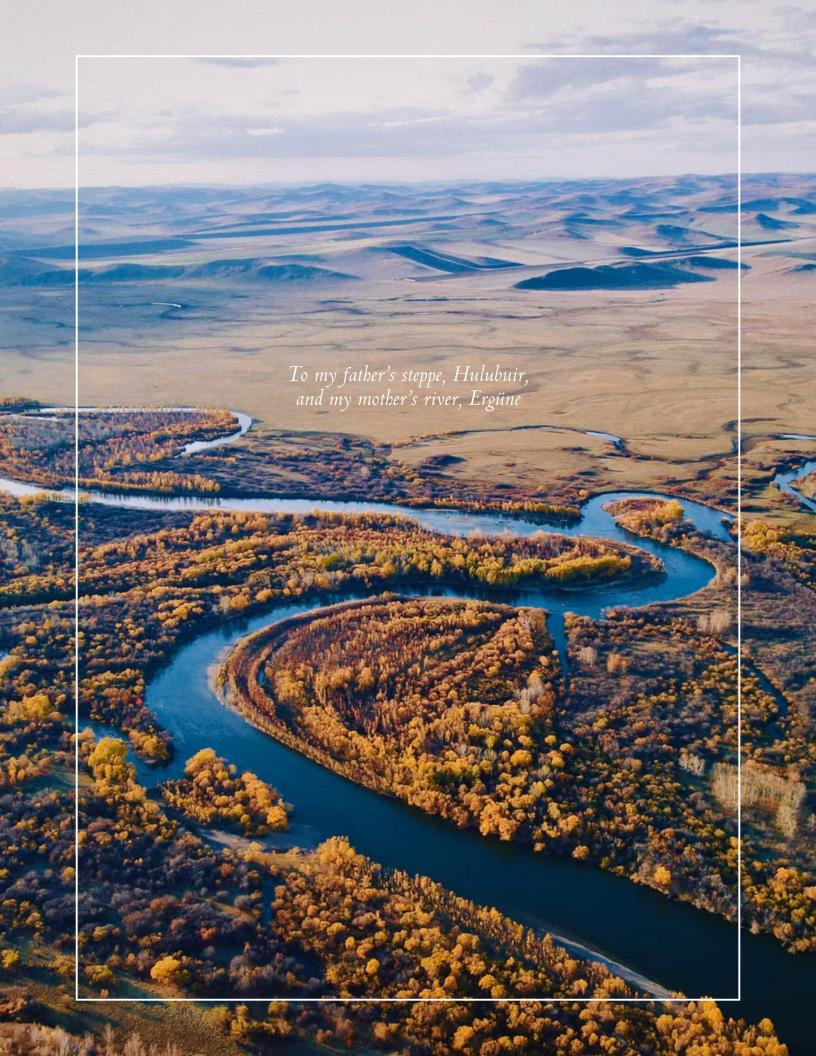


Scattered on the North Asian plateau, the Mongolic ethnic group are sparsely settled nomads living off of the gifts of nature bestowed upon them by the vast steppes and rivers. Their sporadic settlement makes it hard to imagine consolidating a unified Mongolic identity. However, throughout history, the Mongolian group has fragmented and come together repeatedly. Ethnic classification is not as simple as assigning one ethnicity to a diverse body of people that still differ culturally — in political affiliations, clothing, food, religion, and traditions — that resulted in twenty-eight Mongolic subgroups in China today. Further, across Asia, a plethora of sub-Mongolian identities exist that transcend the definition of "Mongolian."

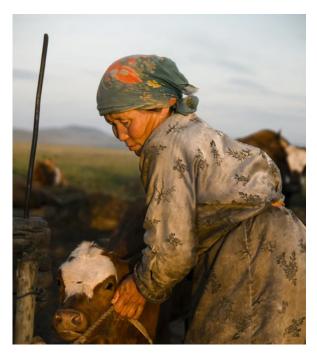
In my project, I hope to highlight how the complexity of Mongolian ethnicity extends beyond the confines of China and the Chinese definition, something that ethnologists must grapple with, historically and contemporarily.

In this newsletter you will find:

History, ethnology, and culture of three Mongolic subgroups: the **Buryats, Ordos**, and **Daurs**



INTRODUCTION



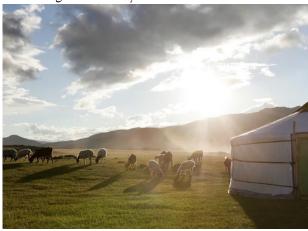
Early to Medieval History

In early Mongolian history, different Mongol tribes were scattered around the Mongolian plateau and organized into different chieftains. It necessitated Genghis Khan's consolidation of the Mongolian steppes to construct a unified Mongolic identity. Genghis Khan united different chieftains and assimilated them into a larger Mongolic empire.[I] The increased interaction and community building brought previously distanced chieftains together as commonalities were acknowledged and celebrated, allowing for the formation of a singular Mongolic ethnic consciousness. Aside from the many Mongolic tribes that fell under his kingdom, many Turkicspeaking groups also "subsumed under the Mongol nationality."[2] The "new" Mongolian identity came to be united under Genghis Khan, and during the subsequent reign of the Mongol empire, tribes reconfigured into the four lineages from his empire.[3] Similar to early ethnological constructions, the "new" Mongols of the medieval ages attributed their identity to the power and legacy of Genghis Khan and his dynasty, a theme that is still prominent in contemporary Asian steppes.

The Mongol identity remained in the hearts of the Mongolic as different tribes and clans moved around north Asia after the fall of the Yuan empire, taking root from the banks of Lake Baikal to the shores of the Black Sea. While the Mongolic peoples are spread over multiple kingdoms, empires, and later nations, this newsletter wishes to focus on the Mongols of China.

Modern China

The Mongols in China experienced a unique ethnic classification project as the last Khan of Genghis Khan's legacy fell in the early 1900s and the People's Republic of China was created. In China, the Mongolian identity was affected by the intense debates surrounding incorporating ethnic groups in the interim. When the Qing court was overthrown in 1911, the revolution was framed as pro-Han and anti-Manchu; as such, Republican nationalists "unwittingly alienated the rest of non-Han China as well."[4] The Republic of China and Chiang Kai-shek's Guo-min-dang party advocated for "homogeneity and indivisibility of the Chinese nation."[5] Chiang argued that "whereas they were commonly believed to have descended from either the Xiongnu or the Xianbei... [the ethnic minorities] were in fact descendants of common ancestors [within the Han ethnicity]: the ruling house of Shang."[6] By erasing the ethnic consciousness of Mongolians centered around Genghis Khan and their nomadic past, Chiang hoped to rally them under a common Chinese lineage, culminating in one Chinese ethnicity the Zhonghua ethnicity.



Different from the GMD, the Communist Party of China heavily emphasized the recognition of ethnic minorities and diversity within their realm. Yet, they were simultaneously concerned with ethnic fragmentation when giving the ethnicities too much autonomy. The CCP's "goal was to enroll non-Han groups in all levels of government, as a means of legitimizing their rule, fulfilling their longstanding promise of ethnonational equality, and securing the territorial integrity of their multinational polity." [7] As a result, they sought to frame Mongolian ethnic identity around the CCP's multiethnic plurality. Unlike the GMD, the CCP recognized the unique ethnological history of the Mongolians and set it distinct from the Han majority.

CONTENT

I hope to explore the ethnological development across time within the Mongolian Steppe regarding three Mongolic groups: the Buryats, Ordos, and Daurs. Specifically, I want to examine the Mongolian identity before and after Genghis Khan and embed photography to visualize the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that developed in the meantime.

Buryat

The Buryats are a Mongolic subgroup that lives in present-day Russia, Mongolia, and China. The Buryats demonstrate a unique case of ethnic migration, as the Buryats of China are not indigenous but rather refugees of Russia's Stalinist regime. This project is centered around the Buryats in China,





Ordos

The Ordos are a distinct Mongolic subgroup that lives in the region intersecting the Loess Plateau and the Ordos Steppe. The Ordos Mongolians also tesfity to the lasting legacy of Genghis Khan's empire, as their clansmen are endowed with the generational responsibility to guard Genghis Khan's mausoleum.

Daurs

The Daurs are a Mongolic-speaking group living in China's northeastern and northwestern borderlands. They maintain an agricultural, fishing, and herding lifestyle. The Daurs' ethnic history uniquely highlights the impact of relocation, classification, and self-identity in the context of ethnology.



NO.1



HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Linguists and ethnologists theorize that the word Buryat came from the Mongolic roots of Buri (wolf), Burgud (eagle), and Buraad (people of the forest).[8] The Buryats originate from the region of Lake Baikal, Siberia, Russia, tracing their ancestry to the Xiongnu (220 BC -200 AD), Xianbei state (93 – 153 AD), Ruoran Khanate (220 - 535 AD), and the Mongol Empire (1206 - 1368 AD), all inhabitants of the Baikal region.[9] The Secret History of the Mongols recorded that the Buryats lived along the Angara River (in present-day Irkutsk Oblast and Krasnovarsk Krai, Siberia).[10] Genghis Khan sent Jochi, his eldest son, north from Karakorum, the Empire's capital, to subjugate the Buryats in 1207.[11]



After the death of Genghis Khan, his empire soon divided into four Khanates, with the Buryats falling under the control of the Yuan Khanate (the Yuan dynasty), based in Beijing, China.[12] When the Yuan dynasty was replaced by the Ming in China, the Mongol court moved out of China proper and remained in Mongolia to establish the Northern Yuan dynasty in I368.[13] Under Dayan Khan of the Northern Yuan, the Buryats were reorganized again into the Khalkha Tumen, one of the six administrative tumens (great confederations).[14] Khalkha encompassed present-day Baikal, central Mongolia, and the northern part of Inner Mongolia.[15] During this period, many Mongolic tribes merged into the Buryats (Bulagad, Khori, Ekhired, Khongoodor), while some Buryats assimilated into the Oirats Mongols, Khalkha Mongols, and Tungus Evenks.[16] Their land extended west as far as Nizhneudinsk, north as far as Verkholensk and Bratsk in the Arctic Circle, and south into Mongolia proper and Inner Mongolia. The Buryats paid tributes to the Khalkha Mongols while collecting tribute from the Ket and Samoyed peoples on the Kan and the Tungus Evenks on the lower Angara.[17]



Traditional Buryat wooden yurt in Ol'khon Island, Lake Baikal, eastern Siberia

In its political structure, the Buryats implemented clan-based tribes or confederations, where senior leaders of each clan debated and decided on decisions that affected the whole clan.[18] Each clan, based on different tribal origin or economic situation, maintained different societies and lifestyles. Ekhired, Bulagad, and Khongoodor clans were agropastoral and lived as tight units in wooden yurts or cabins between summer and winter pastures. The Ol'khon Island and Verkholensk clans were sedentary but still practiced large-scale hunting and fishing. On the other hand, the Khori and Selenge clans were far more nomadic, living in felt yurts and raising large herds of sheep, cattle, goats, horses, and camels.[19] Nevertheless, the Buryat clans maintained a distinguishable identity from the Mongols due to their dialect, clan culture, lack of connection to Genghis Khan, and greater attachment to shamanism. [20] Therefore, a strong, independent Buryat identity emerged at the latter end of the Mongol and Northern Yuan rule.

RUSSIAN COSSACKS

INVASION

In 1628, Russian Cossacks advanced along the Angara River into Buryat lands after hearing of Siberia's rich oil and mineral reserves. The Russians reached the banks of Lena and built Yakutsk, which became the command center for many expeditions to northern Lake Baikal.[21] Another route came through southern Lake Baikal into Selenge, Verkhneudinsk (modern Ulan-Ude), and to the left bank of the Ergüne River.[22] Both the Buryats (primarily the Ekhired and Bulagad tribes) and Kalkha clans resisted the Cossack invasion, raiding the Russian forts of Verkholensk and Nerchinsk and along the Selenge River.[23] However, the natives had a technical disadvantage and were not well-matched against the armed and organized Russian Cossacks.[24] By 1676, the Russians had built forts and towns in Siberia, and by 1676, they had full control of Siberia.

The Russian invasion sparred a period of Buryat relocation. The Khori and Ekhired Buryats pushed the Evenks out and resettled in the Aga steppe and Barguzin valley, respectively.[25] The Khongoodor moved north into present-day Russia from Mongolia, occupying land southwest of Lake Baikal. [26] Only a small number of Buryats remained in northern Baikal.[27]

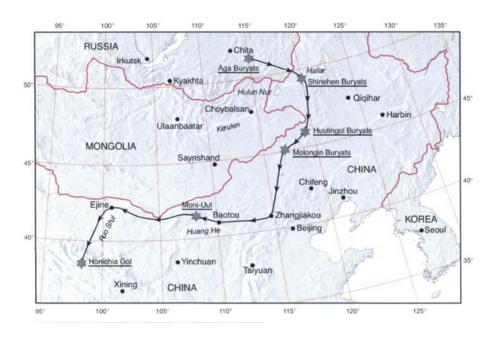


The Russians followed the Buryat clan structure and created ulus, "clan/native administrations," that were part of the 12 "steppe dumas." The administrative officials, elected by their clans, decided tax policies, tracked demographics, administered the Steppe [legal] Code, and mediated between the clans and the Russian officials.[28] Through the introduction of Russian ranching and farming, some Buryats began to adopt a sedentary, industrialized lifestyle with stoves, sewing machines, horse-drawn hay-making machines, and milk separators.[29] Alongside increased interaction with the rest of the Russian Empire, Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism began to spread in Buryat communities, converting many from Shamanism to Buddhism.[30] As a byproduct, the literacy rate increased as Buddhism encouraged learning and education amongst its practitioners. Under Russian rule, the Buryat adopted a "Buryat-Mongolian" identity, recognizing their Mongolian origin but showing strong loyalty to the czar.[31]

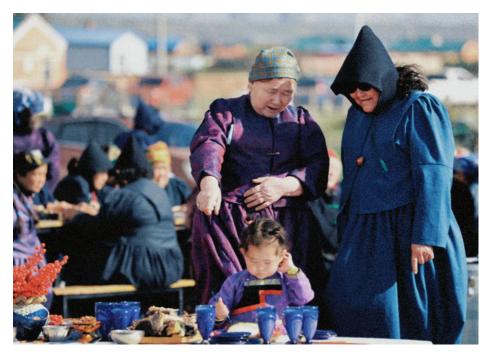


Top: Vasiliy Surikov, "Yermak's conquest of Siberia" Bottom: Buddhist temple, Tseezhe-Burgaltaysky datsan, in Buryatia, Russia

BURYATS IN CHINA



Top: Migration pattern of the Aga Buryats
Bottom: Local Buryat wedding, Shinehen West sum, Evenk Autonomous Banner, Inner Mongolia



In the early 1900s, amidst increased Russification policies, land seizure, and violence of the Red Revolution, Khori Buryats from the Aga steppes moved into the New Bargu West Banner and the Old Bargu Banner on the Chinese frontier. [32] Most migrants were ordinary herdsmen; some were aristocrats and high-ranking llamas or herd owners. [33] The local Hulubuir government of the Republic of China offered a separate pastoral territory near the Shinehen River. In 1922, the first initial migrants moved into the Shinehen region and established a Buryat Hushuu banner.

Meanwhile, in Russia, collectivization and agricultural policies forced Buryats to slaughter their livestock, and many Buryats feared Stalin's purges due to their religious beliefs and intellectual thoughts.[34] As a result, more Buryats moved into Shinehen between the 1920s and 1930s,[35] The Shinehen Buryats settled in quickly, owing to the region's Mongolic heritage and previous peaceful relations with the Mongols and Siberian natives on the border. [36] From Shinehen, some Buryat families used the railway to travel southward, forming communities in Shilingol, Huulingol, and Mologin.[37]

When the Japanese invaded northeast China, they established Manchukuo in 1932, and the Buryat Banner was combined with three other banners into one large banner called the Solon with a specific Banner, (administrative town) for the Buryats under the Solon Banner.[38] According administrative records, Shinehen Buryats were reorganized administratively as a sum under the Solon Banner following liberation from Japanese domination in 1945. By 1954, they were divided into the two sums of Shinehen West and East. Later, in 1961, a new sum called Môngôn-Chuluuu sum was split from Shinehen East sum. The name 'Solon Banner' was changed to 'Evenki Autonomous Banner' in 1958, and it is still used today. In 1969, the Evenki Autonomous Banner, including the Shinehen Buryats, was administratively governed by Heilongjiang province. It was returned to the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in 1979 and continues under the administration of this Autonomous Region today. [39]

Today, the Buryats are registered under Mongolians as one of China's 55 ethnic minorities. Within China, the Shinehen Buryats remain concentrated as close-knit communities in three sums: Shinehen West, Shinehen East, and Môngôn-Chuluuu. The strong community of Shinehen Buryats has allowed their culture, language, and tradition to stand the test of time.

A GLIMPSE INTO BURYAT CULTURE

The Buryat "Youden" hat

The Buryat hat is conical in shape and resembles an ovoo, a traditional place of worship in nomadic culture.[40] They are made of woolen materials constructed to endure the harsh climate of the steppes. It is wind-resistant and water-resistant, which saves them from direct sunlight and cold winters. Because it is foldable, it is easy to carry, especially as the Buryats moved from yurt to yurt.

There are many ways to wear the hat. One is to tie it underneath to protect the neck and ears from the cold climates. Another one is the cone-type folding method, which has the advantage of avoiding heatstroke in summer. The other is the simple hat-fan folding method, worn when riding a horse. One can also roll up the back brim inward and untie the hat fans on both sides. It is suitable for seasonal labor situations.









Ovoos

Even as the Buryats converted to Tibetan Buddhism, remnants of their history remain in their hats. The Buryats still maintain a very elaborate ovoo practice, and every year, each Buryat is expected to attend an annual ritual to the ovoo closest to their residence. [41] The ovoos are sites devoted to various water/dragon deities (luus) and master spirits of the land (gazaryn ezen). [42] As the Buryats moved from Russia to China, they constructed new ovoos to legitimize their use of pasturelands. These ovoos also demarcated clans, territories, political positions, and grazing lands. [43] Today, Shinehen Buryats worship six major ovoos around Hulunbuir. [44] Amongst those, the one in Bayan Han is the most prestigious Buryat sacred site. [45]

BURYAT FOOD

The Buryat Buuz

The Buryat buuz is a typical steamed dumpling variation of the Chinese jiaozi/baozi (also a steamed dumpling) found in Mongolia, Buryatia, Russia, and Inner Mongolia, China. The filling is typically minced lamb and mutton with onion or garlic. The buuz is a staple in Mongolian cuisine, but especially during the Mongolian Lunar New Year celebrations, probably a tradition that comes from the northern Chinese eating jiaozi on New Year's Eve.



Suulei Tsai

A Buryat (and Mongolian) cuisine staple is suulei tsai, which stands for milk tea. However, unlike conventional milk tea found in boba, which is just tea varieties with milk and sweetened with sugar, Mongolian suulei tsai is salted and flavored with various dairy products. Typically, a Mongolian family makes a big pot of suulei tsai every morning. Whatever is not finished will be reheated again for lunch or dinner.

Once the suulei tsai is made, various dairy products will also be served. Often, you will find a combination of boortsogs, qurags, öröms, horisenbada, and dried beef. Boortsogs are sticks of yogurt/milk fried with either beef, mutton, or camel oil. Qurags are a form of curd cheese made by taking the butter from yogurt, drying it in the wind, and molded into little cubes. Öröms are dried clotted cream made by boiling fresh milk and drying the clots that emerge on the surface. Horisenbada is stir-fried millet, where millets are fried in fresh milk butter until golden. Lastly, dried beef is wind-dried boiled beef, typically only favored with salt. After gathering all the dairy products and dried beef, one would pick a bit of each into a bowl, then pour freshly made salted milk tea into the bowl. At last, a bowl of traditional Mongolian milk tea is finished.



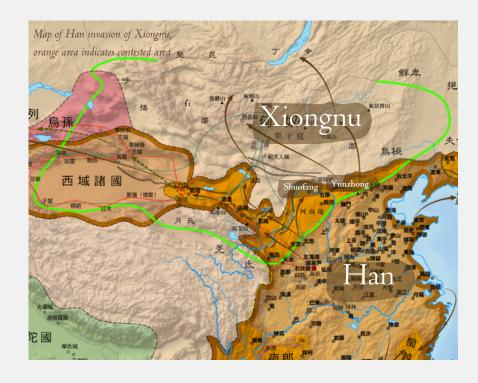


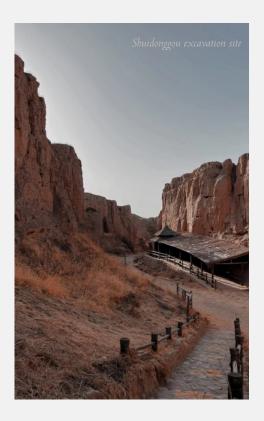


ORDOS MONGOLS

- Early Ordos
- $\bullet\,$ Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire
- Modern Ordos

The area currently inhabited by Ordos Mongols — the Ordos Plateau of the Yellow River — has been the cradle of the Yellow River's ancient civilizations since the Paleolithic blade age.[46] The Sarawusu River, flowing from the northwestern Loess Plateau into the Ordos grassland before merging into the Yellow River, fostered the prehistoric Shuidonggou culture. Since its discovery by Emile Licent and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in 1923, archaeologists have excavated unique core-and-blade technology demonstrating a historical symbiosis with the northern grassland cultures of Mongolia and Siberia.[41] Studies show that the Shuidonggou people are hunter-gatherers who arrived from western Siberia and the Altai region around four million years ago in search of a warmer climate. They brought their complex metalwork techniques, forging stone cores, scrapers, pointed tools, and other Paleolithic tools. [47]







The Zhujiakou culture succeeded the Shuigonggou on the Ordos plateau. The Zhujiakou began as hunter-gatherers, then transitioned to an agriculture phase before a climate change from dry to cold around 1500 BC led to the gradual growth of a pastoral economy. [48] The Zhujiakou's unique Ordos-type bronzes, such as daggers and knives, differ from Mongolian classical cultures, delineating the Zhujiakou as its own complete regional cultural system within the larger composition of prehistoric grassland culture. [49]

In the fourth century BCE, early Chinese texts documented a new wave of equestrian nomads of Indo-European descent migrating into the Ordos plateau from Central Asia and southern Siberia; the Chinese referred to them as the Hu, Donghu, and Linhu.[50] As a result of this influx, the ethnolinguistic character of Ordos culture is heavily influenced by the Scythians (Iranian peoples, north of the Assyrians) and the Pazyryk culture (Central Asian nomadic culture, in present-day Altay region of Kazakhstan, Siberia, and Mongolia).[51] The Zhao kingdom of the Warring States period incorporated these territories into their borders, setting up the frontier commandery of the Yunzhong after King Wuling defeated the Linhu peoples in a campaign between 307 and 296 BCE. [52] The Qin dynasty inherited the commandery and maintained a good relationship between the central administration and the nomadic residents.

Around the second century BCE, the Xiongnu of the northeast Asian steppes expanded their empire, overtaking much of northern Eurasia, including the Ordos steppes, before launching raids and sieges into China proper. When the Han dynasty emperors defeated the Xiongnu, the Ordos region was made into the commandery of Shuofang in 127 BCE.[54] Many Han residents moved into the commandery during this period, setting up frontier towns that facilitated trade on the Silk Road between Europe, Central Asia, and China.[55] Towards the end of the Han dynasty, invading Xianbei and other nomadic tribes drove out many Han residents, and the commandery dissolved.[56] From then on, the Ordos people merged with many Mongolic cultures as the region changed hands between many dynasties established by northern nomads for much of the early ten centuries CE, cementing it as a Mongolic group.[57]



Genghis Ishan and the Mongol Empire

The place where the flower-antlered golden deer lives, the place where hoopoe birds raise their young, the place where declining dynasties are revived, the place where white-haired old men enjoy themselves — a poem accredited to Genghis Khan at Ordos

When Genghis Khan began to expand its empire into East Asia, the Ordos region was ruled by the Tangut-led Western Xia empire. The Tanguts originated from the southwestern Qiang nomadic tribe and the eastern Tibetan peoples, and their Xia dynasty ruled northwest China for about eight centuries after settling into the Ordos plateau during the Tang dynasty in the sixth century. [58]

Legends say that when Genghis Khan arrived in Ordos on his way to conquer the Xia, he was mesmerized by the beautiful scenery of lush water plants, spotted deer, and flying eagles. It is said that the Khan became so nostalgic that his Muna (horsewhip) slipped and fell to the ground. He then turned to his entourage: "I can be buried here after my death."

After his death, his son transported his body back to central Mongolia and buried him secretly (the tomb of Genghis Khan was never discovered). According to Mongolian shamanistic traditions, the Mongols honored his memory and spirit through his personal effects. Kublai Khan built temples to house these artifacts in the new Mongolian capital, Daidu (Beijing). [59]

After the fall of the Mongolian empire, the aristocracy escaped north. When they arrived in the region, they discovered about three thousand households and a plethora of pastures for herds to congregate. [60] Mongol aristocrats brought many sacred objects to the Ordos and rekindled the legend of Genghis Khan's poem in the Ordos during the Xia conquest. [61] The mausoleum of Genghis Khan became known as the Eight White Palaces (sometimes translated as Eight White Yurts).

They named the region "Ordos," after the Mongolian word ordo, which stands for palaces. Traditionally, it consisted of three yurts of Genghis Khan's wives (Börte, Qulan, and Gürbeljin Ghoa) and five sacred objects (Genghis Khan's white horse, his milk pail, his arrows and quivers, his reins and saddles, and his treasury with old writings and sacrificial articles). The yurts would be scattered in northeastern Ordos, coming together only for the unique annual spring offering to Genghis Khan. [62]

The elite entrusted the duty to guard the Eight White Palaces to the Darkhads, the Mongolic nomads originally scattered along the Ordos plains. [63] A Mongol prince bearing the title of Jinong ruled over all of Ordos and managed the Darkhads. From then on, the Darkhads assumed this responsibility, guarding the yurts as they were transported and presiding over the four seasonal ceremonies yearly to honor Genghis Khan.

In their long history, the Ordos Mongolians have created a culture characterized by sacrificial culture, palace culture, and folk culture — a unique Ordos culture. Since the 13th century, the Darkhad people of Ordos have inherited from generation to generation the original palace culture of the Mongolian nation, the highest sacrificial rituals of the Mongolian dynasty, and the classic folk customs of the Mongolian nation. Therefore, in the culture of this period, there was a peak period in literary and artistic creation. Many historical works, eulogies, literary works, folk songs, dances, etc., were published one after another, and the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture reached its peak. Ordos Mongolian culture has never seen such unprecedented prosperity.

Modern Ordos





Both pictures: Worshippers at the Spring Ceremony at the Genghis Khan mausoleum

When Dayan Khan reorganized the Mongol Empire into the Northern Yuan in 1479, Ordos became one of Mongolia's six official tumens. His third son, Barsu-Bolod Sain-Alag, took over the role of jinong.[64] From then on, the title of Jinong descended to his sons. Two hundred years later, the Qing dynasty defeated the last khan of the Northern Yuan in 1649; the Qing ruler reorganized the Ordos tumen and established the Yekhe Juu confederation, consisting of six banners. Many Han Chinese from the Loess Plateau moved into the northwest. They entered the Ordos area, propelled by generous Qing settlement policies to open the area to agriculture.[65] In these two hundred years, the Mongolians and Hans integrated, further consolidating the uniqueness of Ordos culture. For example, the ecstatic tones of the Shanxi folk songs merged with the traditional short-key Ordos Mongolian odes to form the Manhan Melodies.[66] Due to its unique Mongolian culture and the blend with the Loess Plateau cultures of Shanxi and Shaanxi, Ordos culture became an integration of agricultural and nomadic traditions, manifesting in many of its dances, songs, folklore, and personalities.

In the early 1910s, the Republic of China overthrew the Qing. Sun Yat-Sen wished to preserve the Qing traditions for border security and harmony and thus kept the Yekhe Juu confederation and its six banners. [67] In 1939, due to the fear of the incoming Japanese army, the Darkhads asked the Chinese National government to move the cultural relics into Qinghai. After the war ended, the Communist government returned the relics to Ordos. However, during the Cultural Revolution, the Darkhads were driven out, many of the relics were destroyed, and the mausoleum was torn down. Then, in 1979, Beijing reissued funds to rebuild the mausoleum and invited the Darkhads back to Ordos. [68]

Today, the 6,000 Darkhads alive still lead the rituals at the mausoleum. These include daily and monthly offerings, weekly mutton and goat meat sacrifices, and annual and seasonal festivals.[69] Even in the traditional practices of Ordos Mongolian culture, one could see remnants of a long history of cultural perseverance, diversity, imperial traditions, and vitality.



The Ordos Mongols have a very elaborate and unique set of wedding traditions that earns its place as one of the first national intangible cultural heritage recognized by the National State Council.[70] The Ordos wedding contains the essence of the Mongolian marriage ceremonies. It is full of singing and dancing; it is warm, cheerful, humorous, and festive, with healthy content and elegant character. It highlights the Mongolian people's ruggedness, boldness, enthusiasm, and exquisiteness.

The Ordos wedding is a culmination of the Ordos Mongolian traditional spirit — sacrificial culture and palace food from their mission guarding the mausoleum; the music intermingled with the Loess Plateau culture, and the ceremonial clothing and etiquette of the shamans. It embodies the Ordos' desire to pursue a happy life intertwined with rich and profound cultural connotations.

The Ordos wedding includes the presentation of khatas, wearing a bow, blocking the door to welcome the son-in-law, offering sheep for toast, hand-breaking a sheep neck, mother's blessing, snatching the hat, baptism with the sacred fire, kneeling to worship the parents-in-law, sending the bride off with a song, and the bride paying respects to the parents and in-laws.[71] These are a series of specific ritual procedures and activities that make up a traditional Ordos wedding. A few of those mentioned above will be highlighted.

Ceremony and Sacrifice



Before the groom's family departs for the bride's family, the groom, best man, and other people in the wedding procession knelt before the shamanistic altar at dusk.[72] The officiant from the groom's side holds a copper milk bucket filled with fresh milk in one hand, dips the top of the arrow shaft into the other, and then shoots it into the sky as a sacrifice to the gods of heaven and earth. At the same time, they paint the groom's hose, bow, and arrow as the officiant loudly praises the bow, arrow, and horse for good luck.



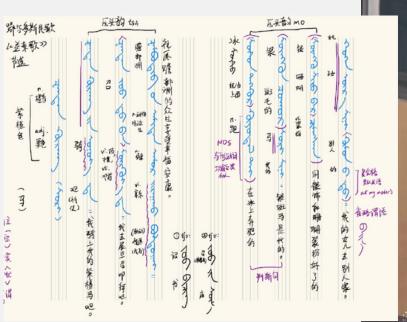
Hat Stealing

Before the groom's family gets to the bride's family, the two sides will have a hat-trick competition on horseback. [73] Usually, the groom's family tries their best to snatch the groom's hat and either put it on the riding crop or throw it to the ground, which forces the groom to get off his horse to pick it up, thereby slowing him down to so doesn't get to the bride as fast. The groom's family protects each other and doesn't let the bride's family remove the hat. Along the way, both families get to get to know each other and have fun with each other, demonstrating an intense atmosphere of steppe life.



Bridal Headdresss

The Ordos Mongolian headdress is one of the most elaborate pieces of the wedding costume. The Ordos type of headpiece is also the most complicated and expensive type out of all the Mongolic groups.[74] They are typically made of silver, coral, Peking glass, turquoise, malachite, agate, enamel, and cloth. [75] The design differs depending on the different tribal clans.[76] Throughout the procession, the bride's headdress and face are covered with a thin red/blue veil; after the bride presents the khata to the groom's family, the groom unveils the bride and ties the veil around the top of the headdress as a bow. The extravagance is a remnant of the old palace culture as Ordos Mongols inherited many of the clothing styles of Medieval Mongolians. The cascading beads that enclose an Ordos woman's face mark the unique and exquisite culture of Ordos weddings.



Bridal Song

The bride's family would sing this song as the groom's family departed with the bride from the bride's house. [77]

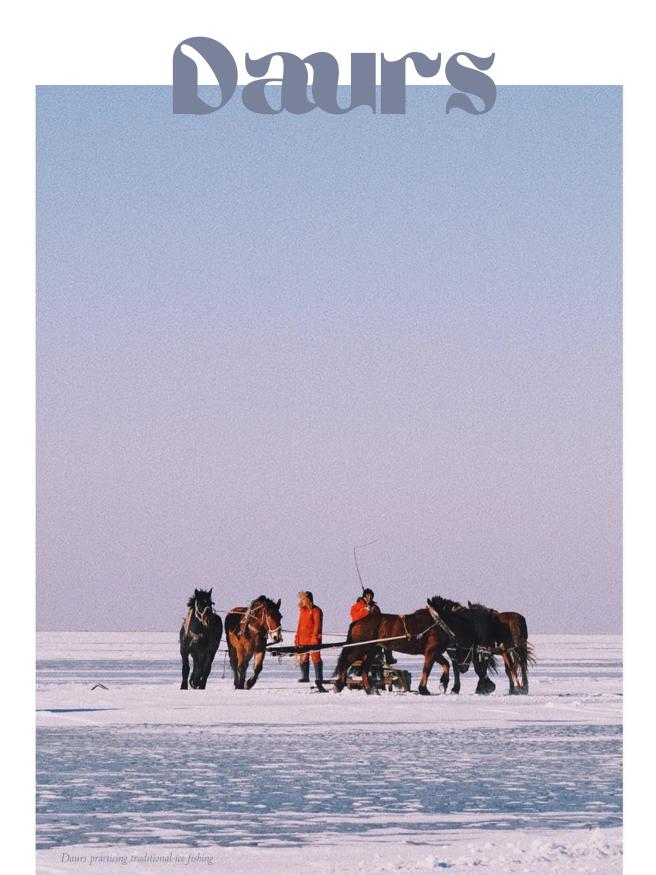
My dearest girl is getting married,
Marry to that faraway place,
The horse hooves of the procession sending off the bride are heard, vast and vast.
The procession was a herd of horses mottled with rosewood, marcon and silver,
Your Ordos headdress is decorated with pearls and corals,
The camel bell jingled as you sat down.
O god who summons the temple,
Soothe us ordinary people.
My dearest girl,
will marry far away,
Where will the family you marry follow the water and grass?
I'm now sending you away, so reluctant to leave,
Don't look back and sigh.
The scenery along the way is receding,
The bride taken away by the horse will not return.





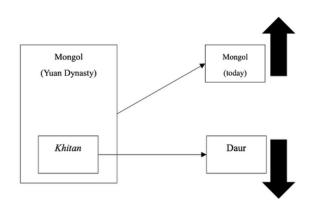
Honoring Fire

The Ordos (and Mongol) people worship many natural deities, including fire.[78] They believe fire is sacred and can ward off evil spirits, prevent disasters, dispel diseases, and eliminate disasters. Therefore, before the bride enters her husband's family, she must first undergo the baptism of the holy fire. The groom holds the bride's hand with a horsewhip and steps over a fire pit. After entering the husband's house, a hearth sacrificial ceremony is held.



Ethnic Origins

Today, ethnologists debate between two prominent theories of Daur origins, the Khitan theory and the Mongolic theory. The Khitan theory states that the Daurs emerged as a subclan of the Khitan nomadic group that occupied much of north China from the tenth to twelfth century. 79 The Khitans first appeared in Chinese records as part of the Xianbei nomadic group (who established the Northern dynasties), the Kumo Xi in present-day Liaoning (northeast China plains). In 916, they took advantage of China's power vacuum after the Tang dynasty's collapse and founded the Liao in 916. The Xianbei and Khitans were proto-Mongolic groups, meaning that they were the ancestors of the nomadic groups that Genghis Khan eventually united and were given the name "Mongols."



《蒙古秘史》Words in The secret history of the Mongols	达斡尔语Words in modern Daur languag	现代蒙古语Words in modern Mongo- e lian language	汉语释义Meanings in Chinese
秃兀巴tu'uba(动词)	tōģü (保留着tū的 动词活用形式)	替换为: buuh	落下
毕勒都兀儿bildu'ur(动物名)	bildūr, bieldür	替换为: hairguqi	《秘史》:告天雀儿 达斡尔语:百灵鸟
秃牙勒tuyal(动物名)	togyl, togiel	替换为: biljuuxai	《秘史》:群鸟、雀群 达斡尔语:朱顶雀、山雀

The link between the Daurs and the Khitans has both ethnological and philological evidence. The medieval Khitan combined stockbreeding, hunting, and agriculture, resembling current Daur agricultural traditions. [80] Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from modern DNA technology. Scientists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences used DNA technology to cross-reference DNA samples taken from the modern Daur population in Inner Mongolia with DNA extracted from a well-preserved Khitan-period corpse. [81] The scientists deduced that the current Daur population is genetically related to the ancient Khitans.

However, some theorists explain that this only shows a genetic mix between the two populations, but it does not indicate that the Daurs are descendants of the Khitans. Instead, it simply means that the Khitans and Daurs descend from ancient Mongolians. [82] Proponents of the Mongol theory claim that the Daurs are descendants of one of the Medieval Mongols, the Shivey people. The Shivey are a group of Medieval Mongols (proto-Mongols) residing in the forests of southern Siberia and the plains of northeast China. [83] Scholars predict that from the Shivey, the proto-Mongols who would become Mongols under Genghis Khan moved westward into the steppes and adopted a nomadic, pastoral lifestyle.[84] The Shivey then seceded from the Khitans in the twelfth century when Khabul Khan from the Borijigin tribe established the first Mongol state, Khamag Mongol. [85] His grandson, Genghis Khan, united the Mongol groups and formed the Mongol Empire. [86] Compared to the Mongols' expansion, a branch of the Shivey remained in northeast Asia. It continued the combination of hunting, fishing, and agriculture in Daur populations today.[87] Evidence of this evolution can be found in comparing the Medieval Mongolian language to the Daur and modern Mongolian.[88] As the Medieval Mongols spread to the corners of northwest Asia, the culture and language underwent drastic transitions and integrations with other nomadic cultures. However, as the Daurs largely remained in the same area, its language maintained many of the roots and phrases of Medieval Mongolian.



Politics and Culture

After Genghis Khan united all the tribes and nomadic groups of north China, the area that the Daur resided in split between three powers. Qasar, Genghis Khan's second older brother, controlled today's Argun River, Hailar River, and Hulun Lake (west of the Great Khinggan Range, before the Mongolian border). Hachiun, Genghis Khan's second youngest brother, received land south and west of Qasar, encompassing today's western Mongolia and middle Inner Mongolia. The Khongirad tribe then ruled over today's Great Khinggan Range and the upper course of the Liao River.[89] When Kublai Khan reformed the empire in I260 and proclaimed the Yuan dynasty, he took over the area previously given to the three powers under Genghis Khan, establishing the official Yuan provinces of Lingbei and Liaoyang.[90] However, after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, the area of south Siberia and the northeast China plains became the borderlands between the Northern Yuan (a smaller Mongolic continuation of the Yuan dynasty) and the Ming Dynasty (the Chinese dynasty controlled China properly). The incessant warfare forced the Daur to migrate eastward to the northern bank of the Heilongjiang River.[91]

After the Ming subdued northeast China, they established the Nurgan Regional Military Commission, specifically maintaining jurisdiction and peaceful relations with the non-Han populations in the area. [92] The administration organized non-Han groups into different geographical frontier posts, weiso. [93] The two maintained a symbiotic relationship: the Ming would protect the weiso from foreign invasions, and the weiso would submit tribute and guard the frontiers. The Daurs are organized into several weiso, including the Gulihewei, Tuomuhewei, Boludanhewei, Chuwanshanwei, and more, all in the middle to upper course of the Heilongjiang River. [94]

At this point, the Daur had consolidated the hunting, farming, and fishing culture that had begun with the Shivey and Khitan people. The mountains and rivers of the Great Khinggan range gave forth lush forests and abundant game. [95] The tributaries of the Heilongjiang River and Ergüne River converged into the north Asian plains, providing rich fishery and fertile soils.[96] Moreover, the Khinggan Range had blocked the tundra winds from Siberia, providing a temperate climate suitable for agriculture.[97] Their geographical advantage differentiated the Daurs from other Mongolic groups, who inhabited a much harsher and drier steppe climate suitable only for pastoralism. When the Russian explorers arrived in the region, they meticulously documented their encounters with the Daur people.[98] The Russians observed that the Daurs lived apart from their Mongolic counterparts, practicing agriculture (growing crops, beads, melons, and fruits) and pastoralism (keeping herds of cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs).[99] They also noted that the Daurs took advantage of the geographical resources and hunted for animal fur.[100] Another critical distinction they made was that the Daurs were heavily influenced by China, adopting Chinese textiles, metals, architecture, and dress.

Besides China, the Daurs were also heavily influenced by the Jurchens (later evolved into the Manchus, who established the Qing dynasty), another Tugusic nomadic group living in northeast China (south of the Daur territories).[101] When one compares Daur clothing with the Mongols and Jurchens/Manchurians, one can see an apparent similarity between the Daur and Jurchen/Manchurian dress in the stitching, pattern, and design.

Like the Mongols, the Qing emperor sought the loyalty of neighboring tribes when expanding its emperor into China. Therefore, Badarci, the chief leader of the Daurs, offered the Qing emperor a generous tribute and willingly submitted his tribe to the Qing empire. Under the Qing, they were grouped as the Solons with the other nomadic northeastern peoples, mainly the Oroqen and Evenks. To further consolidate state control over the Solons, the Qing incorporated them into the Banner system in 1640, which sought to divide ethnic groups into distinct and fragmented units. [102] This was the Qing dynasty's "immensely successful efforts at empire building," as the Banner system incorporated the Solons into a national framework that perpetuated their subjugation and justified their loyalty. [103]

In response to the rising frontier wars of the Qing empire, the Qing organized the Solons as soldiers. [104] To encourage loyalty, the Manchurians even promoted the Solons as the "New Manchus" and bestowed them titles and promotions for exemplary service. [105] They were relocated to the frontiers of the Qing empire, stationing in strategic posts in Qiqihar, Hulunbuir, and Mergen around northeast China, with some going as far as the newly conquered territories of Dzungaria near the Taklamakan Desert. [106] They became highly valued garrison soldiers and archers, participating in vital Qing battles in Jinchuan, Dzungaria, and Russia. [107]

While under the Manchurian rule, they incorporated many of Manchurian's cultural artifacts, including their writing script. The writing script then fostered a new era of Daur's literary culture, producing many pieces of writing and art unique to Daur. [108]



Qing to Modernity



When the Qing empire fell, the Daur joined independent Hulunbuir, which became separate from the Republic of China in 1912. During this time, the Daur scholars debated the position of the Daur ethnic identity between its close neighbors, the Mongols and the Manchus. Because of the antagonization of the Manchurians, the Daurs traced back to historical narratives of the Shivey to fit themselves more into a Mongolic culture. In the early 1950s, as the newly formed People's Republic of China began identifying China's many ethnic groups, scholars took three unique Daur factors into account.[109] The Daur was the only sedentary ethnic minority in Hulunbuir, distinguishable from the Evenki, Oroqen, and Mongolian communities. Second, the Daur language bears similarities to Medieval Mongolian but not modern Mongolian. Third, the Daurs kept the traditional shamanistic worship from their ancestors, while the other Mongolian tribes have primarily converted to Tibetan Buddhism. From the aggregate of these factors, the Communist Party conferred with Daur leaders and designated the Daurs as a separate ethnicity.

After this classification, the government soon designated most Daur areas as autonomous ethnic townships and banners across northern China. Today, the Daurs strive to preserve their ethnic culture amidst China's rapid industrialization and modernization. The Daur people have vibrant folk literature. Folk literary works, including myths, legends, folk songs, and folk dance, not only have a wide range of themes but are rich in content and relatively comprehensively reflect the history and social life of the Daur people.[IIO] Every year, the Daur people still host annual ceremonial celebrations and their famous hockey games that have earned them the "birthplace of hockey" in China.[III] In their long history, the Daur people have carved their path in the broader historical epic of the Mongolic people, creating a culture of rich traditions and art that still survives.



Daur Embroidery



Early Daur seamstresses selected the sinews of deer, Siberian roe deer, fox, and other animals into thin threads and used animal bones as thimbles to sew distinct patterns and embroideries onto different types of animal skins. As the Daurs became more agricultural, the Daur people began to use cotton threads and steel needles to embroider on satin and silk pieces.[II2]

Common themes and patterns reflect local customs, sentiments, and the everyday life of the Daur people, roughly divided into three categories.[II3] Plant motifs include flowers (peonies, plum blossoms, pomegranates), leaves, trees, and grasses. Animal patterns have horns, butterflies, birds, and deer. Lastly, some narrative embroideries depict flowing water, pavilions, and bridges. Daur embroidery maintains a harmonious balance between the simplicity of the patterns and the complexities of its cultural connotations. Its rich and unique ethnic heritage is a vital part of Daur's cultural composition and pride.

Hanika

"Hanika" is a form of paper cutting and puppet handicraft of the Daur people.[II4] The handcrafted figures range from around I0 to 20 centimeters. Historically, the Daur elders and parents cut figurines from birch barks to entertain little kids. Parents and children regard the "hanikas" as paper dolls, often assigning each figurine a role. When the kids often play with the "hanikas," adults would use this opportunity to demonstrate proper behaviors during social interactions, such as how to greet guests, how to serve guests tea and food, etc. [II5]



Kumule

"Kumule," a form of wild mugwort commonly found in northeastern China (scientific name: Artemisia integrifolia L), becomes a staple in Daur cuisine during the later spring to early summer period. [II6] In Daur history, the "Kumule" has helped the Daur people survive droughts, famines, and warfare. [II7] In Early May, the Daur people would gather in groups to collect wild-grown "Kumule" from the wetlands such as rivers, riverbanks, and riverbeds. Daur people regard them as a gift from nature.

To commemorate the survival of the Daur people from "Kumule," the Daur hosts an annual "Kumule" celebration on the third Sunday of May, where the Daur people put on their ethnic dress and come together for singing, dancing, wrestling, and horseriding. [II8]



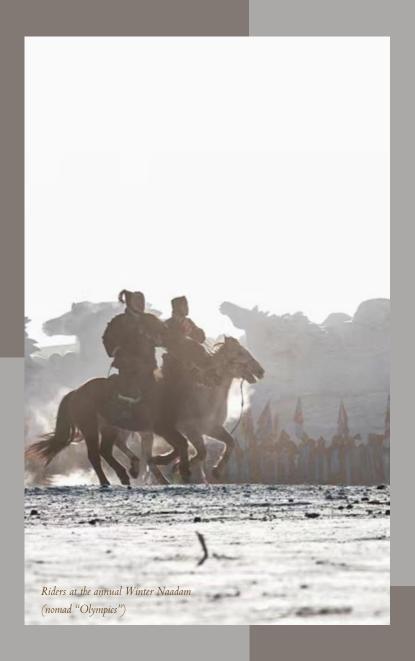


The most common way to eat "Kumule" is to make a Kumule soup with braised pork ribs. Scientific research and Daur traditional medicine affirm the positive benefits of eating Kumule, mainly its hypolipidemic (lowering lipids and cholesterol) effects from its high protein, fiber, and vitamin contents. [119]

Falconry

Falconry is a common nomadic hunting practice in Central Asia and the Northern Asian steppes. The Daurs refer to falconry as "shuwa" and typically use the Eurasian Goshawks, valued for their speed, agility, and aggressiveness. [120] The hunters would raise an eyas (baby hawk/falcon) from birth, domesticating and training them to become trusted hunting partners of the falconers. Once trained, they can capture hares, foxes, chickens, and other small animals — skilled falconers and falcons can even catch small does and gazelles — to enrich the Daurs' diets.





Across the North Asian plains, the steppes and rivers have nourished a whole body of people who have emerged from the pastures and developed into great empires and nations. The various Mongolic subgroups experienced decades of continuity and change through the currents of their history. The brief highlights of the Buryats, Ordos, and Daurs demonstrate that they are now at a new inflection point in their culture — the cross sections of their history, culture, and identity. As they navigate the twenty-first century's unique political, economic, and social landscape, they must consider how to preserve or reclaim their culture.

It is almost impossible to discern a clear policy suggestion on cultural perseverance and individual prosperity when, most of the time, they seem to be antithetical. Yet, these Steppe natives are slowly discovering ways for these two concepts to co-exist. Perhaps merely the spread of knowledge — of knowing that there are the Buryats, Ordos, and Daurs — does a minor part in this continuous work to retain their rich, colorful, and intrinsically invaluable cultural identity.

NEWSLETTER

CONCLUSION

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