Repair: Mongolian Art as Reimagination of the Pastoral Identity

Jamie N. Sanchez, Biola University, USA

Abstract

Many Mongols in Northern China grapple with threats to their cultural identity. Ongoing economic development, rapid urbanization, Hanification, and the state's historical assimilation policies threaten a distinct Mongolian cultural identity. One way that Mongols grapple with "cultural identity anxiety," is through representation. Material culture has become one mode to represent a distinct cultural identity and to uphold distinct ethnic boundaries. In this article, I analyze a piece of material culture in cartoon art form, titled "Repair," by Mongolian artist Babilig. I use cultural and political theory, historical shifts in Inner Mongolia, and Chinese state discourse and ideologies to demonstrate why material culture is used to construct and represent Mongolian cultural identity. I demonstrate how the artist uses different elements in piece of art critique the impact of the Chinese state's rapid urbanization on Mongol cultural space. I also posit that a distinct Mongolian cultural identity is promoted to debunk the long held Chinese state discourse in which Han are promoted over Mongols. Additionally, I argue that, ultimately, the representation of Mongols as reimagined pastoralists justifies state economic and urbanization policies aimed at ushering Inner Mongolia, and the Mongols who live there, into modernization.

Keywords: Inner Mongolia, China, Mongols, material culture, cultural identity

Introduction

I lived and worked in Hohhot, capital of Inner Mongolia, for about ten years between my first visit to the city 2001 and when I moved back to the United States in 2012. Over the years, like any expatriate who lives abroad for an extended period of time, I slowly peeled my way through the multiple layers of culture starting at the top layers of language and food and into the complicated layers of history, relationships, politics, and so forth. Thus, when on May 27, 2011 Mongolian protests took place in Hohhot, capital city of Inner Mongolia, I knew that there was more to the story than what I could see. Protests were not uncommon in China. But generally, they took place in front of a government building and lasted a day or less. This particular set of protests prompted the local authorities to declare martial law throughout the city which indicated to me that this situation was quite unusual.

Just over a year after I witnessed those protests, I started my doctoral studies. As I began to design my research project, I had the May 2011 protests in mind. I was not interested in the actual protests per se, but in the notion of resistance that was marked by the protests. I wanted to know what else Mongols were resisting. I turned to scholarly literature and to print material, social media, and electronic sources to begin my investigation of the phenomenon. My research combined with my extensive experience of living in Inner Mongolia led me to understand that Mongols grapple with cultural anxiety because of the ongoing urban development and state-driven assimilation policies throughout the region.

As I scoured the internet and social media, I happened upon a piece of cartoon art called *Repair* by Mongolian artist Babilig. This article centers on that piece of cartoon art. Against the backdrop of rapid urbanization throughout Inner Mongolia, which has all but destroyed Mongol pastoral grasslands throughout the region, I analyze this piece of cartoon art as a mode of cultural representation, reimagination of cultural heritage, and resistance against the impact of state-led urbanization.

Material Culture as an Object of Analysis

Over the last twenty years, academic investigations of material culture have expanded the way the field is conceptualized. There is no longer only an archaeological focus on material culture, but, rather, material culture can include just about anything (Tilley, et al, 2006). Thus, while the field still includes artifacts, it also includes architecture, landscape, memory, performance, and political ideologies, to name only a few examples (Tilley, et al, 2006, p. 28).

Because the field of material culture is both broad and flexible in its definition and application, I chose to use material culture as a framework of analysis for this article. The case study is a specific piece of material culture that, when analyzed, demonstrates the historical and contextual relationship Mongols have with the state, one another, cultural identity, memory, and so forth. The material culture framework allows for a discussion of reflexivity, relationship, and resistance. Additionally, this analytical framework allows for a simultaneous discussion of the Chinese state ideologies, discourse, and economic policies to which the piece of cartoon art is responding.

In addition to the analysis of material culture, I also use cultural and political theory, historical shifts in Inner Mongolia, and Chinese state discourse and ideologies to demonstrate why and how material culture is used to construct and represent Mongolian cultural identity. This is done in accordance with Appadurai and Breckenridge's assertions (1998) that analyses of

material culture can tell us about internal debates and how actors deliberately construct national and ethnic identities and cultural identities.

Hanification of Inner Mongolia

The population transfers of Han to Inner Mongolia are neither accidental nor a new trend in Chinese politics. In fact, this state practice was already heavily critiqued by Owen Lattimore during the 1930's. At that time one of the border securitization practices was to move Han into areas where there was a strong minority population. Lattimore suggested that assimilation was aimed at the "extermination of the Mongols, to make room for the Chinese" (Lattimore, 1935, p. 415). In addition to "extermination," Lattimore used other terms like "Chinese colonization" and "agricultural colonization" to explain that "All policies towards the Mongols, whether Chinese, Soviet or Japanese, appear to start from, a common premise: that something must be done about the nomadism of the Mongols" (Lattimore, 1935, p. 415). A "balance" in the population with an increase of Han interrupted any potential ethno-nationalistic tendencies that minorities may have harbored. It also prevented the border areas from attempting to split from China and align with other foreign forces. These practices are representative of the political ideology that suggests that to be Han is to be Chinese, and vice versa. This ideology remains strong and as is evident in the most recent Chinese state policing of Uyghur people throughout Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, known commonly as Xinjiang.

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, Mao Zedong continued the practice of mass population transfers to Inner Mongolia. Pastoralism was viewed as barbaric, following the ideology that Mongols, even all ethnic minority groups, were barbarians (Anderson, 1991; Bulag, 2002). In this way, Han population transfers can be viewed as a mode of civilizing the barbaric practices and people throughout the grasslands.

It goes without saying that The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a particularly intense time in Chinese history. The state propagated the discourse that pastoral areas throughout Inner Mongolia were strongholds for ethnic nationalism and could lead to autonomy movements. Under the auspices of security, the state furthered Han population transfers to Inner Mongolia. The idea was that Han would be more loyal to the Chinese state than Mongols (Sanchez, 2015).

Deng Xiaoping's focus on modernization through campaigns like *The Four Modernizations* was a further push by the state to modernize the national economy with far reaching consequences on Mongols. The transformation of Mongols from pastoral people to urbanites became increasingly obvious during this time leading to shifts in the lived realities of Mongols but these shifts and to environmental problems like desertification.

Throughout the 2000's urbanization continued. One driving force was an aspirational economic plan called the *Western Development Program*. This *Program* aimed at developing the economy throughout much of the western regions of China. The focus on raising the standard of living for the growing urban populations often resulted in destruction of the grasslands. Mongolian herders may have been compensated for their land, but as we have learned from other global cases, no amount of compensation is adequate or can replace the self-autonomy and cultural identity often attached to land (Escobar, 2001, p. 162).

The prominent ideology that Han are culturally progressive and all others in China are backwards, has driven much of the state's assimilation policies and continues to guide the state's management of ethnic minority groups. State-driven economic development throughout China's borderlands is thought to be one way the state controls ethnic minority groups living

in the border regions. The state's colonial projects are not unlike the global norm in which state powers have framed *others* as in need of help from the civilized world. North American Indians, Native Hawaiians, and Australian Aborigines have all been ushered into modernity through so-called goodwill development introduced by the civilized world. Stevan Harrell referred to this process as a "civilizing project" in which China's ethnic minority groups have been "subjected over the last few centuries to a series of attempts by dominant powers to transform them, to make them more like the transformers, or in the parlance of the transformers themselves, to 'civilize' them." (Harrell, 1995, p. 3). Thus, modernism, backwards, goodwill can be understood as rhetorical tropes that construct the state's ideology and its aggressive development policies in which non-Han might be civilized.

Although urbanization has removed vast populations of Mongols pastoral lands, the cultural identity connected with pastoralism is clearly not extinct. Rather, this identity marker remains strong as will be demonstrated later in the article. First, however, I will discuss the state's necessity to construct and maintain distinct ethnic identity markers as part of the overall state identity.

The State: Construction of Ethnic Identities

Although Han culture remains the standard culture in China, the state still needs ethnic groups to showcase evidence that China is a multiethnic nation. The proliferation of ethnic groups also helps the state stave off criticisms which blame the state for ethnic minority cultural destruction. However, the state does not leave it to each ethnic group to construct its own identity. The Chinese state has long been involved in "national image-management" in which Chinese citizens become cognizant of the prescribed social order and help perpetuate the prescribed state image of a unified nation (Leong, 1989, p. 76).

During the early Maoist years, the state produced images in which Chinese citizens were depicted as both united in form and function but were obviously distinct from one another (Schein, 2000). After the Cultural Revolution, during which ethnic distinction was prohibited, Deng once again allowed for ethnic differences, which became "picturesque assets" for China's state building efforts (Schein, 2000, p. 144). China's ethnic minorities were put on display through state produced cultural productions to showcase China as a multinational state, in part because multinationalism had become the global norm. The Stalinist model of how an ethnic group should be defined, that guided the Ethnic Classification Project in the 1950's, still directed China's state building efforts during the Deng era. But whereas the prior focus was on social classes, the Deng era focus was on ethnic groups. As a result, Chinese citizens looked to the state's focus on ethnic groups, which included the construction of cultural identities attached to each group, for direction on how to express cultural identity. To this day, the state still sets the parameters for ethnic identity expression.

Cultural identity is often an expression of ethnic group consciousness. That is not to say that *all* members of one ethnic group express cultural identity in the same way. Yet, there are often commonly expressed traits. The construction of cultural identities functions in the same way as the construction of national identities. Benedict Anderson has claimed that "Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). Following the assertion that national identities are constructed through an "imagined community," Stuart Hall asserted that national cultures are also imagined. He stated that "National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can *identify;* these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed

of it" (Hall, 1992, p. 293). In light of the theoretical positionality taken up by Anderson and Hall, namely that national identities are constructed, how then are cultures represented?

In China, the representation of ethnic groups is managed in such a way that promotes nationalism and legitimates the Chinese state. In what has become influential scholarship, Anagnost pointed out that through the representation of ethnic groups the state has rendered itself "civilized" and "constructed an 'otherness' against which the Party can exercise its legitimating activism" (Anagnost, 1997, p. 231). Whereas the categorization of China's ethnic minority groups coaxed those living on the fringe of Chinese society into viewing themselves as part of the Chinese nation, the construction of ethnic identities coaxes ethnic minority groups to look to the state for directions on how to be Mongolian, or Tibetan, or any member of any other ethnic identity. For Mongols, then, there is an identity that has been constructed and promoted by the state, which helps to maintain ethnic boundaries, in the Barthian sense, between Mongolians and others ethnic groups in China.

Who are the Mongols?

The question is, to borrow from Almaz Khan, "Who are the Mongols?" Khan suggested that "Historical memory plays an important role in how the Mongols are perceived and represented today. This is true both in terms of Mongol self-imaging and representation and their perception and representation by other parties" (Khan, 1996, p. 127). He argued that there is a "homogenizing "Mongolness" for the *public* domain, an essentialized identity grounded in a historical pastoral ecology" (Khan, 1996, p. 126). The assertion that the pastoral identity was a key signifier of Mongolian cultural identity is evident throughout scholarly literature. For example, Bulag has written extensively that pastoralism is a key cultural marker of Mongolness, and Fujitani wrote that pastoralism is "a material vehicle of meaning that helped construct a memory…or that served as a symbolic marker" (Fujitani, 1993, p. 89). Thus, the pastoral identity is a key marker of Mongolian identity and, therefore, is used as representation of Mongols in China despite the diminishing numbers of the Mongolians who continue to work as pastoralists.

This article does not claim that pastoralism and agriculturalism fall perfectly along ethnic lines. There is a need to be aware that the binary divide between Mongolian pastoralists and Han agriculturalists marginalizes those Mongols who are farmers and Han who raise sheep (Bulag, 2000). However, whether or not Mongols are actually pastoralists, they, as a collective group, are often represented as such. In this vein, Henochowicz suggested that, "To be Mongol is no longer to be nomadic, but rather to have the nomadic ideal in mind." (Henochowicz, 2008, pp. 46–47). This nomadic identity is constructed and maintained by both the state and Mongols themselves, in part because, of the Ethnic Classification Project which "requires perpetual management by the state and continued participation by the people" (Mullaney, 2006, p. 135). In other words, there must be continued and intentional efforts made in order for ethnic groups to remain distinct.

There is a general consensus amongst scholars that China's minorities have long been represented by an outsider without any voice from within the minority group (See Gladney, 1994; McKhann,1995). A counter-perspective to this view is the assertion that, in recent years, minority groups have increasingly been active in the public representation of their own cultural identities (Baranovitch, 2001). This article follows the same position and suggests that both the state and minority groups are active in the representation of ethnic minority identity. For Mongols, cultural differences are promoted through material culture, which has become a form

of "resistance within collaboration" (Bulag, 1999, pp. 21–41). In other words, Mongols' resistance (to land grabs, sinicization, assimilation, cultural identity anxiety) is achieved through a collaboration with the state in how Mongolian identity is publicly represented. Through these modes of representation, the Mongolian culture is portrayed as that of an essentialized minority group in which the discourse of a multi-national state is perpetuated and Mongols are represented in a stereotypical and internally Orientalized fashion.

The Idealized Grasslands as Landscape Representation

The use of landscape as a mode of representation can be traced back to the Italian Renaissance (Cosgrove, 1985). During that time period landscape began to be theorized as a "visual ideology" of realism (Mitchell, 2000). Because landscapes are represented, this "indicates that landscapes are in some very important senses 'authored' (Mitchell, 2000, 121). Following this line of argument, landscapes hold cultural power and "have a double role with respect to something like ideology … It naturalizes a cultural and social construction representing an artificial world …" (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 1–2). In other words, landscape representations are often created in order to promote ideologies.

Cultural geographers have traced landscape, both the built environment and the representation of it, as a method of exerting power and control over those who inhabit the land (See Cosgrove, 1985; Cresswell, 1987; Daniles and Cosgrove, 1993). Rapid urbanization in China is an example of built environments that exude meaning as a representation of power. Throughout China, built environments have come to represent China's secured position as a global powerhouse to both domestic and international observers. Skyscrapers built throughout Beijing just in time for the 2008 Summer Olympic games, the transformation of villages like Shenzhen to economic centers of trade, and the expansive urban centers built throughout the western regions of the country all represent and undergird the state's power.

Landscape representations can also function in the same way: as representations of power. In Inner Mongolia, the grasslands are the key representation of landscape in the province and display the state's power to represent the land as pristine despite the burgeoning urban growth, coal and gold mines, and other industrial structures that have been built throughout the province. Despite any reality concerning the grasslands, Inner Mongolia "continues to be perceived the way it has always been: as an exotic and wild region where all is boundless blue sky, grassland, herds, and nomads" (Khan, 1996, p. 132). The construction of the grassland imaginary is not accidental but intentionally authored as part of the state's construction of an identity that both appeals to the local community and benefits the state.

The Inner Mongolian grasslands have been rendered to the imaginary in such a way as to give them permanence and position them so they can spur on human imagination and memory. The reimagination of the grasslands continues to be perpetuated despite the reality in which the grasslands throughout the province are increasingly disrupted with sprawling cities and environmental catastrophes. Ironically, the representation of the grasslands as pristine can also be read as a subtle critique of the state's destruction of the grasslands. In other words, the representation of the picturesque geography that no longer exists serves as a reminder that the grasslands have been destroyed by the state's modernization efforts.

The grasslands have long been the setting of an internally colonial experience. Said writes that "more subtle and complex is the unending cultural struggle over territory, which necessarily involves overlapping memories, narratives, and physical structures" (Said, 2000, 181). Thus,

the grasslands are not just represented as idealized for the sake of nostalgia, but they also signify the setting of a cultural struggle between traditional Mongolian shepherding and the modernizing efforts of the state.

The Grasslands in Disrepair

Babilig is an internationally known artist from Inner Mongolia. He has won several awards for his art in China and in international competitions throughout the world. Several Chinese news outlets feature Babilig in their online publications. His work can also be found on *Facebook*.

The piece of cartoon art below is titled *Repair* (Figure 1). I first saw the piece of art on *WeChat* in 2012. I chose this particular piece of art to examine because it is a commentary on cultural and political change in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia. The elements in this art piece work together to represent Mongolian culture and to create tension in which the overdevelopment of the grasslands is critiqued.

Repair depicts the ongoing challenges Mongolian families face in response to over development throughout the grasslands. It is both an imagined representation of the pastoral life and a critique of the impact of modern technology on the grasslands. The geographical setting in this piece of art is the pristine grasslands which, as mentioned above, have become a trope in the construction of a "petrified" Inner Mongolia.

Figure 1: *Repair* by Babilig (Babilig, 2015)

Traditional versus Modern

There are two men in Babilig's art piece. The most prominent figure is at the center of the image. He is depicted as a Mongolian shepherd wearing traditional Mongolian clothes, called a *deel,* and Mongolian boots. The *deel* is brightly colored, which draws the viewer's gaze towards the man. His pastoral identity is further marked by the sheep in the foreground of the picture. Additionally, the grasslands are presented as wide, open spaces without fences or any

other boundary marker. Boundless grasslands in which Mongols lived as mobile pastoralists was once part of the Mongol spatial identity. Babilig rightly places the Mongol shepherd in a traditional Mongolian space. Finally, the glasses he is wearing seem to indicate that he is an older man. In this way, this man is representative of a past generation for whom pastoralism was the most common occupation.

This is in direct contrast to the other man in the picture who is also a Mongolian man, wearing a *deel*, but who is driving a motorcycle which is representative of modern technology. This man is representative of a younger generation. He is facing forward, in motion, and leaving the past behind. This tension, between young and old, modern and backwards, moving and stuck, is key in this piece of art. The actions of each of the men are juxtaposed in order to critique the impact that *modernism* has had on the Mongolian cultural space and, by extension, on the Mongolian people. The tension created by destruction and repair are a reference to the state's policies in Inner Mongolia in which Mongols were blamed for overgrazing and destroying the land. Chinese state discourse deflects any responsibility for land degradation and, instead, blames local residents (Williams, 2002). Mongol pastoralists are depicted as lazy and as lacking the scientific understanding necessary to care for the pastoral lands.

Thus, by depicting the older Mongolian man as the one who is able to repair the land, Babilig resists the state discourse that insists that Mongols are not able to care for the land. Babilig also avoids the danger of having his art censored in China. This is achieved through his nuanced critique whereby, instead of blaming the state directly for the destruction of the grasslands, Babilig focuses on the Mongolian man's "repair" of the grasslands. In doing so, the focus is on the Mongolian shepherd, and by extension, traditional Mongolian pastoralists, the ones who are able to repair the destruction caused by modern development.

Invoking Nostalgia

Another important element in this piece of art is the notion of nostalgia which can be described as the "association with (indeed, its disguise as) more genuinely innocent, tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life" (Resaldo, 1989, p. 108). Nostalgia is invoked in both the constructed image of the grasslands and by the image of a yurt in the background of the painting. Yurts are not as common in daily life as they once were. Instead, they have been transformed into markers of Mongolian ethnicity through the cultural tourism industry which is further discussed in the next chapter. They are used as hotels for tourists who want to have an *authentic* Mongolian experience (Evans and Humphrey, 2002). In this piece of art, there is just one yurt rather than a cluster of yurts, which is more common in tourist locations. This probably indicates that the yurt belongs to one of the men. It is safe to assume that it belongs to the older gentleman because he represents a past Mongolian cultural identity. But, unlike the vivid colors used to depict the man, the image of the yurt is muted. Its faded depiction represents the fading of Mongolian traditional culture. What once was a reality has been relegated to a memory, but even that memory is faded. In this way, perhaps Babilig is conceding the fact that Mongol traditions are in the distant past, and in the distant memory, of the Mongolian people.

Said writes that people look to "memory, especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world" even if it is "manipulated and intervened for sometimes urgent purposes in the present" (Said, 2000, p. 179). The image of the yurt is part of the ethnic Mongolian narrative that maintains Mongolness through imagined pastoralism. In this way, memory is also an indicator of the relationship between Mongols and

the state. The fact that a yurt has been relegated to memory is a reminder that the Mongolian cultural identity has been interrupted by state power. It is a "dialectic of memory over territory" highlights the place that Mongols have within the Chinese ethnopolitical order (Said, 2000, p. 181).

Red China Reigns

The last element of this piece to be analyzed is the color of the dirt beneath the grasslands. It is a reddish hue. Perhaps Babilig drew the dirt red to represent blood. The land is "bleeding" due to the way modern technology has "cut" it. Because of the destruction of modern technology, the land requires a surgical repair by one who knows how to care for the land: a Mongol shepherd. Further, the shepherd is wearing a traditional Mongolian *deel* that is the same color as the land. There is a connection, a unity, between the Mongol shepherd and the land. Thus, if the land is representative of Mongolian culture, then the fissure in the land is representative of the fissure in Mongolian cultural identity. As such, it is a return to the traditional Mongolian lifestyle that will repair the land.

Another possible reading of the color of the dirt is that the red hue represents China. Red is representative of state power. Red is the color of the nation's flag, the color of money-filled envelopes given at Chinese festivals, and the name for the youth army (Red Guards) during the Cultural Revolution. It is a Chinese (Han) color. At Inner Mongolia University, in the capital city of Hohhot, at the top of the main building on campus, there are three decorative concrete yurts. At first glance, it would appear that the yurts that sit atop the main building of a traditionally Mongolian university were constructed to represent the Mongolian culture. But instead of painting the yurts blue, which is a color that is traditionally representative of the Mongolian people, the yurts were painted red to signify the power that the state holds over Mongols. The color literally covers the yurts, which communicates that any expression of the Mongolian culture must follow the state's mandates for the public domain. Thus, by painting the dirt red, Babilig is perhaps cooperating with the state by affirming its power in Inner Mongolia. Further, if the land is red, then it could be interpreted that the land belongs to the state. Despite what Mongols may believe about their cultural connection and history with the land, it is the state that owns the land.

Modern Modes of Technology to Preserve Tradition

As mentioned above, I first saw *Repair* on the popular Chinese social media site *WeChat,* and Babilig's art is also easily accessible on other social media sites. If Babilig is using modern technology to promote his artwork, is it contradictory to my argument that Babilig is preserving a traditional identity? Is the use modern technology contradictory to the resistance theme of *Repair?* I do not think that it is. My argument in the analysis of *Repair* is not that Mongols are not modern or disdain modernity. Rather, I posit that *Repair* is an example to demonstrate how Mongols, in response to development, have reimagined their cultural identity. Thus, modern technology like social media sites are just another mode through which the Mongolian cultural identity can be reimagined and relaunched.

In *Imagined Communities,* Anderson discussed how newspapers were used to promote ideas of nationalism (Anderson, 1991). Printed newspapers have largely given way to social media tools, which include Facebook and Twitter. But the function is still the same: to unify people who live in different geographic locations. In the same vein, the distribution of *Repair* through social media functions to mobilize Mongols through a common identity and purpose. *Repair* is at the intersection of art as resistance and social media as mobilization. Rather than display

Repair as a fixed image on an urban wall mural, Babilig's art is accessible through various online sources. It has been "liked" and "shared" and "reposted" widely. Through this prolific dissemination, Mongols are mobilized in the resistance of the destruction of the grasslands and unified into a reimagined pastoral identity.

Collective Memory as Representation and Resistance

Representations of cultural identity are "not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and *endowed with political meaning* (italics added)" (Said, 2000, p. 185). Said's statement helps further elucidate Babilig's poignant piece of cartoon art. In *Repair,* the collective memory of a Mongol pastoral life is not passively represented. Rather, Babilig chooses certain cultural markers, like the setting of the pristine grasslands and the "wise" shepherd as the one who is able to "repair" the grasslands. He maintains a sense of an imagined community through the expression of cultural identity. Babilig's work is certainly endowed with political meaning. Through the nostalgic elements of a past Mongolian lifestyle and through the destruction created by modern technology, Babilig critiques the Chinese discourse of modernization. What is also important in Babilig's piece is the work that collective memory does to harken Mongols back to the pastoral lifestyle. The images of the grasslands, the shepherd, and the yurt are all a representation of a timeless and idealized pastoral identity that Mongols do not want to forget.

Zhao wrote that "the state may rewrite history as a means to colonize ethnic minorities and to control them through coercive policies. It cannot, however, eliminate the historical memory of ethnic minorities" (Zhao, 2004, p. 179). Therein lies another point of tension between Mongols and the Chinese state. On the one hand, it is the state that has constructed Mongolian cultural identity and has relegated pastoralism to the imaginary. Mongols see themselves as pastoralists forced by the state to become "modern." The state views Mongols as recovered pastoralists that are finally moving along the evolutionary scale of social development (See Mullaney, 2006).

Repair is also a form of resistance which "attempts to redefine or break down the structures of power that govern resister's life" (Mitchell, 2000, 68). Babilig resists the state's discourses about romanticized Inner Mongolia, backwards Mongols, and the benefits of modernity by depicting the grasslands differently from the way the state would wish them to be depicted. This piece of art has all the elements of the state constructed image of the grasslands, just like the leather painting described above. But in Babilig's rendition, the grassland trope is interrupted by destruction. The fissure through Babilig's piece is, as Cresswell writes, a "purposeful action directed against some disliked entity" (Cresswell, 1996, p. 22). Babilig's drawing is then an act of resistance, different from protests, but still aimed at the same disliked entity: the destructive actions in the grasslands.

The pastoral imaginary is publicly represented because, for the state, the image of the pristine grasslands not only dismisses criticisms of environmental destruction, but it also creates a visual rhetoric in which the grasslands are represented as an idyllic tourist destination. The reimagined pastoral identity can be mobilized and taken on by Mongols. This identity is not an advertisement for tourism but, instead, is a critique of the state's destruction of the Mongol homeland. The critique of the state is a method in which Mongols resist the state discourse of goodwill development that frames Mongols as backwards. Further, Mongols resist and protest the end of a distinct cultural identity because, although pastoralists are quickly disappearing,

the pastoral identity can still be perpetuated, even if only through a nostalgic representation of a past reality.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined how Mongols grapple with cultural identity anxiety by using material culture in order to deliberately reimagine a notion of "Mongolness." The reality of a social environment dominated by rapid urbanization, economic development, and Han assimilation has prompted Mongols in Inner Mongolia to turn to material culture as representations of culture, identity, and resistance. Whereas the daily lives of Mongols in Inner Mongolia are marked by the realities of an ever-changing region, representation through material culture helps Mongols preserve their cultural distinction.

The analysis of Babilig's cartoon art *Repair* demonstrates how Babilig followed the parameters of the state constructed grassland image in his painting, which includes the representation of the grasslands as an idealized space. Additionally, as was also demonstrated, Babilig critiques the state discourse in which Mongols are presented as backwards and unable to care for the land. Babilig's piece is an example a Mongol response to the claim of the destruction of the grasslands within the state's dominant framework of representation.

Mongols are constantly negotiating ethnopolitical challenges in China, the impacts of economic expansion, urban policy shifts, and their own ethnic minority status. Given the shifting nature of daily life in China, various forms of material culture may well be one constant source of identity making for Mongols. As such, material culture will also continue to provide sources of study for scholars who want to understand the nuanced ways in which Mongols seek to preserve their heritage and culture.

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Corresponding author: Jamie N. Sanchez
Contact email: jamie.sanchez@biola.edu