

# The Cultural and Educational Dimension of the “New Silk Road:” The Re-invention of Mongolness at the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands

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## Abstract

*In October 2013, Xi Jinping presented not only an ambitious infrastructure project but a strategic initiative that promoted connections in many regards: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). One intended strategic value of this initiative is the improvement of relations between China and its neighbours as well as the improvement of dialogue among different civilizations. Emphasis is placed on the importance of the shared historical cultural heritage of the involved ethnic groups, while the idea of a ‘harmonious society’ is promoted at the same time. The aim of this article is to shed light on how China expands its soft power through civilizational connections along the Sino-Mongolian-Russian Economic Corridor by referring to the Silk Road Academic Belt. This article is based on ethnographic field research in Hénán Mongol Autonomous County in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands of Qīnghǎi Province during an international conference titled “Historical and Cultural Links between Mongolia and Tibet,” held in July 2017.<sup>1</sup>*

**Keywords:** Sino-Tibetan borderlands, “Silk Road,” cultural transmission, Mongols, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).



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## Introduction

The Sino-Tibetan borderlands are comparatively large, complex and heterogeneous in terms of geography, history, and population (see Beth 2012; van Spengen 2009; Tuttle 2010 and 2012; Tsomu 2009 and 2014; Kolas 2015; and Wallenböck 2017b). The region is located in High Asia's plateau and is mainly populated by (semi-)pastoralists; in comparison, China's lowlands in the east are largely comprised of sedentary people. It has been an important contact zone<sup>2</sup> between significant cultural and political configurations throughout history, especially due to the strategic trading routes in the area which have maintained regular contact between China, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The major societies involved facilitated complex and distinctive social, political, and economic infrastructures for connecting distant regions. In this sense, the borderlands have been a focal point for the interaction between major societies, acting as a major crossroads for transferring objects and ideas for at least two millennia. They tend to be portrayed as a transitional region between Tibetan and Chinese cultural realms (Yeh et al 2014), neglecting a long-lasting strong Mongol influence, while they actually need to be described as a melting-pot of multiple ethnic groups at the crossroads between Mongol and Tibetan cultures, as well as Han Chinese and Inner Asian Muslim cultures.

The local population of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands have significant cultural and linguistic characteristics that separate them from the Han Chinese majority group within the People's Republic of China (PRC); at the same time, they share historical and cultural links. The long-term and sustained close relationship between Mongols and Tibetans has been an important factor in historical and social developments in this part of the Chinese nation. This connectivity is therefore deemed an inevitable requirement of the "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) (*yīdài yīlù* 一带一路) initiative proposed by Xí Jīnpíng 习近平 in September 2013. The Chinese government has advocated and supported in-depth studies of Tibet-Mongol ethnic and cultural relations due to its relevance for the construction of a harmonious society in the respective areas. Such initiative is supposed to strengthen *mínzú tuánjié* 民族团结 (translated as "national unity" or "amity between nationalities"), a slogan initially set by Premier Zhōu Ēnlái 周恩来 (1898–1976) during the Qīngdǎo Nationality Affairs Conference in July 1957 (Bulag 2002: 86). It sets up educational and cultural institutions that act as think tanks for learning across different cultures based on "the spirit of the Silk Road – peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit" (University Alliance of the New Silk Road 2015).

Due to the long-term mutual contact between Tibetans and Mongols, a milieu was created in which unique local customs, language patterns, and social communities

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<sup>2</sup> The term "contact zone" was coined by Mary Louise Pratt in 1991. A brief discourse on the term can be found in Viehbeck 2017: 7-8.

have emerged, the origins of which lie in encounters between Tibetan and Mongol culture that share certain features to form a new distinct culture. It is within this contested socio-political landscape that Tibet-Mongols currently seek to reconcile their ethnic Mongol identity due to their attachment to the territory and patterns of socio-cultural behaviour that have sustained them within Tibetan society for multiple generations (Wallenböck 2017b). Understanding borderlands as dynamic political spaces or zones of unique interaction and potential inhabited mostly by ethnic minorities, I will show in this article that they provide opportunities for reinvention, new relationships, and other forms of cultural development.

Besides Mongolia, Mongol populations can be found in Russia and in China; consequently, the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor plays an important role for pan-Mongolian thinking and society, especially since I assume that culture resides in an economic milieu, and that culture and the economy influence each other. After the successful implementation of border trade zones and infrastructure projects along the Sino-Mongolian-Russian corridor, the educational and cultural dimensions of transnational relations<sup>3</sup> are targeted as factors shaping economic cooperation – especially with regards to pan-Mongolian issues as illustrated in this article. In this context, pan-Mongolism advocates the cultural solidarity of Mongols who portray themselves as a distinct ethnic group vis-à-vis other ethnic groups (such as Tibetans and Han Chinese), supported by a sense of togetherness but not pursuing the idea of the establishment of a pan-Mongolian state.

Hence, the emphasis of this article will be on the reinvention of Mongol identity at the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, specifically with regard to the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, through cultural diplomacy. My case study is an international conference on the Tibet-Mongol interface, including its cultural programme. The article is based on my field research in Hénán Mongolian Autonomous County (*Hénán Ménggǔzú Zìzhìxiàn* 河南蒙古族自治县) in summer 2017 where I used participant observation as my applied ethnographic approach.

Having spent many years among the Tibetans and Mongols in the area, my research interest stems from my desire to understand this state-sponsored socio-historical and cultural re-assessment of the Tibet-Mongol interface in the context of OBOR. China’s Mongols have been comparatively side-lined by Chinese and Western<sup>4</sup> academia; work produced has focused on the Mongols of Inner Mongolia (Khan 1995; Sneath 2000; Bulag 2002, 2004, and 2012). Even less research has been done on the Mongols in Tibet and the adjacent regions of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands (Bulag and Diemberger 2007; Roche 2015; Wallenböck 2016, 2017a, and 2017b). In

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<sup>3</sup> See Bennett 2016; Timofeev 2017; and Qin Shujian 2017 on Sino-Russian relations under the OBOR framework. See Grossmann 2017 on Sino-Mongol relations under the OBOR framework.

<sup>4</sup> When using the term “Western,” I refer to European and North American countries as well as Australia.

addition to filling this gap, my article intends to contribute to the larger – and still emergent – field of cultural transmission studies by questioning how China interacts with various other minority culture(s) in a national and international context. This approach opens up a perspective on culture as an ongoing process of transmission and enables us to better understand the dynamics of exactly how cultural innovation becomes possible, what guarantees continuity, and the agents controlling the process. Moreover, this illuminates why and when people are interested in modifying and reconstructing their particular identities.

## The Mongol Population at the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands

The Mongols had a great impact on China's history. During the Mongol Empire, due to the 'reunification' of China, north-south trade along the Grand Canal as well as the ports in South China were revitalised and infrastructure improved. Most importantly, the Mongols – protected by the *pax mongolica* – controlled the Silk Road, so the Mongol leadership secured the foundations of a trade empire. Besides trade, they brought civil servants and scholars from the Middle East and Central Asia to China, and new technologies and ideas were exchanged. In addition to this, the Mongol leaders sought to hold on to their conquest and to create new alliances by maintaining infrastructure, such as roads and lines of communication, and by offering religious tolerance (Di Cosmo 2010: 91-93).

After its height in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Mongol Empire broke up into the Il-Khanate in the Middle East,<sup>5</sup> the Chaghatay Khanate in Central Asia, the Golden Horde on the Russian steppes, and the Yuán 元 Dynasty (1279–1368) in East Asia. The Mongols I consider in this article are the descendants of those who remained in East Asia during the Yuán Dynasty.

Contemporary Qīnghǎi province (*Qīnghǎi Shěng* 青海省) was under Mongol rule for centuries. As early as 1252, the first Mongol settlers arrived south of the Yellow River and established a postal and military station in the Héqū grasslands (*Héqū cǎoyuán* 河曲草原), today's Hénán Mongol Autonomous County.<sup>6</sup> Later, with the establishment of the Khoshut (Mongol) authority over the Kokonor region under Gushri Khan (1582–1655), the Mongols gained power all over Kokonor region until 1723 (Borjigidai 2002). Thereafter, however, the areas of today's Inner Mongolia and

<sup>5</sup> The Il-Khanate became the major force in commercial, diplomatic, and cultural relations of all four above-mentioned Khanates.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed background on contemporary Hénán County, I refer to the various local histories edited by the Committee for the Compilation of Local Records of Hénán Mongolian Autonomous County, as well as the official annals of Hénán County (*Hénán Ménggǔzú zìzhìxiàn fāngzhì biānzǔn wěiyuánhui* 1996; *Zhèngxié Hénán Ménggǔzú zìzhìxiàn wènsì zīliào wěiyuánhui* 1999); *Zhuōcāng Cáiràng* 2010.

Tibet fell under Qing governance due to the *Lifānyuàn* 理藩院 (Ministry of Colonial Affairs or “ministry which manages the border regions”),<sup>7</sup> a section of the dynastic government established in the course of integrating Inner Asia into the Qing Empire. From that time on, Mongol control of the Kokonor area was brought under Qing administration, and the various local communities were divided into specific administrative zones. The *Lifānyuàn* in the Kokonor area was the precursor to the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) (*Méng Zàng wěiyuánhui* 蒙藏委员会) of the Republic of China.<sup>8</sup> Although officially under the administration of the Qing Empire and Republican China, local power in the Héqū grassland remained in the hands of the Khoshut until its incorporation into the Socialist Chinese state in 1954 (Hénán Ménggǔzú zìzhìxiàn fāngzhì biānzǔǎn wěiyuánhui 1996).

In the twentieth century, the underlying Mongolness of the population was no longer only assumed, but began to be reaffirmed; hyphenation began to emphasise their Mongolness vis-à-vis other groups. After the incorporation of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands into the PRC under Máo Zédōng 毛泽东 (1893–1976), its population was categorised as ‘minority nationalities’ (*shǎoshù mínzú* 少数民族), and ultimately referred to as culturally and economically ‘backward’ (Heberer and Müller 2017). Those who had been called ‘barbarians’ in dynastic China were recast as ‘minority nationalities’ and integrated into the ‘civilised’<sup>9</sup> modern PRC state with Beijing as its centre (Harrell 1995; Mullaney 2011). In the following decades, the central government launched strategies to secure inland political stability and move towards the better integration of China’s ‘minority nationalities’ into Chinese society by focusing on economic development. In 1978, Dèng Xiǎopíng 邓小平 (1904–1997) initiated the

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<sup>7</sup> For more detailed information on the *Lifānyuàn*, refer to Chia Ning 1993; 2012a; 2012b; 2017.

<sup>8</sup> The *Lifānyuàn* in the Kokonor area was the precursor of the MTAC in the sense that the latter was developed in 1928 out of interrelated governmental agencies such as the *Lifānyuàn* by the Republic of China government under the Kuomintang (*Guómíndǎng* 国民党) to deal with Mongolian and Tibetan affairs. In 1949, after the defeat of the Kuomintang to the CCP and the establishment of the PRC, the MTAC as part of the Republic of China government relocated to Taiwan where it continued to deal with matters relating to Mongolians and Tibetans. Subsequently, after 89 years of history, the MTAC was disbanded on September 15, 2017. Some of its functions were absorbed by the expanded Department of Hong Kong, Macao, Mongolia and Tibet Affairs under the Mainland Affairs Council (*Dàlù wěiyuánhui* 大陆委员会) in 2018. The task of promoting and preserving Mongolian and Tibetan cultures, supervising Mongolian and Tibetan cultural foundations, preserving historical documents and artefacts, for example, was handed over to the Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Center (MTCC) (*Méng Zàng wénhuà zhōngxīn* 蒙藏文化中心), which was re-assigned to the Republic of China on Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture.

<sup>9</sup> From the Chinese perspective, populations like the one at the Sino-Tibetan borderlands were historically considered to be culturally inferior to the Han; the dichotomy of the ‘barbarians’ and the ‘civilised’ was mainly applied to local environmental conditions (Scott 2009: x-xi; Harrell 1995).

“Reform and Opening-Up” (*gǎigé kāifàng* 改革开放) policy to grant China’s hinterland further economic development.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, during that period, the western regions had limited industrial development whereas China’s coastal regions were given higher priority under this policy. Consequently, region-wide development initiatives were demanded and Jiāng Zémín 江泽民 (born in 1926) implemented the central government-directed “Western Development Programme” (*Xībù dà kāifā* 西部大开发) in 1999. One of the programme’s aims was to involve China’s ‘minority nationalities’ in the western regions in the economic as well as cultural development of their regions by receiving financial and technical assistance from the central government; economic growth was a key tool to maintain regional stability. At the same time, development led to a greater degree of dependence on Han-dominated state power.

With regards to Qīnghǎi province, Rohlf (2015) gives a strong account of the ‘civilising’ and ‘modernising’ mission designed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to develop and to integrate parts of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands into the Chinese state through its first Five-Year Plan (1953–57). Based on strengthening inter-ethnic solidarity, it focused on the development of agricultural and livestock production to ensure the development of the economy and production as well as the improvement of living standards. However, the Hénán Mongols have only benefited from the state’s civilising projects to retain their distinct identity by re-inventing their Mongolness since the 1980s (Harrell 1995). The authenticity of their Mongolness, however, has been brought into question by other Mongols and Tibetans due to Hénán Mongols’ close interactions with their Tibetan neighbours (Roche 2015; Wallenböck 2016 and 2017b).

## The “New Silk Road”

China’s ambitious OBOR initiative, also known as the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), consists of the traditional land-based “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB) (*Sīchóu zhīlù jīngjì dài* 丝绸之路经济带) and the “Maritime Silk Road” (MSR) (*Hǎishàng sīchóu zhī lù* 海上丝绸之路).<sup>11</sup> The “New Silk Road” is supposed to con-

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<sup>10</sup> The previously initiated “Third Front” programme was implemented in Qīnghǎi province in the 1960s (see Naughton 1988). In terms of Hénán County, however, the programme’s orientation was predominantly militaristic. Therefore, this period is not referenced further in this paper.

<sup>11</sup> This article is not focused on the economic and political goals of BRI that have attracted attention in East Asian Studies and Political Science. In fact, the majority view is that the BRI reflects a broad mixture of strategic, economic, foreign policy, and domestic motives (Swaine 2015; Godehardt 2016; Yu 2017). The literature on the BRI and the accompanying – often conflicting – Silk Road narratives promoted by Chinese officials and independent Chinese and foreign scholars (Blanchard 2017; Callahan 2016; Ploberger 2017; Sidaway et al 2017) is vast and growing. Many studies focus

nect China with over sixty-six further countries by sea and by land, advancing a paradigm shift that poses a threat to existing power structures in the respective regions. By using the term “initiative” (*chàngyì* 倡议) instead of “strategy” (*zhànlüè* 战略) in English language publications, China intends to highlight that the BRI is not pursuing strictly political goals but uses a new partly cultural approach to develop new political and economic goals (Sterling 2018). The BRI is one of the PRC’s various attempts to transform the relationship between China proper (*nèidì* 内地) and its traditional geopolitical frontiers (*biānjiāng* 边疆) into Central and Southeast Asia. It supports “dialogues among different civilizations on the principles of seeking common ground while shelving differences and drawing on each other’s strengths” (see Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative 2015). The BRI can therefore be understood as the emergence of various processes of regional and sub-regional integration dynamics to improve China’s ability to project power across Asia, Europe, and Africa. By using the term “Silk Road,” coined by Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905) in the nineteenth century, the initiative evokes memories of China’s glorious trading past. The historical “Silk Road” was not a single road, but a network of routes that originated due to silk trade and transfer of other products. It connected the Hàn Empire in the east and the Roman Empire in the west as a:

network of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting the West and East by merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads and urban dwellers from China and India to the Mediterranean Sea during various periods of time (Richthofen 2015: 4).

The “Silk Road” was a place for economic diffusion, cultural exchange and transfer, and played an important role in promoting China’s interests in its north-western border regions. In the course of exchange, a spirit of mutual respect was fostered and the population along the “Silk Road” was engaged in a common endeavour to pursue prosperity.

Various accounts by Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (John of Plano Carpini), William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, and Ibn Battuta, as well as more recent scholarship (Elisseeff 2000) afford significant knowledge about the complexity of cross-cultural exchanges along the “Ancient Silk Road.” The cultural dimension of the “New Silk Road,” however, has thus far been paid little attention, in spite of culture being acknowledged as a resource to generate economic growth. As Gernet (1996: 1) points out:

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on the BRI’s geopolitical implications in general (Dollar 2015; Rolland 2017); others on specific sub-regions (Chen and Günther 2017). I thank Alfred Gerstl for his suggestions and comments on academic literature on the political and economic aspects of the BRI.

Chinese civilization was the guiding spirit of a very large section of humanity, giving it its writing, its technology, its conceptions of man and of the world, its religions and its political institutions. The land of China itself, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam all form part of the same cultural community. But China's influence radiated far beyond that. It made itself felt among the Turkish, Mongol, and Tungus peoples of Mongolia and the Altai, in central Asia, in Tibet, and in all South-East Asia. It also impinged on more distant countries.

In recent years, western and north-western China have received increased attention from both the international and national communities; economic cooperation with neighbouring regions is especially encouraged due to their unique insights into language and the cultural aspects of business. According to the National Development and Reform Commission (2015, Chapter 6), the “New Silk Road” initiative particularly addresses the economic and cultural strengths of Shǎnxī 陝西 and Gānsù 甘肅 provinces; the ethnic and cultural advantages of Qīnghǎi province and the Níngxià Huí Autonomous Region (*Níngxià Huízú Zìzhìqū* 宁夏回族自治区); as well as Inner Mongolia's proximity to Mongolia and Russia. Chinese provinces and Autonomous Regions see the involvement in the project as an opportunity to garner support for their local projects under the framework of the BRI. To enhance its possibilities, China promotes exchanges between China's culture(s) and other cultures, not least in order to build a favourable cultural image of itself (Liu 2017; Aukia 2014). China is transforming traditional cultural resources for current modern society while fostering global awareness and appreciation of its culture(s). In general, the purpose of cultural soft power is to foster mutual understanding among nations and their peoples with the aim of building broad support for economic and political goals (Sterling 2018). Moreover, culture is used as a tool for political and economic communication within the BRI.

Over the past couple of years, China has begun to engage actively in a comprehensive soft power strategy due to neighbouring countries' anxiety in the wake of China's rapid economic development and military strength. By emphasising China's cultures and proclaiming peaceful relations, the Chinese government has stepped up efforts to build “cultural soft power.” To use Nye's definitions, “power” is the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what you want, whereas “soft power” is used to explain the state's ability to influence the behaviour or interests of others through the methods of political values, culture, and foreign policies. “State power,” meanwhile, focuses on military actions and/or economic inducement and coercion (Nye 2004). Forms of cultural soft power are diversified in their attempts to foster the exchange of views and ideas and promote a positive vision of cultural diversity (Melissen 2005). Cultural diplomacy as a way to use cultural soft power to reach out internationally includes arts, cultural exhibitions, educational programmes (conferences, workshops and bi-/tri-lateral academic projects), broadcasting of news and cultural programmes, and religious diplomacy. By using cultural diplomacy, society at home and abroad can be influenced and shaped. In fact, the New Silk Road is a geopolitical initiative entangled



with cultural diplomacy (Sidaway and Woon 2017). Therefore, different types of co-operation are nowadays encouraged in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands which I seek to examine based on the hypothesis that the BRI is China’s strategy for expanding its “soft power”<sup>12</sup> through civilizational connections in addition to and for the benefit of growing commercial integration.

## “Silk Road Academic Belt”

Xi Jinping was aware of the need to improve relations between China and its neighbours in view of their significant strategic value. In 2013, during the “Important Speech of Xi Jinping at [the] Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference”, he promoted cultural, educational and academic exchanges that would allow China to establish long-term friendly relations with its neighbours (Xi 2013). When the thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2016–2020) was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (n.d.), it showed a strong focus on the modernisation of education (Chapter 59). Another emphasis is put on the protection of cultural heritage at the local level (Chapter 68 and 69) and the endeavour of “both governmental and nongovernmental exchanges to increase mutual cultural trust as well as cultural exchanges” (Xinhua News 2017). At this point, reference should also be given to Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) for International Cooperation in Beijing on May 14, 2017. Besides other issues, he highlighted “educational activities related to the Belt and Road Initiative” regarding “international exchanges and cooperation in education,” and stated that:

These four years have seen strengthened people-to-people connectivity. Friendship, which derives from close contact between the people, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. Guided by the Silk Road spirit, we the Belt and Road Initiative participating countries have pulled our efforts to build the educational Silk Road and the health Silk Road, and carried out cooperation in science, education, culture, health and people-to-people exchange. Such cooperation has helped lay a solid popular and social foundation for pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative. Every year, the Chinese government provides 10,000 government scholarships to the relevant countries. China’s local governments have also set up special Silk Road scholarships to encourage international cultural and educational exchanges (Xinhua News 2017).

In the Xi’an Declaration (*Xī’ān xuānyán* 西安宣言) of May 22, 2015, a “University Alliance of the New Silk Road” (UANSR) (*Sīchóu zhīlù dàxué liánméng* 丝绸之路大学联盟) was proclaimed to provide better connectivity in higher education (University Alliance of the Silk Road 2018).<sup>13</sup> The aim of the UANSR is to establish

<sup>12</sup> For discussion of the Chinese term for “soft power,” see Aukia 2014.

<sup>13</sup> See Secretariat of University Alliance of the Silk Road: <http://uasr.xjtu.edu.cn/index.htm>, accessed July 2017.

cooperative education platforms and other regional initiatives advocating the concept of a “Silk Road Academic Belt” (*Sīchóu zhīlù xuéshù dài* 丝绸之路学术带). Currently, nearly 135 universities from thirty-six countries and regions have participated in the UANSR. In July 2016, China’s Ministry of Education further published a BRI development plan on educational development (*tuījìn gòngjiàn “yīdài yīlù” jiàoyù xíngdòng* 推进共建“一带一路”教育行动)<sup>14</sup> which promotes student exchange, joint research, academic exchange programmes and even the establishment of Confucius Institutes.<sup>15</sup> To date, thirteen provinces including autonomous regions (Gānsù, Níngxià, Fújiàn 福建, Guìzhōu 贵州, Yúnnán 云南, Hǎinán 海南, Xīnjiāng Uygur Autonomous Region (*Xīnjiāng Wéiwú’ěr Zìzhìqū* 新疆维吾尔自治区), Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (*Guǎngxī Zhuàngzú Zìzhìqū* 广西壮族自治区), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (*Nèi Měnggǔ Zìzhìqū* 内蒙古自治区), Jílín 吉林, Hēilóngjiāng 黑龙江省, Shānxī, and Qīnghǎi, and one city (Qīngdǎo 青岛), have already signed this education agreement with the Ministry of Education (University Alliance of the Silk Road 2018).

The relevance of this initiative partly originates from the fact that China’s educational landscape in minority areas had been historically limited, though there had been some improvement between 1949 and 1978 in the course of the Chinese state educational policy (see Leibold and Chen 2014). However, it was only in the course of the modernisation drive from 1978 onwards that a special education policy for ethnic minority areas was put forward and fundamental changes were introduced to the Chinese educational landscape. Concurrently, the internationalisation of Chinese education started in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Wojciuk 2015). Due to the historically poor state of education in China’s Tibetan regions, along with low levels of literacy among the general Tibetan and Mongol population, the first substantial steps towards Tibetan and Mongolian higher education only took place with the improvement of the minority education system in the 1980s (Zenz forthcoming; Wallenböck 2016).

## A Case Study in State-Sponsored BRI Academic Programmes with a Focus on Tibet-Mongol Relations

Against the backdrop of new opportunities offered by the BRI and the “Silk Road Academic Belt,” the Department of Mongolian Studies at Northwest Mínzú University (*Xīběi Mínzú Dàxué Ménggǔ Yǔyán Wénhuà Xuéyuàn* 西北民族大学蒙古语言文学学院) and the local government of Hénán Mongol Autonomous County in

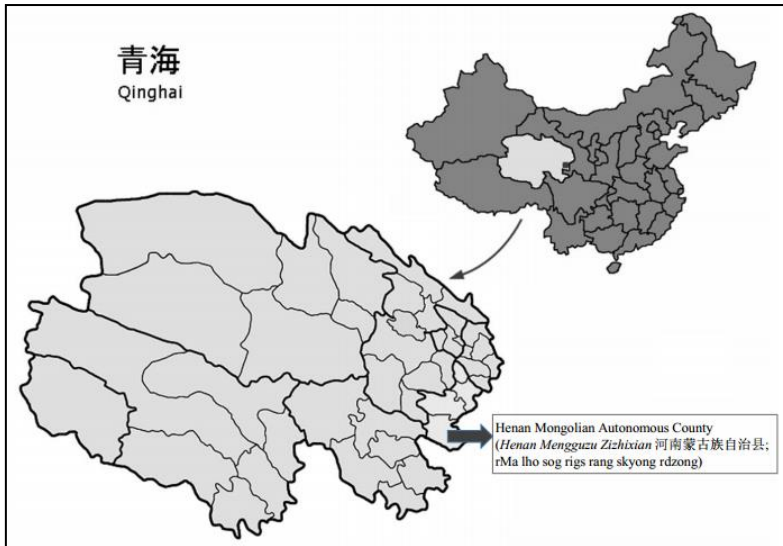
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On the “internationalisation” of Chinese education, see Zhou Ji (2006), and Wojciuk et al (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2016, Document 46.

<sup>15</sup> For more details on the development of the Confucius Institutes in terms of China’s “soft power” strategy, see Yang 2010; Dellios 2017; and Sterling 2018: 111.

Qīnghǎi Province decided to improve cultural cooperation with and among the Mongol population along the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor by organizing an international conference. Initiating such an event, they also aimed to implement the strategic plans of the provincial governments of Gānsù and Qīnghǎi to open up “new heights” (*xīn gāodì* 新高地) along the New Silk Road. As a result of their common efforts, the “‘Historical and Cultural Links between Mongolia and Tibet’ within the Framework of the State Programme ‘One Belt One Road’”<sup>16</sup> conference (“*Yīdài yīlù*” *shìyě xià de Méng Záng guānxì yǔ wénhuà jiāoliú guójì xuéshù yántǎohuì* “一带一路”视野下的蒙藏关系与文化交流国际学术研讨会) was held in Hénán County, a small enclave located within the Tibetan cultural area of Amdo (*Ānduō* 安多), in July 2017.



Source: Wikimedia 2007

The conference was organised by the Department of Mongolian Studies of Northwest Mínnú University together with the Hénán County Bureau of Culture and Broadcasting (*wén guǎng jú* 文广局). It was co-organised by the Chinese Society for Mongolian Studies, Committee for Specialists on the Oirat<sup>17</sup> (*Zhōngguó Ménggǔxué Xuéhuì Wèilātèxué Zhuānyè Wěiyuánhui* 中国蒙古学学会卫拉特专业委员会), the Department of Tibetan Studies at Northwest Mínnú University (*Xībēi Mínnú*

<sup>16</sup> A second official English title of the conference is “‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) First International Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Exchange Academic Symposium.”

<sup>17</sup> The term “Oirat” refers to the “Western Mongols” (in Tibetan *Sog*), distinct from the Khalkha “Eastern Mongols” (in Tibetan *Hor*). For further reading, see Halkovic 1985; Miyawaki 1990; and Pegg 2001.

*Dàxué Zàng Yǔyán Wénhuà Xuéyuàn* 西北民族大学藏语言文化学院), and the Research Centre on Oirat Studies at Northwest Mǐnzú University (*Xībēi Mǐnzú Dàxué Wēilātèxué Yánjiū Zhōngxīn* 西北民族大学卫拉特学研究中心). In accordance with the concept of the “Silk Road Academic Belt”, the main goal of the conference was to establish a cooperative education platform among the various academic institutions along the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, and to contribute to the common development of ‘civilisation’ and collaboration in higher education.

More than ninety-three scholars from China, Mongolia and Russia, as well as three Western scholars, including myself and two scholars from the United Kingdom, took part in this conference on the Tibet-Mongol cultural interface that took place from July 22–24, 2017. Of interest was the call for papers for this conference; it was circulated with little notice via Wechat groups and personal invitations. Beyond that, the selection criteria of the participants were not transparent. Based on my observations, the ethnic Mongolian participants were all of Oirat origin, and the Russian scholars worked on Oirat issues. The main organiser from Northwest Mǐnzú University was a Mongolian from Xīnjiāng; he seemingly had his own network due to former students and colleagues spread across the involved institutions. The three European participants (including myself) were informed directly by the organisers from Hénán County; we were known due to our long-term engagement with local communities in the course of our previous fieldwork and the associated publications. The other participants were Mongol, Chinese, and Tibetan scholars from the following institutions: Northwest Mǐnzú University, China Academy of Social Science (*Zhōngguó Shèhuì Kēxuéyuàn* 中国社会科学院 中国社会科学院), China Tibetology Research Centre (*Zhōngguó Zàngxué Yánjiū Zhōngxīn* 中国藏学研究中心), Central Mǐnzú University (*Zhōngyāng Mǐnzú Dàxué* 中央民族大学), Dàlián Mǐnzú University (*Dàlián Mǐnzú Dàxué* 大连民族大学), Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Science (*Nèiménggǔ Shèhuì Kēxuéyuàn* 内蒙古社会科学院), Inner Mongolia Agricultural University (*Nèiménggǔ Nóngyè Dàxué* 内蒙古农业大学), Inner Mongolia University (*Nèiménggǔ Dàxué* 内蒙古大学), Minority Language Translation Office of Qīnghǎi Province People’s Government (*Qīnghǎi Shěng Rénmín Zhèngfǔ Shǎoshù Mǐnzú Yǔwén Fānyì Shì* 青海省人民政府少数民族语文翻译室), Shǎnxī Normal University (*Shǎnxī Shīfàn Dàxué* 陕西师范大学), Qīnghǎi Mǐnzú University (*Qīnghǎi Mǐnzú Dàxué* 青海民族大学), Qīnghǎi Normal University (*Qīnghǎi Shīfàn Dàxué* 青海师范大学), and Yúnnán Mǐnzú University (*Yúnnán Mǐnzú Dàxué* 云南民族大学). Mongolian researchers were affiliated with the National University of Mongolia, and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences (Institute of Language and Literature). In terms of Russian academic institutions, scholars from the People’s Friendship University of Russia, the Kalmyk State University, the Kalmyk Institute for the Humanities (Russian Academy of Sciences), the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Tuvan Institute for Research in the Humanities and Applied Social Science, the

Buryat State University, and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations were involved in the conference.<sup>18</sup>

On July 22, 2017, the event was officially opened by the Party Secretary of Hénán County, Hán Huá 韩华, in a newly built concrete *ger* (yurt)<sup>19</sup> which could host at least 150 people. In his speech,<sup>20</sup> Hán Huá mentioned that although the main objectives of the BRI related to the economy and infrastructure, education and people-to-people exchange were also on the agenda. Emphasis was placed on the close relation of economic development and academic exchange. Hán Huá preliminarily highlighted the “Four Solid” (*sì gè zhā zhā shí shí* 四个扎扎实实) major requirements<sup>21</sup> and the new concept of the “Four Transformations” (*sì gè zhuǎnbiàn* 四个转变)<sup>22</sup> as the ecological and social development strategies of Qīnghǎi Province, which were approved in the course of the thirteenth Qīnghǎi Provincial Congress of the Communist Party of China in August 2016. The goal of these requirements is the “establishment of a wealthy,

<sup>18</sup> The list of participants can be found at:

[http://www.orientalstudies.ru/rus/images/stories/conferences/qinghai\\_conference\\_2017.pdf](http://www.orientalstudies.ru/rus/images/stories/conferences/qinghai_conference_2017.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> At this point, it is worth mentioning that the yurt is part of the Mongolian narrative that maintains Mongolness through imagined pastoralism (Wallenböck 2017b). For more detailed background information on the yurts in Hénán County, see Lha mo sgrol ma and Roche 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Even though the official languages of the symposium were Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Russian, and English, the principal languages used were Mongolian and Russian. Unfortunately, hardly any academic lectures were translated into Tibetan, Chinese or English. Emphasis was put on the importance of the Mongolian language – even though fewer than half of the audience were able to follow a lecture in Mongolian. However, the official opening ceremony was almost exclusively held in Chinese.

<sup>21</sup> The “Four Solid” requirements are as follows: (1) sustainable economic and health development (*jīngjì chíxù jiànkāng fāzhǎn* 经济持续健康发展), (2) ecological environmental protection (*shēngtài huánjìng bǎohù* 生态环境保护), (3) securing and improving people's livelihood (*bǎozhàng hé gǎishàn mínshēng* 保障和改善民生), and (4) strengthening and standardisation of political life within the party (*jiāqíng guīfàn dǎng nèi zhèngzhì shēnghuó* 加强规范党内政治生活) (Bao Tuoye 2017).

<sup>22</sup> The “Four Transformations” were explained as follows:

*nǚlì shíxiàn cóng jīngjì xiǎo shěng xiàng shēngtài dà shěng, shēngtài qiáng shěng de zhuǎnbiàn* 努力实现从经济小省向生态大省、生态强省的转变: The transformation from a small economic province to a large ecological province, and to an ecologically strong province.

*cóng rénkou xiǎo shěng xiàng mínzú tuánjié jìnbù dà shěng de zhuǎnbiàn* 从人口小省向民族团结进步大省的转变: The transformation from a province with a small population to a province with “national unity” and progress.

*cóng yánjiū dìfāng fāzhǎn zhànlüè xiàng rónggrù guójiā zhànlüè de zhuǎnbiàn* 从研究地方发展战略向融入国家战略的转变: The transformation from the study of local development strategies to the integration of national strategies.

*cóng nóngmùmin dānyī de zhòngzhí, yǎngzhí, shēngtài kǎnhù xiàng shēngtài shēngchǎn shēnghuó liángxìng xúnhuán de zhuǎnbiàn* 从农牧民单一的种植、养殖、生态看护向生态生产生活良性循环的转变: The transformation of semi-pastoralists' lives to planting, breeding and environmentally-protected lifestyles. (Mei Yan 2017)

civilised, harmonious and beautiful” (*jiànshè fùyù wénmíng héxié měilì* 建设富裕文明和谐美丽) Qīnghǎi (Bao Tuoye 2017). In order to be able to achieve those goals, political beliefs, political thinking, and political responsibilities would have to be strengthened. Based on these requirements, Hán Huá promised that the Hénán County Party Committee and the county government would support all ethnic groups to work together to overcome difficulties and to finally be able to make progress – to lead Hénán County into a bright and prosperous future. He stressed the ethnic diversity within Hénán County but claimed that by having followed the “Four Transformations” in recent years, and after continuous cultural exchange and integration, Hénán County had become the most harmonious area of national unity and progress (Bao Tuoye 2017).

The chief of the county, Ā Qióng 阿琼, subsequently pointed out in his speech<sup>23</sup> that since the eighteenth National Congress, an important part of China's cultural development strategy was to promote the “extraordinary traditional Chinese culture” (*Zhōnghuá yōuxiù chuántǒng wénhuà* 中华优秀传统文化). By using the Chinese term *Zhōnghuá wénhuà* 中华文化 for “Chinese culture,” he indicated that the Mongol and Tibetan cultures were integrated within the context of a greater Chinese cultural sphere. He argued that an important fact for the development of the Chinese nation was the long-lasting and sustained close relationship between the Mongols and Tibetans which is tied together with Chinese history and advocated by the Chinese government as an inevitable requirement of the BRI. According to Ā Qióng, the BRI could only be successful if the ethnic, cultural and historical aspects of the ancient Silk Road were fully understood. He further stated that only intellectuals would be able to provide this kind of profound knowledge needed for the implementation of the initiative. He pointed to the interesting fusion of Mongols and Tibetans in Hénán County that was brought about by the geographical, historical and religious conditions of the territory, as well as by its inter-ethnic marriages. He referred to Hénán County as an example of a harmonious society (*héxié shèhuì* 和谐社会) in the context of local ethnic and cultural diversity as a model for successful cultural exchange, and as the “most typical cradle of Mongol and Tibetan Culture” (*yùnyù Méng Zàng wénhuà de zuì diǎnxíng de yáolán* 孕育蒙藏文化的最典型的摇篮). As a result of all this, Hénán County had been chosen to host the “International Symposium on Mongolia-Tibetan Cultural Exchange” with the aim of consolidation and maintenance of national unity. The symposium was planned to provide a “historic opportunity” to deepen the academic connections between research institutions working in the field of Tibetan and Mongolian Studies. Therefore, scholars from relevant national and international academic institutions were invited to join the three-day symposium for an in-depth exchange, and the above summarised opening ceremony was followed by various academic lectures on historical, linguistic, cultural, literary, and religious topics. Working

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<sup>23</sup> Notes taken and translated by the author.

within the framework of the cultural aspects of the BRI, future economic development was focused upon.

In addition to the agenda of scientific exchange, activities dedicated to artistic traditions including music and dance were organised during the course of the conference. In spite of Hénán County claiming its responsibility to support the BRI by promoting its inheritance of both Mongol and Tibetan culture, these activities mainly served to promote Mongolian culture and, more specifically, Oirat culture. This choice of specific cultural ethnic representation seems to conform to a policy of raising awareness of cultural traditions of the various ethnic groups within the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic People’s Republic, in order to promote China’s image as a ‘harmonious society’. Chapter 68 of the thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China n.d.) highlights that:

We will strengthen the development of both cultural initiatives and the culture industry by implementing projects to develop culture and help people emerge as eminent cultural figures so as to give an extra touch of colour and vitality to people’s cultural lives.

## Markers of Mongolness

Given the above policy approach, I should not have been surprised that the conference’s cultural programme – which according to my informants complied with the “Cultural Reform and Development Plan” – included elements of Mongolian culture, even if they could no longer be found in Hénán County. Striking examples of this more pan-ethnic than local representation were Mongolian “overtone singing” or “throat singing,” one of China’s intangible cultural heritage entries registered with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and a piece of music with the horse-head violin that is no longer played in Hénán County. One highlight representing local culture was a dance performance on the Héqu horse (*Héqu mǎ* 河曲马), also called the Tūyùhún horse (*Tūyùhún mǎ* 吐谷浑马). The dance refers to the reputation for horsemanship of Tibetan and Mongol pastoralists of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands who have long bred fine horses and provided top-quality horses for both commercial and military purposes. In this sense, the performance represented a local pastoralist population fostering “attitudes and value judgments which are part of horse-culture modal personality” (Ekvall 1968: 11).

Another marker for “Mongolness,” the Naadam Festival – a traditional three-day sports festival closely related to the history and culture of Mongols that had taken place in Hénán County every year since 1984 (Wallenböck 2016) – was cancelled in 2017 due to the immense costs of the international conference. When Naadam – comprising a religious, secular, political or social ceremony, followed by competitions in archery and horseracing – takes place, Mongol identity is highlighted by the display of Mongolia’s ancient traditions, symbols and rituals; furthermore, social cohesion is

created as many multivocal rituals are included. Hence, its cancellation in Hénán County seemed to indicate that the local Mongol communities' sense of belonging was sacrificed for the benefit of a sense of community among the Mongol conference participants.

Figure 1: Cultural Programme (© Wallenböck)



Later on, I would find that the Naadam or “Three Games of Men” – which can be traced back to the ancient military arts of Chinggis Khan’s army and the Mongols’ nomadic past – had not been cancelled altogether, but rather displaced and incorporated into the broader context of the New Silk Road in another way. On September 9, 2017, the first<sup>24</sup> “Silk Road Naadam” (*Sīchóu zhīlù nàdámù* 丝绸之路那达慕) took place at the National Sports Centre in Jiǔquán, Sùběi Mongol Autonomous County in Gānsù province (*Gānsù Shěng Jiǔquán Shì Sùběi Ménggǔzú Zìzhìxiàn* 甘肃省酒泉市肃北蒙古族自治县) – an important node in the eastern part of the ancient Silk Road. Mongols from China as well as from Mongolia were invited to attend the festival that “played an important role in promoting cultural exchanges with surrounding countries and regions in Sùběi County, and in enhancing understanding and friendship between the various regions.”<sup>25</sup> One day later, a “Silk Road International Naadam” was held at Inner Mongolia Normal University (*Nèiménggǔ Shīfàn Dàxué sīchóu zhīlù guójì nàdámù* 内蒙古师范大学丝绸之路国际那达慕) as part of the Second China-Mongolia Expo 2017 from September 10-28, 2017. This event included the “three games,”

<sup>24</sup> The second Silk Road Festival was held from August 18–20, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Original quotation in Chinese: 对肃北县加强与周边国家和地区文化交流，增进加深各地区之间的了解与友谊具有十分重要的推动作用。(Di Dongyang 2017).



as well as archery competitions, a football tournament, and an academic forum during which agreements with foreign universities were signed.<sup>26</sup> By using culture as a tool, this event aimed to advance educational cooperation among countries along the Belt and Road similar to the Hénán conference.

In Hénán, a full day of the conference was dedicated to cultural exchange and shared heritage among the Mongol populations along the Silk Road. A field trip was organized to the memorial for the traditional Mongol rulers<sup>27</sup> (opened in 2009), and the Historical and Cultural Museum of Hénán Mongols (*Hénán Ménggǔ lìshǐ wénhuà bówùguǎn* 河南蒙古历史文化博物馆)<sup>28</sup> (established in 2014). The aim of the visit was to improve the protection of cultural heritage and networks of public cultural facilities as emphasised in the “Cultural Reform and Development Plan” (*Wénhuà gǎigé fāzhǎn guīhuà* 文化改革发展规划) (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China 2012).

The majority of museums in the PRC are state-run institutions funded by the state at national or local level (Kim 2011). Therefore, they mainly communicate an ideological and nationalistic message “implicated in a highly politicised process of remembering and representing the past” (Denton 2014: 2-3). In fact, state-run museums in the PRC always mirror the current political sensibility of the ruling regime and thus turn into a “*Schaufenster*” (show window) of China’s current policy. Following this pattern, the two new museums in Hénán County serve the ideological and pedagogical purpose of highlighting the distinctive Mongolness of Hénán, displaying its distinct Mongol history and culture while at the same time serving the larger state ideology of a multi-ethnic Chinese state. Reflecting the narratives of unbroken continuity in the development of Chinese civilisation, the museums shape the perception of history, memory and identity of the local population. During our visit to the palace of the former *qīnwáng* 亲王 (Prince of the First Order),<sup>29</sup> one of the locals told me that:

<sup>26</sup> See website on the 2017 Inner Mongolian Normal University International Naadam Festival: <http://news.imnu.edu.cn/c48.jsp>.

<sup>27</sup> This memorial consists of three parts: 1) The Exhibition Hall of Culture and Art of Hénán County (*Hénán Ménggǔzú Zìzhìxiàn wénshǐ chénliè guǎn* 河南蒙古族自治县文史陈列馆), 2) the early Office of the CPC Hénán Méngqí Working Committee (*Zhōnggòng Hénán Méngqí gōngwěi zǎoqī bàngōngchù* 中共河南蒙旗工委早期办公处), and 3) the palace of the former *qīnwáng* (*Qūgé qīnwáng fǔ* 曲格亲王府).

<sup>28</sup> The Historical and Cultural Museum of Hénán Mongols is an imposing, four-storey building that exhibits the past, present, and future of Hénán. It is the first government-funded museum in Qīnghǎi province at the county level. The main sponsor of the museum was the local government of the Yījīn Huòluò Banner (*Yījīn Huòluò qí* 伊金霍洛旗) of Inner Mongolia who provided more than sixty-six million Renminbi (approximately 860,000 Euros); the remaining sum was financed by the Central government.

<sup>29</sup> After 1723, the *qīnwáng* was a political authority in the area until its incorporation into the modern Chinese state.

曲格亲王府真实地记录了那段令人难忘的岁月，是新型的爱国主义教育基地。

The *Qūgé qīnwáng fǔ* [palace of the former *qīnwáng*] has recorded the unforgettable years of the past; it is a new type of basis for patriotic education.

The two museums are devoted to the culture and history of the Mongols with carefully selected and constructed exhibitions of cultural artefacts. They focus on the Mongol identity of the territory with the aim of enhancing the development of the local communities; they try to restore lost memories of the past and seek to educate visitors through objects. Their exhibitions reflect the fact that the relatively autonomous history of Hénán County helped its Mongol population to sustain a distinctive identity – one that is different from both the Tibetans and other Mongols outside the region, but at the same time put emphasis on the pan-Mongol identity in the course of displaying Chinggis Khan's portraits. In fact, shared historical and ethno-cultural heritage is shown as an important condition of being Mongol. Both museums therefore trace the (local) Mongol history back to Chinggis Khan since it is said that the Chinggisid lineage was the everlasting stem of Mongol identity, and the origin myths are tied to the Chinggisid lineage. Whereas the various Mongol communities – such as the Khalkha, the Oirat, the Buryat and the Kalmyk – claim to have distinctive group (Mongol) identities, they describe themselves just as 'Mongol', especially when distancing themselves from the Russian and the Chinese. It can be stated that within a "diversified unity" of Mongols, the collective Mongol identity is preliminarily constructed through the link with Chinggis Khan.

In this context, one needs to remember that while the Mongols historically perceived the "Middle Kingdom" as one section of their vast empire, the Mongolian steppes also have strong historical associations with China and her cultural realm as the homeland of the conquest dynasty of the Yuán, which today is claimed by China as its own dynasty. The Chinese had adopted the Mongol emperors as their own, providing an argument to their central governments to foster greater links between China and Mongolia. In some sources, Chinggis Khan is even referred to as the "only Chinese to defeat the Europeans" (Bulag 2004: 110). This interpretation of history plays an important role in the creation and development of a Chinese multi-ethnic nation. At a certain point, the Chinese Communist government even turned Chinggis Khan into a figure of identification of the Chinese people:

[As] early as the 1930s, Máo had invoked Genghis when he implored the Mongolians to 'cooperate with the Chinese Soviet regime and the Red Army' so that 'who [would] then dare [to] entertain the thought that the sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan be humiliated' (Rossabi 1993: xix).

The representation of Chinggis Khan rekindling a popular memory of the nostalgic version of the historic figure in the museums can therefore be seen as aiming to generate pan-Mongolian as well as Chinese sentiments.

## Conclusion

The Sino-Tibetan borderlands are known for both their immensely diverse cultural landscape and complex set-up in terms of socio-cultural, political, and economic spheres. Hence, the Chinese government has to deal with the issue of both internal and external cultural identification through the evolution of cultural policy.

By holding international conferences combined with cultural events that emphasise the importance of the shared historical cultural heritage of the past, China uses soft power to establish the image of a new emerging China along the Silk Road while at the same time generating positive social impact for the local communities.

The conference in Hénán County – where the pastoral Mongol society has adapted and assimilated to the local Tibetan culture but has also been encouraged to focus on their Mongol identity – needs to be understood in this context of state-sponsored international cultural and educational exchange. By providing academic support and ideas for the improvement of Mongol-Tibetan cultural links along the Silk Road, the conference promoted the national development strategy by using cultural diplomacy. An aim of this event was to take the first step in establishing a new gateway for connecting academic institutions in countries with Mongol populations along the New Silk Road. In this sense, the conference was indeed a soft power tool serving China’s development strategies to raise cultural awareness and improve its communication and economic development with its neighbours. By strengthening China’s cultural and economic links with the Mongol populations in Asia, the development of a ‘harmonious society’ along the Silk Road, in memory of the ancient Silk Road during the Mongol Empire, was actively promoted.

During the conference, Mongol culture was ‘used’ to construct a distinct (cultural) identity, to maintain ethnic boundaries in which they are distinct from Tibetans, and to object to the “Tibetanization” (Roche 2015) of Mongol cultural identity at the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. Hence, my second conclusion is that this conference was a “pan-Mongolian” event rather than one aiming at a Tibet-Mongol interface. In the course of this event, it was shown that the Mongols juxtapose their Mongolness not only against Tibetan and Han culture; they activate it to consolidate an identity that does not have a fixed and presumed meaning, but is open to negotiation and rearticulation both within and outside the context of China. They are aware that they partition into several political communities while, at the same time, stressing ethno-cultural and historical unity. This Mongol consciousness constructed on pan-Mongol culture and history was promoted during the above-mentioned conference by exhibiting it in the course of cultural performances.

The conference and its add-on cultural programmes further showed that due to his act of unifying the fragmented nomadic societies of the Eurasian steppe, Chinggis Khan remains a particularly revered figure in contemporary pan-Mongolian thinking and society. However, against the backdrop that his deeds have also been adopted as

part of Chinese history, Chinggis Khan is not only used as an icon of “Mongolness,” but also articulated as a symbol of national identity incorporating both Mongol and Chinese elements by the Chinese state.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the cult of Chinggis Khan is nowadays reproduced and cultivated by the pan-Mongolian society as an imagined community, as well as by political authorities on different levels. Through an interpretation, celebration, and commemoration of Mongol history as Chinese history and the promotion of Mongol heritage as Chinese heritage, cultural nationalism is revived with the help of the glorification of cultural remnants of the past. This finally makes my case study a showcase of China’s immense investment in projects that institutionalise minority culture as a tool to increase China’s influence by raising awareness of Chinese culture and tradition.

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<sup>30</sup> At this point, reference should be given to the Mongols during the Soviet regime. Bulag (2010: 32) notes that “[a]fter the long ban by the Soviet Union, Chinggis returned with a vengeance, reclaiming Mongolia as a Chinggis Khaan’s Mongolia.”

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
MTAC	Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission
MTCC	Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Center
OBOR	One Belt One Road
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt

UANSR  
UNESCO

University Alliance of the New Silk Road  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## GLOSSARY

<i>Ānduō</i>	安多	Amdo, one of the Tibetan cultural areas besides Kham and Ü-Tsang
Ā Qióng	阿琼	Current county mayor of Hénán County
<i>biānjiāng</i>	边疆	frontier(s)
<i>chàngyì</i>	倡议	initiative
<i>Dàlián Mínzú Dàxué</i>	大连民族大学	Dàlián Mínzú University
<i>Dàlù wěiyuánhùi</i>	大陆委员会	Department of Hong Kong, Macao, Mongolia and Tibet Affairs under the Mainland Affairs Council
Dèng Xiǎopíng	邓小平	Dèng Xiǎopíng, Chinese communist leader and leading figure of the reform and opening policy.
<i>Fújiàn Shěng</i>	福建省	Fújiàn Province
<i>gǎigé kāifàng</i>	改革开放	reform and opening-up
<i>Gānsù Shěng</i>	甘肃省	Gānsù Province
<i>Guǎngxī Zhuàngzú Zìzhìqū</i>	广西壮族自治区	Guǎngxī Zhuàng Autonomous Region
<i>Guìzhōu Shěng</i>	贵州省	Guìzhōu Province
<i>Guómíndǎng</i>	国民党	Kuomintang KMT, Nationalist Party
<i>Hǎinán Shěng</i>	海南省	Hǎinán Province
<i>Hǎishàng sīchóu zhī lù</i>	海上丝绸之路	Maritime Silk Road (MSR)
<i>Hēilóngjiāng Shěng</i>	黑龙江省	Hēilóngjiāng Province
Hán Huá	韩华	Current Party Secretary of Hénán County
<i>Hénán Ménggǔ lìshǐ wénhuà bówùguǎn</i>	河南蒙古历史文化博物馆	Historical and Cultural Museum of Hénán Mongols
<i>Hénán Ménggǔzú Zìzhìxiàn</i>	河南蒙古族自治县	Hénán Mongol Autonomous County
<i>Hénán Ménggǔzú Zìzhìxiàn wénshǐ chénlièguǎn</i>	河南蒙古族自治县文史陈列馆	The Exhibition Hall of Culture and Art of Hénán County
<i>Héqū cǎoyuán</i>	河曲草原	Héqū grasslands
<i>Héqū mǎ</i>	河曲马	Héqū horse
<i>héxié shèhuì</i>	和谐社会	harmonious society
Jiāng Zémín	江泽民	Jiāng Zémín, former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party

		(1989-2002) and former President of the PRC (1993-2003)
<i>Jílín Shěng</i>	吉林省	Jílín Province
<i>Lǐfānyuàn</i>	理藩院	Ministry of Colonial Affairs or “ministry which manages the border regions”
<i>Máo Zédōng</i>	毛泽东	Máo Zédōng
<i>Méng Zàng Wěiyuánhui</i>	蒙藏委员会	Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC)
<i>Méng Zàng Wénhuà Zhōngxīn</i>	蒙藏文化中心	Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Center (MTCC)
<i>mínzú tuánjié</i>	民族团结	“National unity” or “amity between nationalities”
<i>nèidì</i>	内地	“China proper”
<i>Nèiménggǔ Dàxué</i>	内蒙古大学	Inner Mongolia University
<i>Nèiménggǔ Nóngyè Dàxué</i>	内蒙古农业大学	Inner Mongolia Agricultural University
<i>Nèiménggǔ Shèhuì Kēxuéyuàn</i>	内蒙古社会科学院	Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Science
<i>Nèiménggǔ Shīfàn Dàxué</i>	内蒙古师范大学	Inner Mongolia Normal University
<i>Nèi Měnggǔ Zìzhìqū</i>	内蒙古自治区	Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
<i>Níngxià Huízú Zìzhìqū</i>	宁夏回族自治区	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
<i>Qīngdǎo Shì</i>	青岛市	Qīngdǎo City
<i>Qīnghǎi Mínzú Dàxué</i>	青海民族大学	Qīnghǎi Mínzú University
<i>Qīnghǎi Shěng</i>	青海省	Qīnghǎi Province
<i>Qīnghǎi Shěng Rénmín Zhèngfǔ</i>	青海省人民政府	Minority Language Translation Office of Qīnghǎi Province People’s Government
<i>Shǎoshù Mínzú Yǔwén Fānyì Shì</i>	少数民族语文翻译室	
<i>Qīnghǎi Shīfàn Dàxué</i>	青海师范大学	Qīnghǎi Normal University
<i>qīnwáng</i>	亲王	Prince of the first rank/order
<i>Qūgé qīnwáng fǔ</i>	曲格亲王府	Palace of the former <i>qīnwáng</i>
<i>Shǎnxī Shěng</i>	陕西省	Shǎnxī Province
<i>Shǎnxī Shīfàn Dàxué</i>	陕西师范大学	Shǎnxī Normal University
<i>shǎoshù mínzú</i>	少数民族	‘Minority nationalities’
<i>Sīchóu zhīlù dàxué liánméng</i>	丝绸之路大学联盟	University Alliance of the New Silk Road’ (UANSR)
<i>Sīchóu zhīlù guójì nàdámù</i>	丝绸之路国际那达慕	Silk Road International Naadam
<i>Sīchóu zhīlù jīngjì dài</i>	丝绸之路经济带	Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)
<i>Sīchóu zhīlù nàdámù</i>	丝绸之路那达慕	Silk Road Naadam
<i>Sīchóu zhīlù xuéshù dài</i>	丝绸之路学术带	Silk Road Academic Belt

“Sì gè zhā zhā shí shí” “Sì gè zhuǎnbìan”	“四个扎扎实实” “四个转变”	“Four Solid” “Four Transformations” political concept
Sùběi Ménggǔzú Zìzhìxiàn Tuījìn gòngjiàn “yīdài yīlù” jiàoyù xíngdòng”	肃北蒙古族自治县 推进共建 “一带一路” 教育行动	Sùběi Mongol Autonomous County BRI development plan on education development
Tǔyùhún mǎ Wén guǎng jú Wénhuà gǎigé fāzhǎn guīhuà	吐谷浑马 文广局 文化改革发展规划	Tǔyùhún horse Bureau of Culture and Broadcasting Cultural Reform and Development Plan
Xí Jìnpíng	习近平	Xí Jìnpíng, General Secretary of the CCP (since 2012) and President of the PRC (since 2013)
Xī'ān xuānyán	西安宣言	Xī'ān Declaration
Xībēi Mínnú Dàxué Ménggǔ Yǔyán Wénhuà Xuéyuàn	西北民族大学蒙古 语言文化学院	Department of Mongolian Studies, Northwest Mínnú University
Xībēi Mínnú Dàxué Wēilā Tèxué Yánjiū Zhōngxīn	西北民族大学卫拉 特学研究中心	Research Centre on Oirat Studies of Northwest Mínnú University
Xībēi Mínnú Dàxué Zàng Yǔyán Wénhuà Xuéyuàn	西北民族大学藏语 言文化学院	Department of Tibetan Studies, Northwest Mínnú University
Xībù dà kāifā xīn gāodì	西部大开发 新高地	Western Development Programme “new heights”
Xīnjiāng Wéiwú'ěr Zìzhìqū “yīdài yīlù”	新疆维吾尔自治区 “一带一路”	Xīnjiāng Uyghur Autonomous Region One Belt One Road (OBOR), also known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
Yījīn Huòluò qí	伊金霍洛旗	Yījīn Huòluò Banner
Yuán cháo	元朝	Yuán Dynasty (1279–1368)
Yúnnán Shěng	云南省	Yúnnán Province
Yúnnán Mínnú Dàxué “Yùnyù Méng Zàng wénhuà de zuì diǎnxíng de yáolán”	云南民族大学 孕育蒙藏文化的最 典型的摇篮	Yúnnán Mínnú University “Most typical cradle of Mongol and Tibetan Culture”
zhànlüè	战略	strategy
Zhōnggòng Hénán Méngqí gōngwēi zǎoqí bàngōngchù	中共河南蒙旗工委 早期办公处	The early Office of the CCP Hénán Méngqí Working Committee
Zhōngguó Ménggǔxué Xuéhuì Wēilātèxué Zhuānyè Wěiyu- ánhùi	中国蒙古学学会卫 拉特学专业委员会	Chinese Society for Mongolian Studies, Committee for Specialists on the Oirat
Zhōngguó Shèhuì Kēxuéyuàn Zhōngguó Zàngxué Yánjiū Zhōngxīn	中国社会科学院 中国藏学研究中心	China Academy of Social Science China Tibetology Research Centre

<i>Zhōnghuá wénhuà</i>	中华文化	Chinese culture
<i>“Zhōnghuá yōuxiù chuántǒng wénhuà”</i>	中华优秀传统文化	“Extraordinary traditional Chinese culture”
<i>Zhōngyāng Mínzú Dàxué</i>	中央民族大学	Central Mínzú University
<i>Zhōu Ēnlái</i>	周恩来	Zhōu Ēnlái, leading figure in the Chinese Communist Party and Premier (1949–1976) and Foreign Minister (1949–1958) of the People’s Republic of China