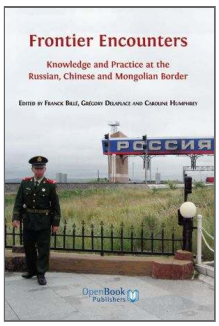

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Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border

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3. Rethinking Borders in Empire and Nation at the Foot of the Willow Palisade

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Uradyn E. Bulag

Prologue: stony wars at the foot of the willow palisade

Every year, on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, i.e. the traditional Duanwu Festival (also known as Dragon Boat Festival or Double Fifth Festival), people in Wangsiyingzi and the neighbouring village Sifangtai, just about one and half kilometres to the south, would climb atop a small mountain that lies between the two villages. Instead of racing dragon-headed boats as is the practice in south China, where the tradition first started more than two thousand years ago, people in these two villages, and their supporters from as far as Shenyang city, threw stones at each other. In this annual fight, called *kezhang doushi*, many were injured, some even seriously, but apparently no one ever died. Curiously, as soon as the fight was over after dusk, the warring sides resumed normality and visited each other as if nothing had happened. This tradition was, however, banned by the Liaoning provincial government a couple of years ago for having allegedly attracted large numbers of armed gangsters from outside the villages.[1]

1 Violence is endemic in dragon-boat festival. See Hsin-Yüan Chen (2008/09).

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On a late summer day in 2010, Burensain and I drove to Wangsiyingzi for a quick visit, hoping to learn a bit about the fight.[2] The two villages belong to two separate counties, which in turn are under the jurisdiction of two different prefecture-level municipal cities in Liaoning Province. Under Heishan County of Jinzhou City, Sifangtai has about 1,500 people, half Manchu, half Chinese. Wangsiyingzi, on the other hand, is a village under the jurisdiction of the Fuxin Mongolian Autonomous County, Fuxin City. Originally a pure Mongolian village called *Norsan Ail*, today the Mongols constitute only one fifth of the village's population of 1,100 people; the rest are Chinese and Manchu, the latter making up one fourth of the total. As we roamed the village, we encountered a few Mongols chatting in fluent Mongolian. The Mongols, they told us, occupy the north-eastern corner of the village, and they do not normally interact with the Manchu or Chinese. Pointing at the nearby mountain, they recounted the fight in vivid terms, dismissing the government ban as nonsensical.

The mountain, about a kilometre south-west of Wangsiyingzi, is called Norsan Oroi (Norsan Hill), after the village name. In Chinese, however, since the mountain has two connected mounds, the northern one is known as Ma'an Shan (Horse-Saddle Mountain) and the southern one Wangbao Shan (Treasure-Watching Mountain). There is a *bianqiang* nearby, they said, and the two villages fight over it. *Bianqiang* is the Chinese term used by local Mongols for *Liutiao Bian*, the Willow Palisade (lit., willow-branch border).

We drove up to the foot of the mountain and walked on the ridge from the northern end to the southern end, which is about two kilometres long. A grass-covered water gully runs between the two mounds, so we thought it must be the ruins of the famed Willow Palisade. We were wrong. Qu Yanbin, a Chinese folklorist, writes that the ruins of the old palisade are actually at the foot of the southern mound, Wangbao Shan (Qu 2007: 158). Unfortunately we missed it, as this information was not available then and we did not have enough time to do more explorations.[3] In the fight, Sifangtai villagers occupy Wangbao Shan, and Wangsiyingzi villagers Ma'an Shan, and they try to conquer each other's mountain, stoning the "enemies" off, for fun, according to the Mongol villagers we talked to.

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2 Burensain Borjigin is a Japan-based Inner Mongolian historian. See Burensain 2007.

3 We made the excursion on the last morning of our three-day visit to the Fuxin Mongolian Autonomous County.

The previous day, at a banquet with several retired Mongolian cadres from the Fuxin Mongolian Autonomous County, one of them pronounced proudly to us that the Mongoljin[4] Mongols in Liaoning Province still maintain their Mongolian identity well, and they have been serving as a Great Wall (*chang cheng*) protecting Inner Mongolia. Another elder, having learnt that I am from Ordos, said that the Ordos Mongols speak Mongolian with a strong Shaanxi Chinese accent, whereas the Mongoljin Mongols speak the most authentic Mongolian. I admitted readily that we in Inner Mongolia are not holding our cultural ground as well as we should. Afterwards, Burensain, who has been studying the region for more than a decade, confided that the Mongoljin suffered heavily during the Jindandao cult rebellion in 1891, when they lost more than 10,000 lives at the hands of the Han Chinese tenants who tilled Mongol land (see Borjigin 2004; Dai 2009; Wang 2006). Today, these Mongolian retired cadres, known as local elders, *nutgiin övgöd*,[5] run three associations: the first pertains to the promotion of Mongolian culture, the second to the study of China's ethnic autonomy laws, and the third to the study of tourism. Sophisticated in political skills, they have been relentless in their pursuit of justice, making use of every bit of China's Constitution and laws, especially the *Regional Nationality Autonomy Law*.

In the past decade, these elders have campaigned effectively against the term *Menggu Daifu* (Mongolian doctor), a Chinese ethnic slur which characterises Mongolian doctors as low-skilled and cruel veterinary surgeons.[6] More recently, they have successfully challenged the Han-dominated standing committee of the autonomous county Party Committee, by persuading the higher authority to make it a Mongol majority committee to reflect the Mongolian titularity of the autonomous county. This was no small feat, and in fact unheard of anywhere else in China.

Remarkably, deep inside China, in the thick of the Chinese population, the Mongoljin Mongols are still fighting at the foot of the Willow Palisade to defend their identity and interest. In this chapter, I re-examine the borders in empire and nation in China and Inner Asia.

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4 The Mongoljin Mongols used to be part of the Tumed Tumen, one of the six Tumens of Central Mongols ruled by Chinggisid princes. During the Qing, they were organised into the Tumed Left Wing Banner, belonging to the Josotu League of Inner Mongolia. In 1958 the banner was re-organised as Fuxin Mongolian Autonomous County in Liaoning province (see Bao and Xiang 2008).

5 The Mongoljin Mongols used to have an elders' assembly, *övgödiin chuulgan*, which led a major rebellion against the Qing in 1860–1864 (see Tai and Jin 2008: 238–49).

6 A cursory discussion of the campaign can be found in Bulag 2008.

Rethinking imperial and national borders

The Willow Palisade is a ditch and embankment planted with willows; its construction started in 1644 and was completed in 1681. Resembling the Chinese character 人 (*ren*, human), the palisade starts from the Shanhaiguan Fortress, at the eastern end of the Great Wall, and terminates at the western end of the Korean border. This was the old palisade (*lao bian*), built to prevent the Mongols and Koreans from entering the heartland of Manchuria. A new palisade (*xin bian*) was added, starting from Weiyuanbaomen gate and ending at Fadiha gate, which was built from 1670 to 1681. This palisade was built to prevent the so-called wild Jurchens from entering interior Manchuria (see Edmonds 1979; 1985).

The Willow Palisade was not the only border the Qing instituted. The Qing dynasty also demarcated arguably the world's first international border with the Russian Empire, as documented by Peter Perdue (1998). This is extraordinary and interesting because the builders of these borders and walls were not the sedentary Chinese, but the Manchu, a semi-nomadic Inner Asian people,[7] and this fact alone goes against much of current thinking on borders in empires and nations, a point I will elaborate below. I am tempted to call the Qing dynasty a border-building empire.

Conventional studies of Chinese nationalism focus almost exclusively on extraterritoriality and unequal treaties that gave western powers enormous privileges in China after the first Opium War (1839–42). Liu Xiaoyuan, a Chinese-American historian of Chinese and Inner Asian international relations, argues, however, that we pay more attention to Chinese obsession with territoriality. For him, Chinese nationalism is marked by China's territorial expansionism and incorporation of "Inner Asian borderlands into the territories of the Chinese republic" (Liu 2010: 233). While this is correct, I think he errs in claiming that a clearly demarcated border was the product of nationalist modernity as a result of what he called "cartographic modernisation" during the last decade of the Qing dynasty, i.e. 1902–1911. Before that, he argues, "although China has a long history of using maps, ancient Chinese maps did not demarcate China and its neighbours as bordered geo-entities. In the ancient world of China, border demarcation was occasionally practiced but was not institutionalised, for systematic border demarcation would have contradicted the universalistic ideology

7 David Sneath (2003) made an acute observation of this fact and attributed it to the Khitan Liao tradition of dual administration.

of 'all under heaven' and misrepresented the political reality of China's shifting frontiers" (ibid.). His theory, insightful as it is, in fact resonates with the recent movement in social science theorisation about borders, and some popular Chinese views on borders.

Largely, in social science literature, borders have become a vantage point to critique nation-state. Borders and borderlands are "sites and symbols of power" (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 1). The US-Mexico borders and the Israeli-Palestine borders are characterised as emblematic "wild zones of power" where the state authority exercises extralegal violence to defend them (Morris-Suzuki 2006). As such, borders are seen as what define a nation-state, which is largely represented as a gigantic prison with wired fences, preventing free movement of goods and people. Empires, once denounced and overthrown, have now struck back; they are re-imagined as a cosmopolitan space without borders, imbued with hospitality, welcoming and hosting strangers. Deleuze and Guattari's "nomadology" reigns over the post-national global imagery: nation-states are sedentary and bound whereas empires are nomadic and open (Malkki 1995).

This pro-empire theoretical movement in the West mirrors debates on borders and walls in modern China. In the early 1960s at the height of the ideological tensions with the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) openly defended Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire, celebrating them for sweeping away all the petty kingdoms lying between China and Europe, thereby spreading Chinese civilisation to Europe, including Russia (Farquhar 1967). *Pax Mongolica* was appropriated as *pax Sinica*. During the liberalist movement leading up to the Tian'anmen protests in June 1989, many Chinese intellectuals denounced the Great Wall, not only for its ineffectiveness in defending China from repeated nomadic invasions, but more importantly for its historical role in creating a closed frame of mind in the Chinese people while what they longed for was the blue ocean, where they could sail toward freedom. *Heshang* (Deathsong of the River), a six-part television documentary series made in 1988, celebrated as a Chinese version of *The Closing of the American Mind*, and one which led to political radicalism, has the following to say about the Great Wall:

> By the time that Genghis Khan's [1162–1227] fierce horsemen had swept down like a tide, not even natural barriers like the Yellow River and the Yangtze, let alone the Great Wall, could stop them (Su and Wang 1991: 127).
>
> In direct contrast to the now-forgotten Great Wall of the Qin, the Great Wall of the Ming which retreated a thousand *li* backwards, has been the object of incomparable reverence. People pride themselves on the fact that it is the

> only feat of human engineering visible to astronauts on the moon. People even wish to use it as a symbol of China's strength. And yet, if the Great Wall could speak, it would very frankly tell us, its Chinese [*huaxia*] grandchildren, that it is a great and tragic gravestone forged by historical destiny. It can by no means represent strength, initiative, and glory; it can only represent an isolationist, conservative and incompetent defence and a cowardly lack of aggression. Because of its great size and long history, it has deeply imprinted its arrogance and self-delusion in the souls of our people. Alas, O Great Wall, why do we still want to praise you? (ibid.: 130)

Here, the Great Wall was imagined as the Berlin Wall, a symbol of closed mind and cowardice. Today, leading Chinese writers such as Yu Qiuyu (1995) laud the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing dynasty for his decision not to repair the Great Wall when he received a report from Cai Yuan, the governor of Gubeikou Pass in May 1691 about the derelict state of the Wall. In numerous contemporary Chinese writings, the following from Kangxi's reply is quoted to prove that the Qing was an open Empire:

> Emperors and kings had their own ways to rule all under heaven; they did not simply rely on perilous nature. After the Qin built the Great Wall, the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties often repaired it, but had they ever been free from border troubles? At the end of the Ming, my grandfather [Hong Taiji] led his great army, riding straight in, defeating all [Ming] armies; nobody could stop him. It is obvious that the way to defend a state is really to promote good morality and let people live in peace. If people obey happily, then the state is legitimate and the border will be solid automatically… In the past the Qin launched a large scale project to build the Great Wall. Our dynasty bestows favour to the Khalkha, allowing them to defend the North [against the Russians]; this is more solid than the Great Wall (Qingdai Guanxiu 1985: ch. 151, pp. 19–21).

It is fascinating that contemporary Chinese scholars have taken the perspective of their former conquerors who *ipso facto* would not need a Great Wall to block themselves from conquering China. In their political romanticism,[8] Chinese intellectuals have turned the Manchu conquerors into staunch enemies of smallness, the best practitioners of *da-yi-tong*, the highest Chinese political ideal of grand unity. A Li Zhiting (2005) romanced the following:

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8 See Schmitt's discussion of political romanticism: "In the romantic it is not reality that matters, but rather romantic productivity, which transforms everything and makes it into the occasion for poetry. What the king and queen are in reality is intentionally ignored. Their function consists instead in being a point of departure for romantic feelings. The same holds for the beloved. From the standpoint of romanticism, therefore, it is simply not possible to distinguish between the king, the state, or the beloved. In the twilight of the emotions, they blend into one another" (1991: 126).

> The Kangxi emperor decided to abandon the Great Wall, so that henceforth there was no more division between the south and the north, no more distinction between the Chinese and barbarians, genuinely becoming "one family", endowing "Central Kingdom" with contemporary meaning of China. Abandoning the Great Wall was tantamount to dismantling a barrier wall that segregated the great masses of the Han from the "three northern" minority nationalities, rapidly forming an unprecedented multi-nationality state of "grand unity". This decision of the Kangxi Emperor, while abandoning the earth and stone Great Wall, built instead a national Great Wall of "collective will", which was no doubt an epochal breakthrough of the theory of "grand unity", a great pioneering undertaking!

The admirers of the Kangxi Emperor's grand political philosophy ignored what he might have really thought; they conveniently forgot or did not realise that he in fact lied about his dynasty needing no wall. It is true that the Manchu did not repair the Great Wall, but it was in 1681, during Kangxi's own reign (1662–1722), that a different kind of wall, the Willow Palisade, was built, which had been initiated by his father the Shunzhi Emperor (Lee 1970: 6) well before he boasted about "consolidating the empire without relying on the perilous mountains and rivers" in 1691, a year when the Khalkha Mongols submitted to the Qing.

The main arguments that I will elaborate on in the remainder of this chapter are the following. Contrary to conventional assumptions, empires built by nomads or semi-nomads did have a sense of border and boundary. The Manchu Qing, and for this matter the Mongol Yuan, had a strong sense of border, using it as a political technique to manage the disparate populations within the empire. One of the distinct characteristics of Inner Asian conquest dynasties was the dual rule instituted to administer the conquered Chinese population separately from their own ethnics. The Mongols in fact created a native chieftainship (*tusi*) system to rule non-Mongol and non-Chinese populations in the Yuan separate from the Mongols and Chinese who were administered in provinces (*xinsheng*), another Mongol invention (Bulag 2010a).

This proposal that empires have borders is by no means a novel idea. After all, one of the key techniques used by rulers, imperial or otherwise, is "divide and rule". What I suggest is special about the Qing is the enormous degree to which internal borders had been codified and policed, and the severe consequences such borders have had for the post-imperial communities. The histories of nationalism of both the Mongols and the Chinese are deeply intertwined with border maintenance and border dismantlement. I propose therefore to take a closer look at the internal

borders within the Qing Empire and the nationalist backlashes. Below I will first look at the Mongolian and Chinese internal borders separately before examining the common border between them.

Inter-Mongolian borders

The Manchu Qing governance of the Mongols has had a profound long-term impact on the Mongols. On the one hand, the Manchu unified all the disparate Mongolian groups by alternate means of alliance and conquest. It was under the Qing administration that the ethnonym *Mongol* was used to override such ethnonyms as Oirad and Horchin, expanding the name that had earlier been monopolized by the Chinggisid six *tumen*s (see Crossley 2006). Almost all the Mongols, except the Buryats in southern Siberia and the Kalmyks who migrated to the Volga region, were administered by the *Lifan Yuan* (Board of Colonial Affairs, M. *γadaγadu mongγul-un törü-yi jasaqu yabudal-un yamun*), inculcating a sense of unified Mongolian identity as opposed to the Manchu, Tibetans, Muslims and Han. Segregation, according to Mark Elliott, was a key Qing mode of governance, that is, segregating the Manchus from the conquered and/or subordinate peoples in order to maintain what he calls "ethnic sovereignty".[9] The Qing segregation policy was, in his view, partly responsible for the institutionalisation of ethnic groups, each of whom was not only named, but also segregated from others.

On the other hand, this ethnically-unified Mongolia was not to be a unitary political entity.[10] Instead, they were subdivided into numerous smaller units, from *aimag* (tribes) and *chuulgan* (leagues) to *hoshuun* (banners). The six leagues of inner *jasag* (later known as Inner Mongolia) were divided into 49 banners, and the Khalkha (later known as Outer Mongolia) were divided into 81 banners. There were also numerous other banners outside the two large entities. Borders were demarcated and policed between tribes, leagues and even between banners. *Karun* (M. *Haruul,* C. *Kalun*) border control stations were set up along borders, and stone cairns called *oboo* were built between *karun*s. At strategic places, each *karun* was manned by 30–40 soldiers from Manchu garrison armies stationed in Suiyuan, Ningxia, Uliastai and other places; they would patrol along

9 The Manchu segregated themselves from the Chinese wherever they set up garrison cities.

10 See Johan Elverskog (1996) for the transformation of the Mongol polity from *ulus* to banner.

the border every day to the *oboo* between *karun*s, where they exchanged information with patrols from the other *karun*. This was called *khaich yavakh*, scissor-walking, a metaphor implying that the soldiers were cutting the borderline like scissors, making a radical partition. These *karun*s and *oboo*s would be checked by Manchu garrison generals once a month and they would be inspected by officials from the Lifan Yuan in Beijing occasionally. No tribal, league, or banner nobles and subjects were permitted to cross banner borders, nor were they allowed to marry across banners without authorization. The *karun* guards would make their record every day and the inspection report would be sent to Beijing regularly (Baoyinchaoketu 2003).

Punishment was severe for any violations of borders, trespassing either into "*neidi*", that is, inland China, or into other's territory. For instance, *Daqing Huidian Shili*, published in the twenty-third year of Jiaqing reign (1814), recorded the following: "Originally, should there be border violations from Mongolia, a prince would be fined 10 horses, *zasag*, *beile*, *beizi*, and *gong* 7 horses, *taiji* five horses, and commoner, a cattle". By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the fine had been increased tenfold for aristocrats, and a commoner would lose all his property, including himself, which would be awarded to the whistle-blower (Huidianguan 2006: vol. 979, pp. 237–39). The fine soared further towards the end of the Qing, betraying an increase in violations and their seriousness.[11]

Such stringent prohibition of trespassing borders was to mould a divided unity of the Mongols under the Qing *gurun* or state. All Mongols were to identify with the Qing state, not as a politically unified nation (*ulus*), but through the banner system. It was intended to prevent the Mongols from realigning with each other and challenging the Qing, as it categorically prohibited princes from conquering each other, which was the classical mode for the rise of power among the nomads. Consolidation of the banner administrative system was designed to ensure political stability in the backyard of the Qing.

The long-term effect of the Qing governance was that there remained a general sense of "Mongolness", aided by a historical memory and maintained by the Qing administration, and yet, the Mongol groups

11 Border clashes increased over years, sometimes escalating into major incidents. In 1937, without the Qing imperial border control, the Otog and Ushin banners of the Yekejuu League resorted to an all-out war over border violations, lasting for a year, and inviting mediation from the Chinese Communist Party. See Lifanyuan (1998).

were deeply divided and suspicious of each other. This was the imperial legacy. After the collapse of the Qing, Mongolian nationalists did not find themselves facing a group of ethnically unconscious herders who could be easily molded into a Mongol nation, as Eugen Weber's (1976) peasants would turn into Frenchmen; instead, they were confronted with a unified Mongol people with a clear consciousness of who they were, and yet who were deeply divided institutionally. In 1925, when the Kharachin Mongol nationalist leaders of the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party came to Ordos, they were largely rejected by the Ordos members of the Party who formed the bulk of the Party's army. This Party was perhaps the first ever Inner Mongolian effort for a united action, but failed ignominiously thanks to the deeply entrenched banner division (Atwood 2002). Mongolian institutional division also frustrated the earlier effort for unification between Outer Mongolia and Inner Mongolia in 1911–1915. So did it lead to the internal split of Prince De's Mongolian autonomy movement in 1936, not of course without external pressure by the local Chinese warlord Fu Zuoyi (Bulag 2010b).

Nationalist Mongolian frustration at internal division was conducive to mythologising any sign of unity. Thus the "April the Third 1946 Meeting" (*4.3 Huiyi*) between Ulanhu and Hafenga/Tümürbagan has attained a huge significance in the historiography of modern Inner Mongolia, celebrated as the first success in the unification of Eastern and Western (Inner) Mongolia. With unity thus becoming the highest ideal of the Mongols, it is not surprising that the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has been characterised as a unitary or unified autonomy (*tongyi zizhi*), not only for overriding and demolishing Chinese provincial boundaries, but also for establishing a Mongol polity in which Mongols from different banners, leagues and tribes, for the first time in the history of Inner Mongolia, could come together (Bulag 2010c).

This is not to say that internal divisions have disappeared: far from it. What I am suggesting is that modern Mongolian nationalism has been built upon the historical Mongol identity created in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and institutionalised during the Qing Empire, and yet it is also a violent protest at the Qing imperial partitioning of the Mongols into numerous small groups. Mongol nationalism works on two sets of imperial legacy: first the boundary created and policed by the Manchu between the Mongols and the Chinese, which has been accepted as national border of the Mongols and which they fight to defend, but not always successfully;

second, the borders between Mongol banners, which they think illegitimate and which they vow to dismantle or overcome, but not always successfully, either. The ethnic groups the Manchu helped maintain – Manchu, Mongols, Tibetans, Muslims, and Han – were internally divided groups. It is true that all communities show "a degree of unity to the outside world while simultaneously remaining a site of internal tension" (Bellér-Hann 2008: 16). But the ethnic groups that emerged out of the Qing Empire were intended to be so, and this has been recognised by nationalists. This recognition gave rise to border-breaking political programs.

Breaking down provincial borders

The Manchu segregationist border building was not limited to non-Han peoples; even the Han Chinese were segregated from each other largely along provincial lines. The Qing provincial administration followed Ernest Gellner's (1983) classical agrarian political structure, that is, a pyramid structure with the emperor at the top who ruled, through literati officials, vertically insulated communities, which were not allowed mutual communication without authorisation from the centre. In the Qing dynasty, this was done through provincial governors appointed by the imperial court. Qing-created provinces became cultural communities with distinct dialects, mind-sets, local cuisines and customs, even though they were unified by literary high culture and the imperial court.

One of the sagas of Chinese political modernity was a fight between nationalism and provincialism. Towards the end of the Qing dynasty, as the Manchu rulers began to rely on the Chinese for both defending China against western powers and for quelling Muslim rebellions in Gansu, Chinese provinces emerged as autonomous political entities, eventually defying the Manchu-dominated Qing centre when the latter was weakened by the western powers. Provinces were not initially granted any autonomy from the central authority, as were Mongolian banners. However, once the ideal of self-rule was introduced, especially in relation to a perceived alien empire, it was the Qing-created provincial lines that became the natural divisions for the new political articulation of self-rule. In 1908 the Qing court officially recognised and even promoted provincial self-rule as a new governmental measure to salvage the crumbling empire, thereby opening Pandora's Box. "Hunan for the Hunanese", "Guangdong for the Guangdong people" and so on became the slogans of the epoch,

and provinces became the most important bastion for anti-Manchu activities. And yet the provincial divisions had become equally entrenched, challenging a unified action among Han anti-Manchu revolutionaries. Sun Yatsen's *Xinzhonghui*, established in 1894, was an exclusivist Guangdong organisation, and the leading revolutionaries were divided into provincial factions, each insisting on their own provinces as the basis for launching the anti-Qing uprising (Liu 1999; Su 2009).

However, once the Qing was overthrown, leading Chinese nationalists envisioned that China's power must come from a unitary and centralised state, an ideal stemming from their observation of the rise of modern Japan. In this vision, provincial autonomy was deemed a challenge to the new national centre, fragmenting the new nation into numerous local kingdoms ruled by military strongmen. Thus, prior to the 1927 northern campaign by the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang), China was beset with wars among provincial strongmen, which contributed to the Guomindang's desire for a unitary and centralised polity. The debate between a unitary state model and a confederate state model was ultimately won on the battle front, with the nationalists militarily unifying China in 1928, discrediting the provincial strongmen as "local warlords", and local provincial autonomy as feudal separatist rule (*fengjian geju*) (Duara 1995; Fitzgerald 2002).

The Guomindang dream for a unitary state was realised by the CCP in 1949. In the first four years of the People's Republic until 1954, province was made a second tier administrative unit, below *da xingzhengqu*, great administrative region, of which China had six, plus one autonomous region, i.e. the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

As this cursory examination of provincialism shows, Chinese nationalism has had to grapple with internal borders instituted by the Manchu, and this continues to be a thorny issue. Provincial identity often contributes to political factions in the ruling Communist Party, and the Party seldom appoints a provincial native to the position of the province's party secretary. The autonomist tendency of Chinese provinces and the stringent measures adopted against it challenges one of the political mythologies of China that a unified China was achieved as early as the Qin dynasty two thousand years ago. It also behooves us to remember that provinces were first set up by the Mongols during the Yuan, abolished by the Ming, and restored by the Qing, which divided the Chinese regions into eighteen provinces, which were together called "China Proper" by Westerners.

Inter-ethnic border or international border?

As we have shown, nationalists reject internal borders; Chinese and the Mongol nationalists are in agreement that the Qing imperial governance was predicated on a divide and rule policy. What they do not agree on, however, is what to do with the inter-ethnic borders erected between the Mongols and the Chinese.

By the end of the Qing dynasty, Chinese nationalists had largely accepted the eighteen provinces created by the Qing as *Zhongguo Benbu* (China Proper), and their original ambition was no more than to drive the Manchu out of these provinces. The nationalist flag used during the Wuchang Uprising on the 10th October 1911 was called "flag of the iron blood and eighteen stars" (*tiexue shibaxing qi*) – eighteen stars representing eighteen Chinese provinces. Although on the 1 January 1912 the Republic of China instated a five-colour striped flag symbolising a newly declared union of five races (*wuzu gonghe*), the flag of iron blood and eighteen stars was retained; it was used as flag of the army until 1928, when the Guomindang established a new National Government. Small China-ism died hard.

Until the 1930s, even the Chinese Communists regarded the Great Wall as the border between the Han and the Mongols, as was evidenced in Mao Zedong's proclamation to the people of Inner Mongolia on behalf of the Central Government of the Chinese Soviet People's Republic on the 10 December 1935, avowing to return Mongol land occupied by the Chinese to the Mongols:

> First, Baotuwan, which was occupied by Jing Xiuyue, and the area which was occupied by Gao Shixiu, along with the two salt ponds, will be returned to the Inner Mongolian people. Moreover, the area along the Great Wall, including places such as Ningtiaoliang, Anbian, and Dingbian, is designated as a commercial area, in order to promote bilateral trade between you and us (Mao Zedong 1992 [1935]: 72).

Mongol nationalists also accepted the Qing ethnic border along the Great Wall and the northern part of the Willow Palisade as the national border of the Mongols. In 1913–14 the government of Bogd Khan Mongolia sent five columns of cavalry to liberate Inner Mongolia only to lose its own independence in 1915, becoming an autonomy recognising China's suzerainty. In 1945 the Mongolian People's Republic army marched into Inner Mongolia against Japan, and briefly entertained the idea of unifying

Inner Mongolia with the MPR only to gain formal recognition of its independence by the Republic of China in 1946 (Liu 2006). Henceforth, pan-Mongolism died as a political programme, and Inner Mongolia was to emerge as an autonomous region within China. When the region took its current shape in 1956, it lost a quarter of the Mongolian population, including the Mongoljin, to the neighbouring provinces, and most of its land along the Great Wall and the Willow Palisade.

However, while the Mongols continue to think in terms of the borders created by the Qing, this "national geography" has been challenged by the Chinese. In the early 1990s Lin Gan, arguably the most prominent Chinese historian of the northern peoples, furiously debunked the idea that the Great Wall and the Willow Palisade should be seen as the national border of China. He was careful not to criticise the independent state of Mongolia, but blame two external imperialists, the Japanese and the Soviets, for introducing this idea. He denounced the Soviets for following the Japanese assertion of "Beyond the Great Wall is no longer China" by quoting the following passage, a statement issued by the Soviet government in June 1969, at the height of the Sino-Soviet confrontation:

The border of China in the north is marked by the Great Wall. Prior to China's conquest by the Manchu, the northern border of China proper ran along the Great Wall. In the west, China's border did not go beyond Gansu and Sichuan provinces. The Willow Palisade of the Qing dynasty was the northeastern border of China at that time (Lin 2007: 50).

In challenging this statement, Lin Gan advanced a new argument that all the nomads that had appeared in Chinese history, and all those who had invaded China, were *a priori* "northern nationalities of ancient China". Borders and divisions were thus internalised or nationalised and dismissed as of little or no political and international significance. This argument somewhat resonates with the theory of Fei Xiaotong (1989), China's foremost anthropologist, who famously claimed in 1989 that non-Han peoples in the past were Chinese except that they were not aware of that identity, and their consciousness as Chinese became apparent only after the invasion of imperialists, i.e. Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century. In this discourse, Inner Asian conquests were rendered no more than a domestic violence between brotherly ethnic groups of the newly-imagined Chinese nation – *zhonghua minzu*.

Gehe: inter-ethnic psychological barrier

The domestication of the non-Han peoples as sibling ethnic groups of the Chinese nation is of course characteristic of nationalism in general, but the vehemence in Chinese hostility toward inter-ethnic boundary requires further commentary. For what is at issue is not necessarily the physical border, which has long crumbled, but rather the psychological barrier, that is, the refusal of the Mongols (and some other groups) to identify with the Chinese even though they have been incorporated into China. This psychological barrier is best denoted by the Chinese concept of "*gehe*", referring not just to a barrier, but an estrangement, a tendency to move away, thereby having an effect on someone from whom one moves away. More importantly, *gehe* between two persons or entities is often attributed to a third party; as such, it may not be just an innocent lack of communication, but may be conducive to realignment of relationship. *Gehe* must be acted upon if it is not to adversely affect oneself. *Gehe* is a triangular effect.

Robert Lee is, in my view, correct in arguing that the Willow Palisade was erected not just for preventing Chinese immigration into the naturally better endowed Manchuria and for preserving the Manchu culture and identity. It was primarily designed to prevent an alliance between the Mongols and the Chinese, minimising their contact. "The Manchus had conquered China by forging an alliance composed of themselves, the Mongols, and dissident Chinese. As rulers of China, they were determined not to let such an alliance be formed again" (Lee 1970: 21). One may add that the Manchu rulers must have remembered that their former dynasty Jin was annihilated by none other than an alliance between the Mongols and the Song dynasty in the thirteenth century.

If we accept this thesis, then, the Qing segregationist policy was to prevent alliances and the Willow Palisade was a wedge driven between the Mongols and Chinese, who were pit against each other. This was because in the heartland of Manchuria there were already significant numbers of Chinese prior to the Qing, and many remained during the Qing period. I am thus tempted to suggest that the *kezhang toushi* ritual fight mentioned at the opening pages of this paper is a historical memory of a Mongolian perimeter defence against encroachment from land hungry Chinese migrants or famine refugees. The Willow Palisade was only part of an elaborate Qing segregation measure. Indeed, throughout Mongolia, while the Manchu bannermen policed the internal Mongol borders, the Mongols were charged to defend the Qing-Russia border, and the numerous *karun*s along the Willow

Palisade were manned by soldiers of the Chinese eight banners under the close supervision of Manchu bannermen. It was a classical imperial mode of playing off one party against another.

A far greater *gehe* between the Mongols and the Chinese was created on the cultural and psychological front. The prohibitions of communication between the Mongols and Chinese prescribed in *Lifan Yuan Zeli* were unprecedented and comprehensive:

1. Mongols were not allowed to marry Chinese (Lifanyuan 1998: 249).
2. Mongol nobles of all ranks were prohibited from hiring Chinese to teach Chinese language or use them as scribes.
3. Chinese language was prohibited in writing the Mongol official documents, memorials or letters.
4. Mongols were prohibited from using Chinese names (ibid.: 365).

This was radical "multiculturalism". Most commentators have viewed this segregationist policy as a Manchu fear for Chinese "polluting" the Mongols and undermining their military prowess, rendering them useless. Today the predominant Mongol nationalist assessment of the Manchu promotion of Tibetan Buddhism among the Mongols is pathological, believing that the Manchu deliberately tried to weaken the Mongols. The following passage from Qianlong's "*Lama Shuo*" (*On Lamas*) is quoted by Sechin Jagchid (1988) to this effect:

> The Yellow Religion of the interior and the outside was generally governed by these two persons, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Erdeni. All the Mongolian tribes whole-heartedly submit themselves. The development of the Yellow Religion is intended to pacify the Mongols. This matter is not insignificant and therefore should be protected but is not a policy similar to that of the Yuan Dynasty, which deviously flattered the Tibetan monks.

A huge contradiction can be detected in the interpretations of the Qing approaches to the Mongols: the Manchu did not want the Chinese to weaken the Mongols, but the Manchu used Tibetan Buddhism to weaken them. If there is any logic in this contradiction, then, what is clear is that the Mongols were not barred from accessing Tibetan Buddhism and culture as they were from Chinese language and culture. I would argue that the Manchu measures were not necessarily intended for preserving the Mongol prowess or weakening them, but rather for rendering them "submissive" or loyal to the Manchu. Nothing would work better than entering the Mongolian religious system by making the Manchu emperor become Manjushri, one of the

highest bodhisattvas (Farquhar 1978). As the Kangxi Emperor believed that the Khalkha Mongol defence against the Russians was "more solid than the Great Wall", so were Mongols expected to be more solid than the Great Wall in their defence against the Chinese. And nothing would be more effective than creating *gehe* between them, making them psychologically distant from each other but identify with the Manchu. As such, the Qing dynasty was not a simple segregationist Empire, hardening the boundaries of ethnic groups. It was also Georg Simmel's *tertius gaudens* (laughing third) (Wolff 1950).

The long-term effect of the Qing policy was a profound distrust and fear of the Chinese on the part of the non-Han peoples, to whom the Chinese often appeared like ghostly figures. I myself can remember vividly my own fear of Chinese strangers in the early 1970s. We were living in the countryside, and the closest neighbour was about three kilometres away. One night, my sister and I discovered huge footprints behind our house. For several nights, we huddled together with our mother, believing that the footprints must be those of a Chinese, who might have long daggers. This fear was as much a result of Chinese persecution of the Mongols during the Cultural Revolution[12] as a historical memory.

Perhaps an institutionalisation of this fear can be found in numerous Mongolian fables of *altan unag*, golden pony. In these fables, which can be found in many parts of Inner Mongolia, but not in Mongolia, the local *nutag* (homeland, allocated pastureland) is rich, lush with grass and animals. Many places are called *bayan*, rich: *bayangol*, *bayanbogd*, *bayantal* and so on. These places have treasures, which are represented by golden ponies that peacefully graze the pasture, but disappear when there is turmoil. In some regions, golden ponies or golden calves are said to reside in the lake. Some fables have it that the golden animal is stolen by an alien, usually Chinese, and sometimes yellow-haired Russians (Chen 2001; cf. Bulag 2010b: Ch 5). The morals of the fables are that the Mongols should engage in both "perimeter defence" and "social boundary defence" (Cashdan 1983) against the Chinese and Russians – which was indeed the historical role assigned to the Mongols by the Manchu in the Qing dynasty.

The deeply entrenched Mongol fear and distrust of the Chinese, long nourished by the Manchu, did not bode well for the Manchu who identified with the Chinese towards the end of the Qing. In 1902, the Qing opened the Mongolian border to allow Chinese to settle in Mongolia as the Manchu did

12 The most authoritative book on the subject is Qi (2010).

to their own homeland Manchuria, a policy deeply resented by the Manchu's former Mongol aristocratic allies. Violence and turmoil induced by massive Chinese settler colonialism prompted the Mongols to declare independence in December 1911 before the Qing abdication, turning to none other than the Manchu's nemesis, the Russians. Subsequently, the Chinese nationalists' solution to the so-called "Mongolian question" was none other than measures of dismantling Mongolian administrations, further Chinese settlement and promotion of Chinese language and cultural assimilation on all fronts. This is politicide *par excellence*.[13] These measures were to eradicate the alienation of heart or *gehe*, which was blamed on the Manchu imperial segregation policy, and external imperialists such as Russia and Japan. Nationalist China was now out to bring down all physical, cultural and psychological barriers and borders between the Mongols and the Chinese. Unfortunately for the Guomindang, this pushed the Mongols further away into the fold of the Japanese and the communists, both Russian and Chinese.

Concluding remarks: toward a triangular conceptualisation of border

In this paper I have argued that Chinese and Mongolian nationalists have reacted strongly against – and continue to grapple with – the borders and boundaries instituted by the Manchu in late imperial China and Inner Asia. I have mentioned two kinds of borders, one physical and the other cultural and mental. While the old physical borders such as the Great Wall, the Willow Palisade, or the border posts of *karun*s and *oboo*s may have long become defunct, the cultural and mental borders die hard. They continue to frustrate both Mongol nationalists and Chinese nationalists.

The ideal of any nationalism is of course to build a homogeneous nation. What is new in the case of China and Inner Asia is that nationalists are confronted not with "a plate of loose sand", to use Sun Yat-sen's famous metaphor, not with rural communities who could be easily moulded into nations, but rather with ethnic communities whose borders have been demarcated and maintained, and yet who are internally divided. In this regard, the Qing dynasty does not fit the popular image of an empire maintaining loose control over various communities. It bears all the hallmarks of a European colonial state whose governance of diverse populations was predicated on

13 For the use of "politicide" instead of "genocide" in the Chinese context, see Bulag 2010a.

divide and rule. Anthropologists and political scientists have long noted the European colonial production of cultures and ethnic groups.[14] And yet, unlike a modern European colonial state that instituted indirect rule, the Qing did not stand aloof and above all groups as a disinterested sovereign. Rather, Qing emperors tried to win the loyalty of the subject groups by identifying with their cultural and religious systems, and drove wedges between the subject groups making them checkmate each other, so that they could sleep soundly at night, laughing in their dreams.

We thus find a unique border or boundary formation in China and Inner Asia. Boundary or border is both closed and open. For instance, the internal boundary either among the Chinese or among the Mongols was closed to their fellow ethnics, but open to the Manchu. The closed border was an antagonistic one, with both sides treating each other as foes, engaging in both perimeter defence and social boundary defence. These defences were as inter-ethnic as intra-ethnic. The open border was one erected between the Manchu and each of the ethnic groups within the Empire. This border was not symmetrically guarded as in the case of closed border. Since the border around the Manchu was erected for the purpose of maintaining the "ethnic sovereignty" of the Manchu, it was closed to non-Manchus who were prohibited from crossing borders. The Manchu, on the other hand, as the master race of the Empire, had access to every inch of territories "under the heaven" – *tianxie* – as it were, which were simultaneously territories of "our great Qing" (*wo da qing*).

I am now close to proposing a new conceptualisation of border. Instead of seeing the border as simply lying between two groups, border in the Qing was often triangulated and as such they were politically *affective* borders. Invested with legitimacy or illegitimacy, morality or immorality, affective borders are targets of either radical closure or opening up. If this conceptualisation is valid, then borders in China and Inner Asia are not simply arbitrary demarcations preventing free movement of goods and people, where states exercise their maximum power. An affective border defines the existential essence of a group, which may see it as legitimate so as to defend it with all its might, or as illegitimate to so as to dismantle it.

In this light, we may go beyond the initial argument advanced in this paper that nationalists have had to grapple with borders set up by

14 The most devastating critique comes from Mahmood Mamdani (1996; 2002), who attributed the African tribalism at large and the Rwandan Tutsi-Hutu mutual genocide in particular to European colonial policies.

empires. Nor should we stop at saying that nationalists reject internal borders and only accept external borders. To the extent that we are dealing with multi-ethnic political entities, borders and boundaries are actually a political technology not specific to imperial conquerors. If the essence of the political lies in the distinction between friend and enemy (Schmitt 2007), imperialists or nationalists or communists must attend to organisational matters if they were to build a community. Collaboration, as I have argued elsewhere, is endemic in nationalism. Collaborative nationalism is never binary; it is at least triangular. Knowing when and how to open and close boundary and with which partner is an art that is essential for one's political survival.

In a similar way to the Manchu, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made an alliance with non-Han ethnic groups in its struggle with the Chinese Nationalist Party. In this collaboration, the CCP insisted that the minorities maintain boundary with the Guomindang, and for this purpose, the CCP advocated ethnic self-determination and promised ethnic autonomy. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government established in 1947 was supported and led by the CCP; its border was open to the CCP. However, it closed its border to the Guomindang, against whom the Mongol autonomists fought heroically, supporting the CCP. This collaboration was mutually beneficial, as it helped the CCP to win the Civil War, and helped the Mongols to secure an autonomous region.

However, the CCP alliance with the Mongols and other non-Han peoples were predicated on a discourse of presenting themselves as Good Han and denouncing the Guomindang (GMD) as Bad Han (Bulag 2012). This was an effective strategy insofar as the CCP won the minorities to its side. What the CCP did not realise was that they had subjected themselves to the judgement of the minorities whose trust of the CCP depended on whether it could continue to be Good Han. Any Han chauvinism, which the CCP is often susceptible to, is thus seen as blurring the boundary between the CCP and its nemesis the GMD, thereby incurring strong resentment from the minorities who feel betrayed. Minority criticism of the CCP trespassing its own line with the Guomindang had thus been blamed by some within the Party as a result of the very autonomy the Party had awarded to minorities. From the late 1950s, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, minorities were openly attacked for distancing from China, from the CCP and for splittism.

Today, although the CCP upholds the system of regional nationality autonomy as a result of the catastrophe during the Cultural Revolution,

some within and without the Party, and especially those in academia, including many anthropologists, fear that the autonomy system and the category of nationality itself have not achieved the original purpose of integrating minorities with the Chinese in the form of *minzu tuanjie*. Rather, they have induced more *gehe*, estrangement between Chinese and minorities. They are said to have entrenched internal ethnic borders, which are in the process of externalisation, being turned into the border of China. A Chinese nation, it is now asserted, needs no internal borders, either ethnic or administrative-cum-territorial. The Chinese nation is imagined as a national cosmopolitan space, in which no bound autonomous nationalities have any room for existence. Ethnic groups are no longer allowed to have any line of demarcation (*jiexian*) with the Chinese. Chinese intellectuals now openly embrace Deleuze and Guattarian nomadology, using it to urge the descendants of nomads to live up to this ideal. To the ears of the Mongoljin Mongols at the foot of the Willow Palisade, this nomadological argument sounds so alien. They have rolled up their sleeves ready to fight the last ditch of battle of defence, a battle they have been fighting since the first years of the Qing dynasty. In Xinjiang, while the political (autonomy) boundary has long been trespassed, the ethnic boundary is most vehemently maintained by both the Han Chinese and the Uyghurs (Topin 2011).

Today, inter-ethnic *gehe* is as deep as ever, perhaps deeper, not because there is lack of emphasis on national unity. To the country, this *gehe* has gone deeper precisely because of the overwhelming Chinese nationalist attempt at breaking down all boundaries to create a national empire. A new Chinese national empire by necessity will not need a Great Wall to block its conquest, but there is no reason to believe that it will not erect new boundaries even as it tries to pull down old ones to achieve its purpose.