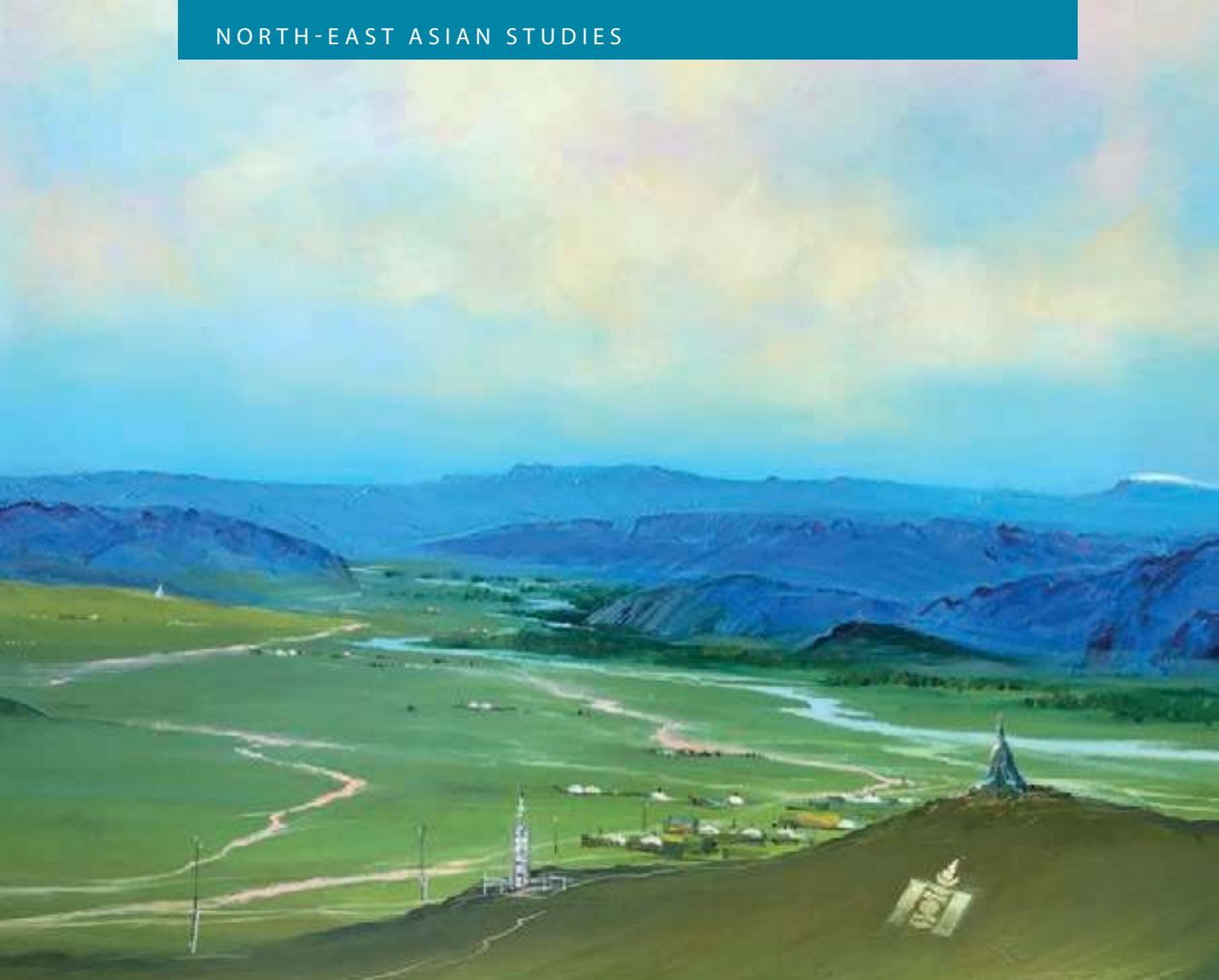


NORTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES



Phillip Marzluf

# Travel Writing in Mongolia and Northern China, 1860-2020

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Travel Writing in Mongolia and Northern China,  
1860–2020

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*Phillip P. Marzluf*

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Map 1. Nineteenth-Century Qing Empire. Map by Brooke Marston.



Map 2. Late Qing Empire (1860–1911). Map by Brooke Marston.



Map 3. Modern Mongolia. Map by Brooke Marston.

# Introduction

## Abstract

*Travel Writing in Mongolia and Northern China* makes travel writing about Mongolia more visible, introducing readers to the imaginative geographies, Orientalizing discourses, and rhetorical strategies that fix ideas about Mongolia for European and North American audiences. According to these discourses, Mongolia is a decaying, peripheral, ahistorical, and primitive place or, nostalgically, it exists to recuperate overly civilized Westerners. Travel writing is an ideal source for the exploration of these imaginative geographies because it focuses readers on the asymmetrical relationships between travelers and their Mongolian interlocutors and because it is a malleable genre serving various ideological, public, and rhetorical purposes. In the introduction, the five travel eras that constitute the 800-year history of Western travel writing about Mongolia are also defined.

**Keywords:** imaginative geography, representation, Orientalism, travel eras, travel writing

In the fall of 2017, when a *Sky News* journalist asked Michael Heseltine, a former British leader, where the Prime Minister should station the then Foreign Minister, Boris Johnson, he responded: “Mongolia, somewhere like that?” (“Heseltine” 2017). Though the humor may be lost on the readers of this book, Heseltine’s flippant response circulates a powerful and resilient discourse about Mongolia, depicting an unimaginable and utterly distant place, the complete opposite of Great Britain. The 800-year history of Western travel writing about Mongolia can help us clarify these discourses—these images, representations, tropes, narratives, myths, and assumptions about Mongolian landscapes, pastoralism, and people. An American traveler, Erika Warmbrunn (2001), centers her bicycle trip to Mongolia on this trope of distance and isolation, delighted by the fact that she has found herself in “the middle of nowhere” (7). As we follow this trope backwards in time, a British

traveler, Nick Middleton (1992), wonders why “Outer Mongolia occupies such a special place in so many people’s minds as the most remote spot on earth, possibly even the last place God made” (x). Middleton, in this case, expands upon the trope of distance, making Mongolia an exceptional place in the imagination of Westerners as well as alluding to its sacredness. In the 1950s, Ivor Montagu (1956), while traveling in socialist Mongolia, comments on how this country generates “exotic interest” from the British public and characterizes it as the “opposite” of Great Britain. Montagu writes:

[T]he people living there are our opposites in almost every way. We live in an island, they in the heart of the largest land mass in the world. Our country is one of the most densely populated, theirs almost the most roomy. We were the first to begin industrialization, they are almost the last. Most of us live in towns; and quite a lot of us wear dark suits, at least on Sundays. They—most of them all the time and all of them some of the time—still dwell in yurts [...] [and] still wear, for choice, the *del*, the long-skirted, long-sleeved, high-collared robe buttoning double-breasted on the right that marks a Mongol whether you meet him in Moscow or Peking. (10)

Montagu’s strategy of comparing Mongolia and Mongolians with Britain and the British is a common one, amplifying the trope of distance but in terms of time and culture. Montagu’s list of binary opposites also hints at another possibility for the Western imagination: Mongolia as a non-industrialist Eden, one that, according to this romantic and Orientalist trope, provides Britons and other Westerners a respite from industrial capitalism, urban life, bureaucracies, and other forms of middle-class conformity. We can continue to track examples of travel writing, into the nineteenth century and earlier, that emphasize the ulteriority and peripheralness of Mongolia, a land perpetually on the edges of the Western geographical imagination.

One goal of this book is to make travel writing about Mongolia more visible. At the same time, it hopes to justify Mongolia as an important locus of imaginative geographies, which remain independent of those of China (e.g., Tian 2019), possess their own travel histories, and make contributions to travel writing theory and criticism. *Travel Writing in Mongolia and Northern China* responds to recent interest in Mongolia, Central Asia, and the Silk Roads. In 2014, a Chinese team, sponsored by the city of Wuhan, traveled the northern tea trade routes, a “14,000-kilometer journey across China, Mongolia and Russia” (“A Journey” 2014, 6). These northern alternatives to the Silk Roads, which facilitated trade in tea as well as in silk, pelts,

lumber, horses, licorice, intestines, antlers, and other goods, provided opportunities for Western travelers and others to construct images and ideas about Mongolians and Mongolian landscapes.<sup>1</sup> In the past decade, a traveling exhibition, *Genghis Khan: Bringing the Legend to Life*, has brought many of these representational strategies to middle-class North Americans. Reminiscent of ethnic shows in the nineteenth century (Ames 2004, 313), “real” Mongolians wear traditional clothing, sing, play folk instruments, and sell art portraying pastoral scenes.

As this national exhibition suggests, the fascination with Chinggis Khan as well as the historical work in reimagining the Mongol Empire and its role in uniting Asia with Europe has enabled researchers to explore the cultural and ideological contributions of travel, most importantly that of the Silk Roads. For Peter Frankopan (2018), the historical projects related to the Silk Roads represent a methodology for reconsidering the cultural and technological flows interconnecting Central Asia to Mongolia and China and to European polities. Frankopan writes, “The Silk Roads allow us to understand the past not as a series of periods and regions that are isolated and distinct, but to see the rhythms of history in which the world has been connected for millennia as being part of a bigger, inclusive global past” (x). Frankopan’s project, as well as Jack Weatherford’s popular histories and other studies, have reenvisioned the Mongol Empire as the central actor in sponsoring trade, the distribution of technologies such as a paper (Bloom 2005), and cultural exchanges of ideologies, religions, craft traditions, and languages (Frankopan 2015)—a historical era of free travel, prosperity, and relative peace that historians have dubbed the *Pax Mongolica* (Jackson 2018). In the twenty-first century, the Silk Roads have become a way for China, Mongolia, and Central Asian states to brand themselves (Frankopan 2018, xviii; “Mongolia” n.d.). China’s Belt and Road Initiative has been the most powerful way of invoking the Silk Roads and, in this case, the interpenetration of the Chinese economy with Central Asia (Frankopan 2018, 62, 64, 68), an economic hegemony that, for Mongolians and many others, remains frightening and controversial (Pieper 2021).

Another goal is to explore these Western imaginative geographies about Mongolia. In part, they are constituted by representational strategies of Western travelers whose ethnographic, rhetorical, and literary choices fulfill the curiosity of their readers and encourage them to accept judgments

<sup>1</sup> The northern trade routes linked China, Mongolia, and Russia through these key cities: moving from south to north, Hankou (modern day Wuhan), Beijing, Kalgan (Zhangjiakou), Khüree (Ulaanbaatar), Kyakhta, and Udinsk (Ulan Ude).

about Mongolians and Mongolian landscapes. These judgments are framed by Orientalizing, imperialist, and colonizing discourses that are familiar to students of travel writing, including, among several possibilities, definitions of civilization and barbarism, stories about the decline and death of non-Western pastoralist and nomadic cultures, distancing strategies, ideal primitivism, and dangerous hybridity. These discourses, as well as the assumptions and ideologies that underwrite them, make it difficult for travelers to imagine and experience Mongolia in alternative and more complicated ways (Myadar 2021). Nostalgic and romantic twenty-first-century travelers continue to shift Mongolia back into a timeless, primitive, innocent, and pure time, one that can restore lives that have been weakened because of global capitalism and urbanism. Rupert Isaacson (2009), for example, travels to Mongolia to heal his son who has an autism spectrum disorder. Arriving first in Ulaanbaatar, depicted as a “sluggish, diseased serpent” and “plonked down” by the Soviets in the twentieth century, Isaacson travels west into the countryside—and, in effect, back in time—arriving finally in a reindeer camp, the place where Isaacson’s son’s healing takes place. Importantly, the reindeer camp was “perfectly timeless, where the ancient past and the present meet” (278). Isaacson (2009) writes, “I was looking back at 40,000 years of human history, back to the ice-age beginnings of my own heritage, my own people, my own culture” (278). These are powerful Orientalizing strategies, which place this Duha (Tsaatang) group into a different historical framework, denying it “coevalness” (Ní Loingsigh 2019, 46; Pratt 2008, 64), their own right to exist in the contemporary world, and using these people to reach the origins of Europeans.

This book contends with the fact that these possibly dangerous representational patterns cling to cultures and places across time.<sup>2</sup> According to Tim Youngs (2013, 12), these persistent representational patterns demonstrate the power of travel writers who authorize themselves to “fix” and normalize the ways their readers can conceive of other cultures; moreover, when we, like Youngs, consider travel writers also as readers who may assimilate these powerful representations, we need to speculate whether travelers can encounter new spaces as naïve and “innocent” subjects or whether their travel experiences are necessarily mediated by intertextual networks, established assumptions, and cultural frameworks. What complicates this question, according to Robin Jarvis (2016, 90), is the difficulty we have in ascertaining the degree to which readers take up the judgments and

2 For example, Mervat Hatem (1992, 36) explores the similar ways in which Egyptian women are described by Western travelers throughout the modern period.

worldviews of travelers. Obviously, the power and persuasiveness of writers are not necessarily that direct and all determining; on the other hand, we can at least acknowledge the fact that travelers' judgments may simplify and foreclose alternative representations of non-Western others—or, at the very least, make them more difficult to imagine.

To meet these goals, this book tracks the representational strategies of, primarily, European and North American travelers across three travel eras after 1860. By examining ethnographic strategies and the imaginary geographies of an Edenic Mongolia, language and language ideologies, the authority of women travelers, and contemporary strategies of representation, this book demonstrates the contributions of travel writing as public records of cultural and social interaction, which have important consequences for Mongolians, Mongolian Studies, and travel writing criticism. On two occasions, this book interrupts the dominant role of Western travel, acknowledging the travel writing of Mongolians who explore Asia, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe as well as the imaginative geographies that are constructed by a popular Chinese author, Jiang Rong. These two interruptions will enable us to challenge the Orientalizing assumptions that place the authority and agency of travel writing thoroughly in the hands of Western travelers.

*Travel Writing in Mongolia and Northern China* follows a rough chronological order. Chapters 1 through 3 focus readers on the most significant travel era, which spans the period of the new travel and trade routes crisscrossing Mongolia after the Second Opium War (1856–1860), through to the fall of the Qing Empire (1911), the Autonomous Period in Mongolia (1911–1920), and the early socialist period. Chapter 1 examines a dominant imaginative geography, the Edenic Mongolia, in Frans Larson's *Larson, Duke of Mongolia*. In this romantic representation, Mongolia is a space of ideal primitivism, showing overly civilized and domesticated European men a simpler, less regulated, and less stressful way of life. Chapter 2 explores the "language scene," an approach to isolate scenes in which travelers reflect upon language to magnify the rhetorical role language plays in these narratives. By looking at James Gilmour's language scenes in *Among the Mongols* (1895), I argue that language plays a crucial role in constructing the authority of travelers and their attempts to identify with Mongolians. The focus of chapter 3 shifts to women travelers, primarily through Beatrix Bulstrode's *A Tour in Mongolia* (1920). As the power asymmetry between North American and European travelers and their Mongolian interlocutors is an important consideration in travel writing, this chapter explores how women complicate ideas about authority, ethos, and travel.



Chapter 4 shifts the perspective to Mongolian travelers, examining how the two most prominent socialist-era intellectuals, Byambyn Rinchen (2015) and Tsendiin Damdinsüren (1998f), appeal to their elite Mongolian audiences through three strategies: Mongolian nationalism, in which Rinchen and Damdinsüren demonstrate the influence of Mongolian language and culture in the Soviet world and beyond; Soviet internationalism, in which they voice the official policies and discourses of the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party; and cosmopolitanism, their awareness of the positions, attitudes, and discourses beyond Mongolia and the Soviet world.

The final two chapters ask readers to engage with contemporary travel writing about Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. Chapter 5 explores travel writing published after the democratic reforms initiated in 1990. These narratives continue to imagine Mongolia as a final travel frontier and essentialize Mongolians as pastoralist nomads, making it difficult for Western travelers to view Mongolians in more complicated, realistic, and historically specific ways. However, I argue that it is necessary to complicate these colonizing visions, sharing examples of travelers who demonstrate their reflectiveness, show their awareness of their misconceptions, and acknowledge their cosmopolitan privilege. Chapter 6 adapts the definition of travel writing to accommodate Jiang Rong's fictional *Wolf Totem* (2009) and an elite, imperial Chinese traveler's perspective, one that idealizes Mongolian masculinity and Mongolian pastoralism to the extent that Mongolian intellectualism and Mongolian hybridity are rejected; more dramatically, Jiang Rong destroys his pastoral myth by anticipating the end of Mongolian culture in northern China.

## Travel Writing Theory

Edward Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978, stimulated awareness about travel writing—and, likewise, the theorizing of travel narratives—to reveal imperialist imaginative geographies and discourses (Clark 1999, 3; Kuehn 2019, 176), asymmetric relationships between travelers and non-Westerners, cultural exchange, and, in addition to other possibilities, strategies to distance metropolitan readers from these non-Western others. Although travel writing before Said's controversial intervention had possessed little prestige earlier as an academic specialization, being simultaneously too empirical for literary purposes and too rhetorical for the needs of social scientists (Clark 1999), its heterogeneous mix of genres, discourses, and disciplinary approaches is what made travel narratives fascinating for a young Michel

de Certeau (1991)—and what makes it fruitful for the purposes of this book. De Certeau writes outside of Said's postcolonial contexts:

Travel narratives also constitute interdisciplinary laboratories in which categories of analysis, scientific concepts, and taxonomic systems demarcating and classifying observations on social organization, linguistic and juridical formations, technologies, myths, and legends, geography, a new experience of the body, as well as biological, zoological, and medical factors, can come into play and interact. (222)

Approaching travel narratives as “interdisciplinary laboratories” acknowledges the fact that they are diverse and malleable public discourses that are constituted by multiple genres, rhetorical purposes, messages or arguments, stylistic strategies, and audiences.

Said (1979) does not underestimate the potential of travel writing, which is a central element of the Orientalizing archive, including an “intellectual power” (41) and “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar [...] and the strange” (43). Similar to Youngs's (2013) claim about the power of travel writing to “fix” attitudes about “distant” cultures, Western travel writing constitutes reality, shaping readers' interpretations of and future readers' experiences with the Middle East, Asia, and other non-European places. In fact, Said (1979) reminds us, Orientalist discourses do not merely reflect and justify imperialist and colonialist policies and assumptions; these discourses create and shape these ideological positions (39–40). Despite the mundane and “empirical” qualities of these travel narratives, Mary Baine Campbell (2002) amplifies their power as part of the Orientalizing archive: “Much of the work of observing, interpreting, articulating the explosion of that world, as well as the historical development of the imperial world that led to it, was done through recovery and analysis of people's writings about ‘foreign’ and especially ‘exotic’ places” (261). Peter Hulme (1986) depicts travel writing as a “colonial discourse” that perpetuates claims about “savagery” and other false statements: yet, in this case, the “falsity has a wider significance in the justification of existing power-relations” (8); in other words, these inaccurate and unfair representations of others by Western travelers are nonetheless powerful and influential.

At the heart of travel narratives as productive, ideological, and rhetorical Orientalizing documents is the asymmetric relationship between the traveler and the non-Western Other whom they construct. Mary Louise Pratt's (2008) “contact zone,” the meeting space between Westerners and

non-Westerners—travelers and their interlocutors—dramatizes this power differential inherent in travel narratives. Contact zones are fraught with miscommunication, hints of violence, and, more hopefully, conviviality and cultural exchange. Yet, the contact zone is based upon an asymmetric relationship. The Western traveler arrives, in almost all cases unbidden, into these relationships and cultural negotiations, yet with political, economic, and discursive privileges. Travelers possess freedom of movement, the liberty to travel for leisure, and the political access to cross frontiers freely (Lisle 2006). To state the obvious, travelers have rhetorical agency and authority over what and about whom they write. They control their persona, the details they choose to select and magnify, and the strategies of description, representation, and cultural identity, contributing to what Debbie Lisle (2006) refers to as the “level of myth, imagination and storytelling” (278), the rhetorical materials that readers take up—or resist. Much of what we will explore in the following chapters returns to the ways in which Western travelers depict their interactions with Mongolians—their strategies to conceal their privileges and legitimate themselves as objective observers and ethical participants, their attempts to make themselves more credible for their readers, and their uses of reflective strategies, including humor.

Finally, postcolonial travel writing theory has challenged the empirical credibility—the “scientific” or objective findings of travel narratives. Said (1979, 62) labels these elements of the Orientalist archive as “Western ignorance” and not, that is, a “positive Western knowledge which increases in size and accuracy.” This approach shifts us away from commonsensical, unarguable, inevitable, natural, neutral, and factual accounts of travel experiences. Travelers do not simply convey their “real” experiences, observations, and interactions as a direct correspondence between themselves and their readers, a theory of writing that rejects ideology and historical contexts (Lisle 2006). Instead, if we remain aware of the rhetorical situation and the writing processes of travelers, we recognize that they are never in complete control of the “real” narrative; instead, they are invariably shaping meaning, creating or maintaining judgments and images, and trying to represent themselves as a particular type of traveler—a hero, an imperialist, a detached scientist, or, among other options, a contemporary liberal aware of their own cosmopolitan privilege. Peter Bishop (1989) links the overall consequences of travel narratives about Tibet to Said’s argument about “Western ignorance.” For Bishop, these Tibetan imaginative geographies provide an internal coherence for Europe (12): “Two centuries of travel writing in Tibet tell as much, if not more, about Western fantasies, than they do about a literal Tibet” (8). A similar point can be made about

Mongolian travel narratives; in this case, travelers, looking back at the history of travel writing about Mongolia, may accept these texts at face value without reflecting on the previous travelers' rhetorical and ideological goals, imaginative geographies, representational strategies, and appeals to their Western audiences.

This final theoretical approach, in which, according to Said (1979), there is always a "second-order knowledge" that "lurk[s]" beneath the documentary and empirical evidence of travel writing and other Orientalist genres (52), suggests our need to explore the direction of, or, more exactly, the audiences of these ideologies, assumptions, narratives, and frameworks. Again, Said (1979, 67) indicates the effects of the Orientalist "force" of "institutionalized Western knowledge" as "on the Orient, on the Orientalist, and on the Western 'consumer' of Orientalism"; in other words, for our purposes, we need to become more aware of the consequences of travel writing on the Mongolians or other non-Westerners that travelers are representing, on the fields of Mongolian Studies and travel writing, and on the metropolitan audiences of travel narratives.

As Jarvis (2016) has indicated, exploring the audiences of travel writing faces many challenges, not to mention ascertaining the ways in which readers accept the imaginative geographies—or resist or react to them in unexpected ways. Critics have focused on book reviews of travel narratives to get a sense of their public reception (Jarvis 2016, 91; Johnston 2013, 27), and paratextual sources such as introductions and acknowledgements may provide glimpses as to who the readers may be and how they may react. Intertextual passages embedded in travel narratives, in which travelers comment on or criticize previous accounts, also reveal possible reader interactions. Henry Yule (1876), for example, disqualifies the well-known French Franciscan traveler, Évariste Régis Huc, as a source of credible geographical knowledge (xix), claiming that Huc's detailed observations may have been corrupted by the writing process. Likewise, Julius Price (1892), a British newspaper artist traveling in the late nineteenth century, accuses his compatriot, Harry de Windt, of making up his observations of the Russian-Mongolian frontier (250–51). Montagu (1956) criticizes previous travel writers, including Nikolai Prejevalsky, Beatrix Bulstrode, and Roy Andrews, whose observations about Mongolia are unreasonable because of "traditional and ideological reasons" (xvi). Of course, these travelers represent highly specialized audiences, whose responses may remind us that readers are reading critically and evaluating the credibility of the travelers; that being said, we may feel uncomfortable extrapolating their reader responses to those of the general public.

Another strategy is to consider the ideal or rhetorical audiences that travelers project in their narratives. Obviously, these rhetorical moves do not index actual readers, yet they do provide some glimpses as to how audiences are considered. Let me explore this point by comparing two travel scenes from the same writer, Price (1892), whose criticisms about another traveler's credibility we have already mentioned. In an earlier version of his travels that lead southward from Siberia through late Qing Mongolia in 1891, Price (1891), writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, depicts a scene in the Gobi Desert in which a group of "Mongol camel-drivers" playfully harass him and jostle him. He patiently accepts the abuse, until he squares up to box the Mongolian leader, who immediately retreats, claiming, in Russian, that he "doesn't understand English boxing" (2). Price closes the scene with a playful point about English identity and civilization: "Thus even the Mongol in the middle of the Gobi Desert is aware of our Jem Smithian proclivities! Is civilization played out?"

This scene reappears in Price's (1892) travel book, *From the Arctic Ocean to the Yellow Sea*, published one year later than the newspaper article, yet he alters several details of the story, and his purpose changes subtly. For the travel book, Price places the story early on in his travels in the northern part of Mongolia, between Kyakhta and Khüree (Urga), identifying the troublemakers as Buryad Mongolians ("Mongol-Bourriat chaff[s]") who were driving oxen, not camels (269). Unlike the newspaper account, he shows more sympathy towards his tormentors, asking his readers to think in relative terms and consider a Mongolian traveler who finds himself in a "crowd of English roughs" (268). His poor grasp of Russian, moreover, becomes the main reason why the Buryads pick on him. The main thrust of the story is the same: after getting shoved, Price threatens to box the leader, who retreats, much to the relief of Price, who calls his fighting stance a "bluff."

The differences between these two scenes explains something about the different British audiences that Price invokes. For the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Price (1891) reduces his boxing scene to seven sentences and addresses a wider newspaper audience. He places this scene in the Gobi Desert, a metonym for Mongolia with its connotations of distance and isolation for his readers, and Price simplifies his tormentors to "Mongol camel-drivers." By making his comment about English civilization being "played out," Price is humorously undercutting his own masculine bravado but also making a more serious point about civilization, relating to the anxiety of his readers: in short, what happens to the distinctiveness of Great Britain if its culture becomes spread out through the world, even to the heart of isolation, the middle of the Gobi Desert? In short, Price (1891) simplifies the details of his

experience to match the expectations of his immediate English newspaper audience, who may gravitate towards exotic images of faraway places that are cut off from mass tourism (Bishop 1989, 1) and modern transportation. These English readers also expect to read about the presence of the British Empire, which reveals itself in these distant places, though not necessarily for imperialist purposes (Colley 2002).

In the retelling of this travel story in Price's travel book (1892), which takes more than two pages to complete, Price shows himself as being more reflective and understanding, and he is far more specific about where he is, who his tormenters are, and why they are harassing him. By identifying the Mongolians as Buryad Russians, he also explains their connection to Russian and why they would use language as a pretext for their confrontation. Price shapes his readers' perception of his persona: instead of a masculine hero, he is only playing around, or bluffing, with masculine codes. Finally, unlike the newspaper account, Price does not extend this scene to a larger point about the vitality of English civilization. For one thing, this point no longer fits the situation of bilingual Buryad Mongolian interlocutors and a setting that is close to the Russian frontier; moreover, in the book, it is not Price's intention to ask his readers to ponder the status and legitimacy of the British Empire and English civilization. If we recall Price's (1892) criticisms of previous travelers, his credibility is at stake. He invokes a British audience who, despite the proliferation of books on "Asiatic travel" (xii), may hold misconceptions about Russian Siberia and Asia. Price (1892) compares himself to his audience: "I must candidly confess I arrived in Siberia with foregone conclusions derived from the unreliable information and exaggerated stories so current in England about this part of the world" (x). He hopes to guide these readers, as if they are travelers themselves, to the unknown in "the light of a revelation" (xi).

## Texts

For the purposes of this book, an uncontroversial definition of travel writing has been adapted to fit the three travel eras that span from 1860 to 2020. This definition includes nonfictional first-person and eyewitness narratives about "real" journeys, in which the main character, the narrator, and the author are regarded as the same person (Edwards and Graulund 2012, 16). Occasionally, however, travel-related fictional texts, most notably Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*, have been included as they participate in the construction of the imaginative geographies about Mongolia and they may influence travel

writers.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, because of the “elastic” nature of travel writing (Clark 1999), although I prioritize the nonfiction book, other genres, including memoir, adventure, history, and other possibilities, may blend into the travelogue form. For example, Owen Lattimore’s *Nomads and Commissars* (1962), based on his highly orchestrated official travels through socialist Mongolia, is more of an excuse to write about twentieth-century Mongolian history. The diversity of travel texts, furthermore, reflects the wide range of travelers, ranging from short-term tourists, to expatriates and journalists who lived in Mongolia for several years, and to missionaries like Gilmour (1895) and others like Larson (1930), who lived in Mongolia across several decades.

When possible, I analyze other public documents such as newspaper and magazine articles and, for travel writing in the twenty-first century, websites and other social media examples. I also consider the paratextual elements that help inform Mongolian travel, including introductions to books, book reviews, and news stories. Although film and film documentaries as well as photographs and other visual and digital genres participate in the travel discourses, the scope of this book, unfortunately, does not allow for any sustained attention to these important media forms. In short, whereas I focus on the book-length travelogue, I am aware of the travel-related genres that constitute the Orientalist archive about Mongolia. For example, in Great Britain, late Victorian readers had access to translations of Russian and French travelers, ethnographers, and geographers as well as newspaper accounts of Royal Geographical Society presentations (“Royal” 1870) and special features, such as a photo essay about Buryad Mongolians in the illustrated newspaper, *The Graphic* (Boulger 1894). Readers would have gleaned knowledge about Mongolia from paratextual sources such as photographs and illustrations, forewords or introductions to travel texts, and book reviews in newspapers, which included lengthy excerpts of the narratives. British audiences may also have attended presentations about Mongolia from the adventurers or missionaries themselves, such as Gilmour’s talks about Mongolia during his furlough in Great Britain in 1882 and 1883 (“London Missionary Society” 1882), or ethnic spectacles, such as one in 1865 at the Egyptian Hall in London that included lectures, costumes, music, and examples of extremely tall and short Chinese men and women (“The Chinese Giant” 1865). Though few literary texts in this

3 Bruce Chatwin (1977), in his travelogue *In Patagonia*, demonstrates how the characters and events of chivalric romances shaped the ways in which explorers depicted their own experiences. Similarly, Tim Cope’s (2013) uncited use of Jiang Rong’s *Wolf Totem* shows the ways in which fictional texts can influence eyewitness travel accounts.

period focus exclusively on Mongolia and Mongolians, British readers would have been familiar with Jules Verne's (1908) *Michael Strogoff: The Courier of the Czar*, first published in 1876, which depicts a Mongolian-Russian villain possessing enough "Mongolian blood" to make him "deceitful by nature" and "cruel" and to delight in disguises and "deceptive strategy" (132). Finally, readers outside of metropolitan Great Britain may have consumed travel narratives as expatriates in China through the *North-China Daily News & Herald* or the various missionary publications, such as *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*.

## Historical Context & Travel Eras

Mongolia as an imaginative geography for Western travel consists of five travel eras, a classification scheme which is undoubtedly open to debate. Comparable to Bishop's (1989) system of five eras for 200 years of Western travel to Tibet, these eras demarcate distinct geopolitical and economic events that opened up the Mongolian frontier to the West. Given the interest in the audience of travel narratives, these eras also reflect Nile Green's (2014) strategy to differentiate each era of Central Asian travel according to how audiences accessed and consumed these narratives (5). Moreover, the sponsoring institutions, ideologies related to travel and mass tourism, and transportation and communication technologies differ drastically across these five travel eras. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, that ideas of modern tourism penetrated Mongolia, motivating leisurely travelers,<sup>4</sup> journalists, and artists from Great Britain, France, Russia, and the United States to explore the *Kalganskii Trakt*, the several north-south caravan, mail, and official routes that linked Kalgan, the gateway to Mongolia in northern China, with Khüree, and Kyakhta.<sup>5</sup> For example, Mongolia and southern Siberia attracted enough interest from the

4 De Windt (1889) depicts himself and his travel partner as leisurely travelers, "poor, mad Englishmen" who are traveling for "pleasure," a concept that the Mongolians, Chinese, and Russians could not understand (205).

5 The tea trade and the postal routes were dominated by Russian economic interests (Prejevsky 1876, 2–3). Beginning in 1861, Russian traders and merchants built the infrastructure of the *Kalganskii Trakt* (Nordbye 2013), and by 1865 the Russian Empire had the sole foreign consulate in Mongolia, an important landmark and staging post for all Western travelers. Russian merchants established Ikh-Üüd (close to present-day Zamyn-Üüd) in the Gobi Desert in 1886 as a Russian outpost to oversee the tea caravans (Pozdneyev 1971, 420); in the following year, the Russians built a bridge across the Tuul River to expedite the caravan trade entering Khüree.



United States for George Kennan (1889) to acknowledge the possibility of American “globe-trotters” passing through Kyakhta (72). Another late Qing era traveler, the Italian journalist, Luigi Barzini (1908), provides opportunities for juxtaposing modern forms of transportation, such as the automobile and the train, with the earlier dominant mode of transportation, the camel caravan (118), which was on the point of obsolescence by the first decade of the twentieth century. In fact, these technology juxtapositions remain a consistent visual trope in travel writing about Mongolia, as they participate in the dominant—and conflicting—imaginative geographies of Mongolia as a vantage point to the past and, at the same time, as a place on the precipice of dramatic and possibly uncontrollable social change.

In what remains of this section, I summarize the five eras of travel writing about Mongolia.

*Mongol Empire (Thirteenth–Fourteenth Centuries)*. Although Europeans became aware of Mongolians from the first quarter of the thirteenth century (Eastmond 2017, 345–46; Jackson 2018), the first era of travel writing about Mongolia was initiated by what Christopher Dawson (1955) calls “one of the great catastrophes in the history of the world,” the attack by Mongol Empire troops on Poland and Hungary in 1241. This new global reality motivated the travel of John of Plano Carpini, a Franciscan monk sponsored by Pope Innocent IV; his arduous journeys are described by Timothy May (2017) as a “mixture of anthropology, personal journey, and espionage” (27). Another Franciscan, William of Rubruck (1955), in a quasi-diplomatic role for the French King Louis IX, left for Mongolia in 1253. Whereas Carpini (1955) announced his Papal instructions, “to examine everything and to look at everything carefully” (4), with the assumptions that the Mongolians were a potential enemy (3), Rubruck’s more personal account, in which he represents himself as a religious figure and model of Christian values, considers the Mongols as not inherent enemies, yet possible allies for a crusade against Moslem forces in the Holy Lands. In the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the medieval era includes several highly popular and influential travel accounts, such as, of course, *The Description of the World* by Marco Polo (1958), who accompanied his father and uncle on their return trip back to Khubilai Khan’s court and served the Khan from 1275 to 1292.<sup>6</sup>

*Early Modern Mongolia (1688–1840s)*. For close to 300 years, after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, few early modern Western travelers made it

6 See Kim Phillips (2014, 44) for other influential travelers, including the fictional Sir John Mandeville, whose adventures were drawn from the accounts of Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, and others.

the Mongolian frontier (see Robinson 2020). Jean-François Gerbillon (1736), a Jesuit missionary attached to the Manchu court, traveled northward in 1688 through Mongolia on a diplomatic mission to Russia. Gerbillon's travel narrative is important because it provides a European perspective on the civil war between Khalkha and Oirat Mongolians and reports on Northern Mongolia directly before it became a part of the Qing Empire. Yet, Gerbillon's (1736) attitudes towards Mongolians (269–70), their religious practices (242, 247), and his low estimation of their civilization (264) are similar to those of Carpini in the previous travel era. In the eighteenth century, the simultaneous eastward expansion of the Russian Empire and the westward expansion of the Qing emperors (Andreyev 2018, 6) necessitated official contact with Russian and the Qing Empires, and several Western and Russian travelers participated in ecclesiastical mission trips from St. Petersburg to Beijing, which occurred approximately every ten years and developed a great deal of ethnographic, cartographic, and scientific knowledge about Mongolia along a route that would become the *Kalganskii Trakt* (Bell 1763; Timkowski 1827). Unrelated to these travel accounts were the influential travelogues of Huc (1851) and Joseph Gabet, French missionaries whose travels were motivated by religion and ethnography. Huc's (1851) observations about Mongolians are sympathetic, and he transforms the repetitive genre of field notes and diary entries into a narrative, combining dialogue, dramatic scenes, impressionist descriptions of Mongolian landscapes, sympathetic portraits of Mongolians and other "characters," humor, physiognomic sketches, Mongolian terms, and digressions focused on such cultural themes as medicine, Buddhist exorcisms, and burial rituals.

*Late Qing, Autonomous, and Early Socialist Mongolia (1860–1930s)*. The modern travel era, which includes Western travelers journeying in late Qing Empire, Autonomous Mongolia, and early socialist Mongolia, is the most significant one. This era includes a tremendous expansion of the number of travelers and a diversity of motivations for travel, such as commercial (Grant 1862), missionary work (Gilmour 1895), geographical (Campbell 1903), exploration (Andrews 1921; Hedin 1898; Younghusband 1896), and leisure (Whyte 1871). Responding to the geopolitical challenges of the "Great Game," the competition over Central Asia played out in terms of exploration, ethnography, geography, and archaeology (Hopkirk 1992), Russian administrators used travel and these new travel-related sciences to justify the expanded borders of the Russian Empire and to control nomadic groups that threatened to disrupt Russian national unity, corrupt ethnic Russians, and reject the Russian civilizing mission (Brower 1994, 373–74). The most renowned of the Russian travelers was Prejevalsky (1876), a national hero

whose travels were avidly consumed by the public (Brower 1994). Prejevalsky's influential *Mongolia, the Tangut Country and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet*, first published in 1875 and translated into English in the following year, documents many of the Russian Eurocentric tropes about Mongolians that became commonplace in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup> The travels of European and North American travelers were less directly imperialistic, and they appeared in four waves, including the 1860s and early 1870s, the late 1880s and early 1890s after the Dungan Revolts,<sup>8</sup> the couple of years between the Xinhai Revolution and the beginning of World War I, and the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>9</sup> These travelers circulated and magnified the imaginative geographies about Mongolia from the two previous travel eras and they constructed several new ways for their Western readers to imagine Mongolia, in particular, the exceptional nature of Mongolian landscapes (e.g., Roberts 1903); an Edenic Mongolia, the primitiveness of which can serve as a recuperative space for overcivilized and overeducated Western men (Larson 1930); and a nostalgic glance back at Mongolian pastoralism that was changing rapidly due to Sovietization and social change (Strasser 1930, 96).

*Socialist Mongolia (1940s–1960s)*. This brief era stretched from Henry Wallace's (1946) official visit in 1944 as vice president of the Roosevelt administration to journalistic and popular accounts in the early 1960s, which introduced European and North American readers to Mongolia, a new member of the United Nations in 1961. These visits were highly orchestrated by the socialist Mongolian government attempting to control and sanitize the images that diplomats, journalists, and academics circulated about Mongolia (MacColl 1963). Mongolia became, at least briefly, a site to talk about the Cold War, prompting travelers to discuss Soviet authoritarianism, the threats of Communist China, the degree to which Mongolians were independent of these Soviet and Chinese pressures, and the nostalgic image of Mongolia

7 Though not necessarily focused on travel writing itself, historians of nineteenth-century Russian Orientalism have complicated the motivations of Russian travelers and have explored the impact of geography, ethnography, and photography on Russian attitudes and assumptions about Mongolia, China, and the countries of Central Asia (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2001; 2019). Russian Orientalists also contended with non-Russian groups on the periphery of their empire, developing institutions, textbooks and publications, and language instruction to bridge local ethnic affiliations with a universal Russian identity (Tolz 2005, 137, 142). Buryad Mongolian intellectuals, such as Tsyben Jamtsarano, mediating between St. Petersburg and the periphery, were valuable to bond these local and national identities together (Tolz 2015).

8 See Eric Schluessel (2020) for an explanation about these revolts of Chinese-speaking Muslims in northwestern China.

9 See Sue Byrne (2022) for a catalogue of 200 years of British travel to Mongolia, spanning the early modern and modern periods.

(e.g., Raymond 1956a; 1956b). Patrick Heenan and Monique Lamontagne's (2003) criticism of two prominent travelers in this era, Lattimore (1962) and Montagu (1956), whose positive reports about socialist Mongolia were purportedly not from "independent travelers" but the "pro-Stalinist propaganda by gullible fellow travelers" (804), shows the political conflicts of this era. Other Western travelers, sounding a great deal like writers from the post-1990 democratic period, report on the cultural and social ambivalence of Mongolians, who are pulled towards their past, or in the Rip Van Winkle metaphor of a United States Supreme Court Justice, William Douglas (1962), are waking up from their "slumber" and "entering the current of world affairs for the first time in centuries" (289). Harrison Salisbury (1960) reminds his readers about the Mongolian attachment to the past through the power of Chinggis Khan, who "burned more brightly in the minds of his countrymen (and the world) than any vision of Marx or Engels" (211).

*Democratic Mongolia (1990–2020)*. The final travel era was initiated by the Democratic Revolution, consisting of non-violent protests in the spring of 1990, the withdrawal of Soviet economic support, free elections and the end of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party's monopoly over the government, and an economic revolution, one that rapidly privatized a Soviet-based centralized economy (Lake and Lake 2021, 189–91).<sup>10</sup> The United States normalized diplomatic relationships with Mongolia in 1987 (Lake and Lake 2021, 191), and Mongolian elites looked for other "third neighbors" to offset the power of their two neighbors, pursued international aid, and began to develop a private tourist industry for North Americans, Europeans, Japanese, and South Koreans. Ideas and tropes about Mongolia from previous travel eras persist into the twenty-first century. Repeating the juxtaposition of old, persistent traditions against new technologies and developments, Middleton (1992) reuses the Rip van Winkle metaphor of history, claiming that Mongolians are waking up from seventy years of Soviet oppression and are now able to "nurture their culture and identity back to life" (188). Middleton (1992), Jasper Becker (1992), and Tim Severin (2003) acknowledge the new powerful presence of Chinggis Khan, whose historical authority, these travelers rightly predict, will legitimate the new democratic Mongolian state and serve as a basis for national Mongolian ideology. In the twenty-first century, contemporary travel writers continue to frame their narratives about Mongolia in terms of traditional pastoralism, nomadism, and other Orientalizing and romantic tropes such as shifting Mongolia to the distant past or a universal ethnographic timelessness

10 See Morris Rossabi (2005) for the dire consequences of these free market solutions.

(Cope 2013, 19; Sexton 2013; Stewart 2002); other travelers, as we will see in chapter 5, are more reflective about the assumptions that Westerns hold about Mongolia and about the constructed nature of Mongolian pastoralism as a symbol of Mongolian nationalism (Bodio 2003; Lawless 2002; Man 1997; Warmbrunn 2001; Waugh 2003).

This brief survey of the five Mongolian travel eras would not be complete without acknowledging the presence of non-Western travelers. In the thirteenth century, travel narratives to the Mongol Empire exist from Southern Sung emissaries, Chinggis Khan's Chinese advisors, and Taoist religious leaders (Hui 2020, 61, 68–69; Li Chih-Ch'ang 1931). Within the Mongolian frontier, the sixteenth-century renaissance of Buddhism in Mongolia stimulated cultural, religious, and political interactions among Khalkhas, Oirats, Buryads, and Tibetans. By the nineteenth century, Buddhist pilgrimage travel, from Buryatia and Mongolia to Chinese religious sites and Tibet, sponsored practical guidebooks, religious travelogues, and an international travel industry (Andreyev 2018, 6; Charleux 2015). In the first half of the twentieth century, travel texts demonstrate non-Western imperial entanglements in Mongolia and on the Mongolian periphery, such as the perspectives of a member of the Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang Party (Ma 1949) and an elite Japanese writer (Akiko 2001). Finally, Mongolians have documented their own travels and have shown awareness about the Western imaginative geography. The three key Mongolia intellectual figures of the twentieth century, Dashdorjiin Natsagdorj (1961), Rinchen (2015), and Damdinsüren (1998f), traveled to Europe, the Soviet World, and Asia, and wrote for Mongolian audiences and for different purposes. Mongolian researchers have examined historical Western travel texts (e.g., Zolboo 2012), translated travel texts by Gustav Ramstedt and William Rockhill, and have reprinted Rinchen's *Account of a Journey to the West*. Mongolians, moreover, continue to share their travel narratives, both within and beyond Mongolia, on popular social media applications such as Clubhouse and Facebook.

### **A Brief Note on Nomenclature**

The fact that this book focuses readers on the historical representations of Mongolians makes it important to consider several of the issues related to place names and the labels for ethnic groups. Ross Forman (2013), discussing the Victorian discourses about China and the Chinese, matches the terminology of British writers in the late Qing, such as the “Celestial Empire” and “Celestials.” Similarly, Eric Schluessel (2020) emphasizes the

ideological assumptions supporting ethnic labels in northwest China (19–22). For the purposes of this book, though I am cognizant of these arguments for historical fidelity and for recognizing the instability of these terms, I base my terminological decisions on consistency and on my desires to resist the Orientalizing work of earlier labels and to align naming conventions with Mongolian perspectives. Travelers, for example, referred to Mongolians as “Mongols” and “Tartars” and, when referring to the important Mongolian religious and commercial center, oftentimes used the Russian name, Uрга (Örgöö, or “palace”), whereas other travelers were aware that Mongolians referred to it as “Khüree” and its variants (Da Khüree, Ikh Khüree, and Niislel Khüree). I use “Khüree” for the sake of consistency until the socialist era, after which I shift to “Ulaanbaatar.” Keeping with my intention to refer to place names from a Mongolian perspective, I refer to the nineteenth-century Chinese gateway to Inner Mongolia as Kalgan, instead of its Chinese name. Kalgan, based on a Russianized form for *khaalga*, the word for “door” or “gateway” in Mongolian, was meaningful for both travelers and Mongolians. Finally, the terms “Outer Mongolia” and “Inner Mongolia” present challenges. On the one hand, they are terms that only make sense in terms of the Qing Empire: Outer Mongolia was “outer” only in the sense that it was farther away from Beijing, the center of the Qing Empire; Inner Mongolia, as its name implies, was a more intimate, closer part of the empire. What’s complicated is the fact that in Western discourses about Asia, the terms of Outer Mongolia and Inner Mongolia do not appear until the twentieth century, to differentiate the independent country of Mongolia from Inner Mongolia, a part of China. For the sake of clarity, I refer to “Outer Mongolia” as Mongolia or, when necessary, as Northern Mongolia. I still refer to Inner Mongolia, which is consistent with Mongolian usage (*Övör Mongol*). Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer (1979) remind us that Mongolians find such terms as “Outer” and “Inner” to be “distasteful,” and they conceptualize the split between the north and the south in terms of the “back” (*ar*) and “bosom” (*övör*), showing a unity between these two Mongolian groups (7).

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# 1 Frans Larson's Edenic Mongolia and the Possibilities of Cosmopolitanism

## Abstract

Frans Larson (1930) constructs a dominant imaginative geography, the Edenic Mongolia, in which the ideal primitiveness of Mongolia serves overly domesticated Europeans. Though he shows parallels to such romantic British travelers as Alexander Michie (1864) and William Whyte (1871), Larson (1930) complicates their Victorian theories of civilization and their depictions of Mongolians as essentially and naturally pastoral and primitive. For Larson, Mongolians' pastoral way of life is a cultural practice, one intended to keep Mongolians distinct from Chinese identities and those of other dominant groups. Larson's deep cultural understanding of Mongolia is a marker of his cosmopolitanism, which is, unfortunately, limited by the fact that his Edenic Mongolia is necessarily an anti-cosmopolitan space, one that cannot change and adapt.

**Keywords:** civilization, cosmopolitanism, ethnography, Frans Larson, imaginative geography, muscular Christianity, primitivism

Frans Larson's *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* (1930) is an important text to consider for the imaginative geography of Mongolia as a primitive paradise, a pastoral Eden, a place that separates itself from the modern world and looks backwards, orienting itself on the authority of Chinggis Khan and the timeless practices of pastoral nomadism. Larson depicts the primitiveness and simplicity of Mongolia and Mongolian culture to save and recuperate Westerners—especially men—who have become overly domesticated, soft, and urbanized. Larson's unorthodox travel text, coming towards the end of the modern, "heroic" period of travel in Mongolia (1860–1930s), combines memoir, travel, and an overview of Mongolian society, which includes such chapter titles as "The Nobles," "Horses," and "Expeditions." A missionary, businessperson, mediator for Western travelers, and an advisor

to the Republican Chinese government, Larson played a central role for five decades in the formation of and popularizer of the imaginative geography of Mongolians as exceptional nomads and Mongolia as a site of ideal primitivism. The popular reviews of *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* focus on the Edenic quality that Larson produces. George Roerich (1930) writes, “True to the ancient nomad code, the people of this country until very recently preserved a simple yet fascinating way of existence that for centuries has produced a sturdy race of men” (412).<sup>1</sup> A *New York Times* reviewer emphasizes how the Soviet government has disturbed this Mongolian “utopia” by creating social divisions and complicating the role of government (Ivan 1930, 65). This imaginative geography based on simplicity, masculine vitality, and timelessness—one disrupted by Soviet modernism—emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in the writings of British travelers who based their perspectives on Victorian ethnography and, at least obliquely, muscular Christianity. This Edenic conception of Mongolia persists into the twenty-first century.

Larson’s (1930) text allows us to explore, therefore, a key way to depict Mongolia. More importantly, Larson (1930) confronts a controversy in travel writing scholarship: To what extent can we consider the production of these Western imaginary geographies through travel writing and other related genres as ethical, as examples, that is, of cultural understanding and cosmopolitan commitment to difference? Or, is travel writing, especially traditional narratives based on asymmetric relationships between Westerners and non-Westerners, doomed to fail as an ethical discourse? This controversy strikes at the definitional heart of travel writing. Debbie Lisle (2006) defines travel writing as a “profoundly uncritical literary formation” (261) in part because it cannot escape the rearticulation of “colonial power relations” (270). Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund (2012), similarly, emphasize the innate conservatism of travel writing (4), both in its form and in its allegiance to the “rhetoric of Empire” (3). Syed Islam (1999) reminds us about how easy it is for travel writers to exoticize and romanticize nomadic communities (137), especially as they will be working—and writing—from outside of a nomadic worldview (132). In these cases, certain travel landscapes, in particular, deserts (Graulund 2016), lend themselves as spaces for a nostalgic

1 The reviewer, George Roerich, was the son of Nicholas Roerich, a prominent Russian Orientalist, artist, and mystic in the early twentieth century. Roerich and his son traveled through Mongolia to Tibet in 1926 and 1927 in, purportedly, a quest to locate Shambhala (Meyer and Brysac 1999, 468–69). George Roerich, consequently, would have been inclined to accept Larson’s version of ideal Mongolian primitivism.

glance to the primitive past, a move that Bruce Chatwin (1987), whose writing on Indigenous Australians is often cited to showcase nostalgia (Graulund 2016, 440; Islam 1999), knowingly makes: “The idea of returning to an ‘original simplicity’ was not naïve or unscientific or out of touch with reality” (Chatwin 1987, 133). Travel writing about Mongolia from the heroic era contributes to these Orientalizing and colonizing ideas about “primitive” people, producing such imaginary geographies as a dangerous and beastly primitivism, which travelers reproduce by animalistic imagery and allusions to cannibalism (e.g., Meignan 1885); on the other hand, Western travelers may promote Mongolia as a site of ideal primitivism, a strategy that Aedín Ní Loingsigh (2019, 202–3) explores as a way for travelers to critique their own Western societies and offer places like Mongolia as exemplars for a superior way of life (see Graulund 2016, 439–40).

It is tempting to consider Larson’s (1930) text as a central part of the Mongolian Orientalizing archive, one that has been influential for other Western travel writers. Beyond these postcolonial critiques, Larson’s role in Mongolia has been defined as a colonialist one. In his travelogue and history through socialist Mongolia, Owen Lattimore (1962) acknowledges criticism from socialist Mongolians who consider Larson a colonialist, a “convenient symbol of the agent of American imperialism” (115). Though Lattimore (1962, 116) disputes these claims, traces of Larson’s Western assumptions and “civilizing mission” reveal themselves. For example, Larson points out that the “crowded Japanese” could make the Gobi Desert bloom (294), and, at least in one passage, he downplays the effects of Chinese farmers cultivating the grasslands north of the Great Wall (295); in other places, he supports adopting modern Western agricultural and veterinarian practices (see also Sidenvall 2009, 113). Erik Sidenvall (2009) finds Orientalizing tropes in an earlier memoir, in which Larson, for example, defines Mongolians as “childlike” (112) and applauds Scandinavians who establish farms on the Mongolian steppe (113).<sup>2</sup> Finally, Larson was an advisor to Mongolian Affairs for the Chinese Republic government (Larson 2007, 19), a position that Mongolians certainly would have regarded with suspicion.

Though it’s important to articulate the colonizing potential of Larson, both as a writer and as a historical actor, this chapter complicates these claims, joining other researchers who, like Priyamada Gopal (2019), urges her readers to move beyond the typical “denunciation of colonial stereotypes”

2 Larson (1930) compares Mongolians to children when he describes Mongolian elites purchasing luxury items without restraint (27), another way to show how consumerism challenges the simplicity of ideal pastoralism.



(200) and to recognize the agency of colonized subjects who can act in a process of “reverse tutelage” (130) and help shape these imperialist discourses. Likewise, Susan Morgan (1996) and James Clifford argue that travel writing offers more to postcolonial readers than colonial narratives about “coercion, exploitation, and miscomprehension” (qtd. in Ames 2004, 315). Morgan (1996) provides normative advice to travel writing specialists, asking them to question the anachronistic concepts they use to categorize non-European states historically, resist creating monoliths about colonizers, and consider the specific colonial historical contexts of each country.

This examination of *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* won't be able to demonstrate how Mongolians interrupted these conversations, yet it will show how Larson (1930), over a long period of time, attempted to justify his depiction of Edenic Mongolia largely in cultural terms, avoiding the tendencies of earlier British writers who essentialized Mongolians and Mongolian landscapes. This analysis is complicated by the fact that *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* was not necessarily written by Larson but was ghostwritten by Nora Waln, an American writer who had been living in China since 1920 and whose memoir about China, *The House of Exile*, would come out in 1933. Larson (1930) acknowledges the “collaboration” with Waln who, however, hints in her memoir a larger role than that of collaborator: “In the last week in May [1927], I received an offer from a firm of Swedish publishers to go to Mongolia and write an autobiography of Larson, Duke of Mongolia, for his signature and their publication” (Waln 1933, 284). We know little about the process of writing *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* or Waln's ultimate responsibilities as a ghostwriter. Instead of regretting this research gap, we can consider it as a reminder that we are interested in the rhetorical and textual strategies that produce this imaginative geography of Mongolia and less interested in Larson as a social actor. The authorship of this memoir is one that is produced by the rhetorical force of such strategies as shifting to the present tense and addressing the audience more directly; in the final chapter, for example, Larson (1930) writes: “I am now visiting in this section of Mongolia. It is the seventh day of July. Two days ago I wrote this far in this chapter” (292). This immediacy allows Larson (1930) to reveal a dramatic scene over those two days, in which a tremendous storm and a flash flood swept close to where he was staying in the Gobi Desert, killing many Mongolians, Chinese merchants, and livestock (293–94). More to the point, this strategy enables Larson (1930) to interject his authorial authority over the text; in other words, though we cannot verify the authorship of the text, we can acknowledge the rhetorical force of these strategies on the audience.

## Victorian Ethnography, Theories of Civilization, and Ideal Mongolian Primitivism

*Travel journals create places rather than discover them. They construct these places from selective perceptions, from unequal weight given to various themes and from the manner in which all these are then placed in relationship to each other.*

—Peter Bishop (1989, 40)

Peter Bishop's (1989) reminder about how travel writers actively construct geographical spaces and bestow meaning on them for their Western readers is important as we consider how a few British travelers in late Qing Mongolia contributed an early imaginative geography of Mongolia as a pastoral Eden, one that is based upon traits of ideal primitivism and a critique of Western societies. Writing at the beginning of the heroic era of Mongolian travel, two British travelers, Alexander Michie (1864) and William Whyte (1871), use ethnographic strategies to justify the Victorian step-by-step theory of civilization, one that distinguishes Britons, who, as self-proclaimed exemplars of the highest form of civilization, separate themselves from lower levels, which include, in descending order, civilized, semi-civilized, barbarian, semi-barbarian, and savage categories. Michie (1864) was a leading business figure in Hong Kong and Shanghai (Fryer and Kaul 2006) and one of the first British travelers to go overland on the Mongolian caravan routes. Whyte (1871), characterizing his travels as a "grand" form of leisure and entertainment (8), was one of the first travelers to represent himself as a tourist. In addition to these two earlier travelers, Frank Younghusband (1896) emphasizes the ethical qualities of British travelers in late Qing Mongolia and also promotes a version of Mongolia to recuperate overly domesticated English men.

When exploring Victorian ethnographic strategies, I am not implying that these British travelers were active participants in the controversies of this emerging field, such as the role of Social Darwinism and the debates about human evolution (Stocking 1987, 250). Instead, they took for granted a "stadial theory of cultural development" (Thompson 2011, 145), which was canonized in such textbooks as Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, first published in 1871.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, this theory centers Victorian civilization

3 Tylor's (1889) "scale of civilization" (26–27) prompts travelers to generate lists of cultures shifting from the least civilized towards a more civilized (i.e., European) state, such as the following: "Australian [i.e., indigenous Australians], Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian" (26–27). Focusing briefly on all Tartar groups, Tylor (1889) claims that this broad ethnic group consists

at the pinnacle, an ideal civilization that was necessarily a Christian one (Younghusband 1896, 400–401). We can see this theory in practice in travel writing about Mongolia as late as the second decade of the twentieth century, when Henry Perry-Ayscough and Robert Otter-Barry (1914), traveling in Mongolia in the first two years of the Autonomous Period, classify the three “races” they observe in Kyakhta on the Northern Mongolian-Russian frontier: “The effete but ancient race, the highly civilised race which had marked time for hundreds of years, and the virile half-Western, half-Eastern race, whose power yearly increases” (176). Mongolians are the first group, characterized by an adjective, “effete,” which is typically reserved to emphasize the effeminacy of Chinese culture (Bruner 2014, 14, 26). In Perry-Ayscough and Otter-Barry’s (1914) usage, they emphasize Mongolia as a weakening, disappearing, or dying culture, one that is ranked lower than the “highly civilised” Chinese and “half-Western and half-Eastern” Russians.

These levels of civilization are essentialized through an ethnographic strategy, the construction of “types” through the growing practices of physiognomy, anthropological photography, and anthropometric measurements (Saburova 2020, 68–69). These ethnographic types legitimate Orientalizing caricatures, including the “Pekin Chinaman” and the “swarthy Tartar” (de Windt 1889, 154) or, similarly, “intelligent and thrifty Chinamen” juxtaposed against the “dreamy, listless nomads of Mongolia” (Younghusband 1896, 394). Other scenes invoke first impressions of Mongolians, oftentimes mingled with trepidation (e.g., de Windt 1889, 153; Kent 1919, 17; Whyte 1871, 54–55). The “Mongolian Tartar,” on the other hand, disappoints de Windt (1889):

I had pictured him a wild, fierce-looking fellow, bristling with knives and firearms, and leading a wild, romantic existence, of which privation and danger formed a daily part. I found him a mild, stupid-looking individual, lazy, good-tempered, dirty—not to say filthy—in appearance and habits, and addicted to petty theft when there was no fear of being found out. (195)

In this case, de Windt is disappointed by the clash of two images, the first a literary and romantic Oriental image and the second an ethnographic generalization of all Mongolians. In any case, the important point to

of savage elements as well as those with “high ranges of culture,” which Tylor exemplifies by listing Mongolians, Turks, and Hungarians together (51). More than a decade before Tylor’s initial publication of his textbook, however, Francis Galton was already classifying the natural differences between agricultural and nomadic groups, claiming that the former had developed more fully their moral sense and ability to reason (Stocking 1987, 93).

remember is that these types do essentializing work, fixing Mongolians and other non-Westerners to their landscapes and fossilizing them with a set of expectations and attributes.

Michie's (1864) and Whyte's (1871) conception of ideal Mongolian primitivism comes from their manipulation of Victorian civilization theory. Michie (1864) explains Mongolians' exceptional senses and instinctual skills, such as their ability to spot landmarks on the horizon and make their way in the Gobi Desert, by way of this folk belief. His theory is based on an inverse relationship of the mind with the body, which Michie explains in this following way: As "the lower we descend in the scale of humanity,—the nearer man approaches to the condition of the inferior animals,—the more does his mere instinct predominate over his higher mental faculties" (115). Michie continues to explain that Mongolians strengthen their sense perceptions and instincts by constant practice and necessity (115); their bodily senses and instincts, moreover, are not weakened by the prevalence of "artificial aids" (114).<sup>4</sup> Westerners, however, who have become dependent on their education, intellect, and technologies (114), no longer possess these natural capabilities.

Whyte (1871), who possesses the strongest version of the Mongolian primitive ideal, focuses on Gobi Mongolians as the most ethnically pure and, consequently, the most civilized and hospitable. Conversely, he describes a degeneration—both in appearance and in morals—of the "Wandering Caravan Mongols"; these are Mongolian groups, according to Whyte, who have rejected their simple primitivism and their pastoral traditions. Whyte also defines Mongolians who live too close to urban centers or to neighboring civilizations, such as those north of Khüree (184, 196), as possessing a dangerous or degenerate hybridity that mixes the primitive and civilized. Other ethnographic consequences for Whyte are that his ideal Mongolians are highly parochial and cling to a narrow Mongolian worldview in which Mongolia represents the center of the world, bounded by Russia and China (50). Moreover, Whyte asserts as fact that Mongolians do not have a literature of their own and erroneously contends that their written script is based on Chinese (104). Instead of depending upon writing, which requires education and technology, Whyte reports that the Mongolians prefer a more natural verbal communication (104, 215); more to the point, Whyte assures his readers that they have no need for literacy (171).

4 An American journalist, Thomas Knox (1868), makes a similar claim, comparing Mongolians to Native Americans, whose lack of civilization and education is counterbalanced by their heightened senses for navigation and spatial calculations.

These British travelers do not question the colonizing logic of Victorian civilization theory, yet their inversion of the intellectual with the physical allows them to re-evaluate the benefits of Victorian civilization. Mongolia, depicted as a primitive landscape, can serve as a “pedagogical” space for young English men. For Michie (1864), travel in wild landscapes like those of Mongolia can endow overly domesticated and urbanized Britons with experiences of “ever-recurring novelties” that “might be expected to keep the mind alive” (2). Michie appeals directly to his readers to reject Western civilization and “betake yourself to the children of nature, who, if they lack the pleasures, lack also many of the miseries, and some of the crimes, which accompany civilization” (134). Whyte (1871), invoking nineteenth-century anti-tourist claims, urges his readers to avoid the “ordinary hackneyed beaten track” (161), build “a man’s character,” and accomplish what is impossible back in their British homes (161). Whyte invokes the potential of Mongolian travel to restore Westerners back to an original, natural state:

But in this wonderful climate, where the air is so pure and bracing, and with the continual exercise, abstemious living, and even hardships, it is impossible to feel otherwise than in perfect health, which it is certain that, when God created man, he meant him to enjoy, and which he seldom does enjoy where civilisation exists. (130)

For Whyte and Michie (1864), Mongolian travel separates British travelers from the incessant worries and stress of modern Victorian life, such as taxes and hotel bills (Whyte 1871, 160–61) and “the intrusions of mail steamers and electric telegraphs,” by which Michie (1864, 134) means the news and conflicts of the world. Furthermore, Whyte’s (1871) criticism of the falseness and “avarice” of Western civilization, considers their negative effects. Using such paternalistic Mongolian types as the “honest children of the desert” (86) or “these harmless simple children of the desert” (112), Whyte worries that civilization, whether in the shape of Russian commercial influence or Chinese colonialism, will destroy Mongolian culture.

Michie’s (1864) and Whyte’s (1871) idealization of Mongolian primitivism as a pedagogical space to restore overly civilized Britons parallel the discourses of muscular Christianity, which respond to such Victorian anxieties as the domestication of urban men and concerns over new office spaces that revolved around the circulation of money rather than agrarian labor (Rosen 1994, 20). In a later era of imperialism in the 1890s, Younghusband (1896) enters these muscular Christianity critiques of the enervating, stultifying effects of capitalism, bureaucracies, and urban life. Younghusband

imagines a similar audience of travelers and readers, within whom he hopes to stimulate a “keen love for travel and of Nature” (vi). Yet, Younghusband’s Victorian gentlemen readers and potential travelers have become overly domesticated and stuck in their urban routines and English masculine pastimes. Similar to Michie’s (1864) and Whyte’s (1871) readers, these men are unable to delight in Nature, which, Younghusband (1896) reminds his readers, no longer exists in England but in distant places such as the Gobi Desert (388, 401). Younghusband tempts these domesticated gentlemen to travel:

There are others, too, whom I hope my book may reach—some few among those thousands and thousands who stay at home in England. Amongst these there are numbers who have that longing to go out and see the world which is the characteristic of Englishmen. It is not natural to an Englishman to sit at an office desk, or spend his whole existence amid such tame excitement as life in London, and shooting partridges and pheasants afford. Many consider themselves tied down to home; but they often tie themselves down. (vi)

In other words, for Younghusband, distant travel, not “tame excitement,” are the true vocations of British men. The British Empire provides opportunities, both directly and implicitly, for these roles of rugged masculinity and demonstrates, at the same time, the ubiquitous presence of the British Empire. C. J. W.-L. Wee (1994) explains how the distant and rugged travel that Younghusband (1896) proposes could restore a British man’s national identity, yet it was a process based on a contradiction: British travelers had to explore and experience this “primitive energy,” but also keep Britain pure at the cultural level (68). In short, distant travel and high literary culture were brought together to strengthen British identity.

### **Larson’s Edenic Mongolia**

This section explores Larson’s Edenic imaginative geography, in which he circulates similar themes and images related to Mongolian primitivism, timelessness, and simplicity that mark the ethnographic strategies of the British travelers from the previous section. Larson (1930) presents Western readers with a happy, harmonious society, one that is “sublimely” connected to nature and pastoral landscapes (294). As an Eden or paradise for the West, Larson depicts an imaginative geography that orients itself towards the past,

a nostalgic move that, according to Bill Ashcroft (2015), defines the “paradise” for travelers, as opposed to “utopias,” which travelers imagine in the future (250, 256). In both cases, travelers view themselves as detached from their own societies; for them, imagining these static, ahistorical, and primitive spaces offers an opportunity for “self-criticism” (251), or, in this case, a way to challenge their overly domestic and highly civilized urban lives. Despite these similarities with nineteenth-century British travelers, Larson (1930) bases his Mongolian Eden less on ethnographic strategies, assumptions about civilization, and essentialist classifications of pastoral and nomadic societies; he relies, rather, on ideas about cultural distinctiveness: Mongolia remains a static, timeless pastoral Eden as long as it maintains its “ethnic sovereignty” (Elliott 2001), rejecting Chinese, Manchu, Soviet, and Western influences and cultural innovations. As I will argue in the following section, an Edenic Mongolia, therefore, is necessarily an anti-cosmopolitan one.

As an aside, the similarities between Michie (1864), Whyte (1871), Younghusband (1896), and Larson (1930) are more than discursive coincidences. Larson does not directly cite these travelers, yet the publishing worlds of Great Britain and northern Europe were integrated, and readers had quick access to translations (Bishop 1989, 6). Larson (1930) also acknowledges a familiarity with travel writing about Mongolia (273), and he stresses the influence of James Gilmour’s missionary travels on the Christian Missionary Alliance Society of New York, the organization that sponsored his initial mission trip (265). Larson claims that he collected books about Mongolia when he was a child, and he continued his research during a brief educational trip to Great Britain (218).

Larson’s (1930) text contributes a pastoral Eden that balances social equality and democratic potential with a benevolent aristocracy and theocracy; comparable to the imaginative geography that Bishop (1989) explores about the Western fascination with the well-run Tibetan Buddhist state, Larson (1930) describes the hierarchical pastoral system of Mongolia as one that provides clear roles for elites and commoners. Local rulers are embedded among commoners on “common or state” land (57); the commoners provide required service on a rotating basis, and these roles are decided by common sense, based on the strengths of individuals; moreover, these people have the right to a “public audience” (9) with their rulers and, because of their close contact with them, they get to know their rulers well (9–10). Larson assesses the benefits of this pastoral Eden through signs of humor and happiness. For example, he reports the contentment he observes among the Mongolians: “As I rode on I noticed, as I had never noticed before, how serenely happy and peacefully contented are all the folk I have met in Mongolia, and how

laughter rings from even the poorest *yurta*" (80). To add one more point to Larsen's Edenic imaginative geography, Larson's observations of Mongolian women help to support his points about equality and democracy. Women are "socially as free" as men: they dress similarly (48), manage the family's herds in addition to the household, and possess sexual and marital freedom (71). Indeed, Larson depicts Mongolian women as exceptional. Owing to their "free, open-air life," Mongolian women do not age as quickly as their other Asian counterparts (67).

For Western readers, in a scene that encapsulates Larson's imaginative geography, Mongolia serves as the counter to the stresses and evils of the modern, urban, and capitalist West. Larson (1930) critiques the West in the following passage:

The Mongolian people are never overworked, because their needs are few. They never rush or hurry over anything, but take the full joy out of every hour as it passes. They never have any exciting telegrams, express letters, or newspapers. They have no trains to catch, no office hours to keep. They are not weakened by overheated rooms, luxurious furniture, soft beds, or big dinners at which the stomach has to digest innumerable kinds of rich food. They have no narrow streets and no troublesome traffic regulations. They never suffer nervous breakdown. (47)

The traces of muscular Christianity are evident in these anxieties about the enervating and emasculating effects of urban life, office jobs, commercialism, intellectualism, and upper-class domestic expectations. Comparable to Whyte (1871) and Younghusband (1896), Larson (1930) invokes an audience of Western middle-class men, recirculating these critiques about their societies and promoting the effects of rustic, simple, and primitive pastoralism. Larson (1930) applauds the harsh Mongolian winters, which are depicted as more beneficial and healthier than the negative effects of cities, sedentary life, and office buildings on the health of Western men (61). Larson emphasizes the benefits of "outdoor life" and "clean air," reminiscent of earlier discourses about the effects of non-Western landscapes on male virility (e.g., Bishop 1989, 48). In this regard, if we accept Bishop's (1989) claim that travelers' "idealized communities" shifted from remote islands such as Tahiti to "mountainous places" (48), we can recognize how Larson's (1930) Edenic Mongolia fits this historical trajectory.

When talking about the salubrious effects of Mongolian environments on Western (male) bodies, Larson's (1930) cause-and-effect logic is quasi-Darwinian, basing itself on a simplistic relationship of people and their



environments. Larson writes proudly about the Mongolian weather: “[I]t is an excellent climate for folk from northern climates. I am always healthy in Mongolia” (289). In a chapter on horse breeding, Larson shifts his focus to Mongolian bodies and makes his case for a Darwinian relationship between the environment and such traits as strength, stamina, and virility. If Mongolian women benefit from the environment and climate, men are also exceptional. In one passage, Larson’s reports that they have an “unusual stamina” and can endure exposure to the cold as well as the lack of food and water; additionally, they “can judge distances much more accurately than an outsider” (197) and are adept at the use of weapons and military stratagems (197).<sup>5</sup>

Rearing horses is analogous to rearing future Mongolian rulers or building ideal pastoral societies: it is based on a direct, simple, and primal relationship with nature, air, and food. According to Larson (1930), Mongolians demand that horses not be confined in stables, groomed, forcefully bred, shod, protected from wolves and other dangers, and dependent on veterinarians and human intervention (163, 171, 178). These “modern advantages of civilization”—like the innovations or consumer goods of European countries—counter the natural desire of horses for “absolute freedom to run in the herd,” a desire that results in speed (184), endurance, and intelligence (163). In the following chapter of *Larson, Duke of Mongolia*, the rearing of horses is juxtaposed against the rearing of future leaders. Larson, again sounding Darwinian, argues that Mongolian children are “the product of generations inured to physical hardship” (197).

Although we need to remain vigilant, like Orhon Myadar (2021), for tendencies in Larson (1930) and other writers to make essentialist cause-effect relationships based on the environment and climate of Mongolia, it is important to recognize that Larson (1930) is more interested in Mongolian landscapes as a natural pedagogical space—as a way for Mongolians to adopt Mongolian ethnic distinctiveness and perform their pastoral identities. Larson is not only contending that Mongolian nature creates exceptional Mongolians but that Mongolian nature enables Mongolians to remain culturally distinct from Chinese, Manchu, Russian, and other ethnic identities. A pastoral education necessarily connects young Mongolians to their ethnic lifeworlds: “The Mongolian child grows up near to nature and learns by daily experience, and from the book of the world which is spread before

5 As a comparison with Larson (1930), Roy Andrews (1921) uses childlike terms for Mongolian pastoralists (152) and bases their exceptional abilities, such as an instinctual “land sense” (204) and athleticism, on “primitive instincts” (268).

him, a great deal that is denied to children who live in cities" (73). An elite Mongolian child, similarly, grows up beyond the "palace gates" and eats the same food and lives "exactly the same hardening life that his ancestors have lived for centuries" (8). Larson notes that Mongolian-Manchu children, who grew up in Chinese cities away from the steppe and are enticed by the "Manchu court" (219), do not possess the same leadership ability; they do not possess Mongolian cultural distinctiveness.

According to Mark Elliott (2001), this formula for cultural distinctiveness, or "ethnic sovereignty," was first identified by Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century to differentiate the military strength of nomadic groups from agricultural, sedentary, and urban groups. For Elliott, the nomadic/sedentary binary is less important as a way to convey essentialist characteristics of these two types of societies and more of a form of ethnic identification; nomadic groups demarcate themselves as different and identify as a social collective (10), what Islam (1999) translates as "solidarity" (133–34). Larson (1930) demonstrates the cultural power of this binary through several historical examples. First, Mongolians consider the Manchu as a pedagogical case for what to avoid: the Manchu were an ethnic group that lost its distinctiveness because of their interactions with the dominant Han Chinese and with their inability to maintain their traditional customs and withstand the rigors of the steppe (13, 220).<sup>6</sup> Chinggis Khan is likewise invoked by Larson as a positive example of this cultural logic: after the conquests of Eastern Europe in the thirteenth century, despite the fact that Mongolians "marveled" at European "comforts," the Mongolian victors intentionally refused to adopt these luxuries and live in the cities they had captured (46). Larson also considers folk theories about the effects of urban areas on Mongolian bodies. In one case, a Mongolian aristocratic friend, when asked to stay in Beijing with the Dalai Lama, quickly passed away, his body, Larson hints, unable to withstand the confines of a city (28–29).

Larson's cultural logic of ethnic distinctiveness help explain his statements, like those of Whyte (1871), that define mix-raced Mongolian-Chinese or Mongolian-Russian people as dangerous hybrids, who take on the worst traits of both ethnic groups. Larson (1930) comments on the ethical character

6 Approximately fifty years earlier, Ney Elias (1873) makes a similar observation about Mongolians resisting the gradual absorption of Chinese agriculturalists who were pushing northwards from the Great Wall. Despite the fact that these groups interacted a great deal with each, Elias notes little cultural exchange: "[N]o assimilation is observable in the economical condition of the two races, no intermarriage, no modification of manners, customs, or language" (111).

of Mongolians and mix-raced Mongolians: “The Mongols are staunchly honest. Except on the border, where they are of mixed blood and have lost their hereditary integrity, one can trust a Mongol with any amount” (259). The concept of “hereditary integrity” is crucial in this statement, and it is not clear how strong of a Darwinian stance Larson implies in his use of “hereditary” (i.e., a genetic, or essentialist inheritance), or whether, like his points comparing future Mongolian rulers with their weaker Mongolian-Manchu siblings, Larson’s point is a cultural one.

### Larson’s Cosmopolitanism

The writing of expatriates and travelers such as Larson (1930) provide opportunities to investigate cosmopolitanism from a historical perspective. Although cosmopolitanism as an ethical and cultural strategy appears across a range of cultures and time periods (Chouliaraki 2017, 53; Delanty 2006, 27), as a disciplinary frame, it is much more likely to be investigated in terms of postcolonialism and Western globalism from the late twentieth century, a period in which it is assumed that people have immediate and rich experiences with cultures different from their own (Hannerz 1996, 107). Larson (1930) allows us to explore cosmopolitanism as an ethical practice at an emerging period of economic imperialism and globalism. For his readers, who may have little contact with others outside their cultural background, Larsen’s conception of an Edenic Mongolia serves, possibly, as an ethical, cultural, and pedagogical project, a way for readers to feel more comfortable with difference and critique their own society. Yet, as I indicate below, Larson’s cosmopolitanism is limited by its asymmetric nature. Although Larson is able to become a cosmopolitan and transform his social identity through his cosmopolitan embrace with a distant culture, Mongolians are excluded from this move: Larson’s conception of an Edenic Mongolia requires a strong parochial orientation, one that rejects engagement with difference and refuses to learn from other cultures. This imaginative geography of Mongolians being anti-cosmopolitan is a powerful one that haunts travel writing about Mongolia in the final three travel eras and, as I explore in chapter 4, it is dangerous insofar as it is an inaccurate and unfair representation of Mongolians.

Cultural cosmopolitanism is defined as an attitude, orientation, or strategy that shifts the traveler from their home culture or community and towards the desire to understand a new, different, and possibly distant culture. Gerard Delanty (2006) focuses on the individual cosmopolitan, as

someone who is in a “revolt” against “particularistic attachments,” a desire to strive towards “world openness” (27) and to view the world as a “political community extending beyond the community into which one is born or lives” (26). From the perspective of media studies, Lilie Chouliaraki (2017) stresses an ethical imperative, a “moral imagination of multicultural conviviality” (53) and “our capacity to feel, think, and act for distant others” (52). Kwame Appiah (2006) shares a similar position, defining cosmopolitanism as an “ethical obligation to others” (xv), one with a pedagogical dimension, as cosmopolitanism entails the possibility that “we can learn from each other’s differences” (4). Similarly, Ulf Hannerz (1996) emphasizes cosmopolitanism as an “orientation,” which requires “an intellectual and esthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences” (103).

To extend the comparison of Larson (1930) with Victorian travelers to Mongolia, Younghusband (1896), to some extent, defines the ideal traveler in these cosmopolitan terms, as a Briton who necessarily confronts human difference and interacts with people from different “steps” of civilization. Unlike others who remain in the London metropole or who, like religious evangelicals, cannot understand other cultures and perspectives, Younghusband’s traveler is brought face to face with difference, “with persons in every grade of the social scale, and of every degree of intellectual capacity,” from men who are “little better than beasts of burden” to those politicians, scientists, and intellectuals from the “most civilized countries of the world” (395). In terms of religious understanding, Younghusband’s cosmopolitan travelers distinguish themselves from parochial evangelicals by appreciating different religious perspectives and a universal impulse for religion (384). Yet, what separates Younghusband’s position from an ethical cosmopolitan one is that he places the ideal British traveler on the step-by-step “ladder of human progress” (395), in which adventurous British travelers stand firmly at the top, surveying the history of human evolution and development laid out below him. This ideal British traveler is on a civilizing mission, and their respect for cultural difference and the intelligence of non-Europeans does not supersede their Victorian assumptions about civilization and beliefs in European moral superiority. Sounding akin to the civilizing mission statements of politicians commending British travelers in Mongolia, who were characterized as sharing the “blessings of civilization” and the “social duty” of Christianity (Grant 1862, 34), Younghusband (1896) expounds on the “moral superiority” and “religious character” (395) of Western travelers, who possess traits of a “higher moral nature” (397) and characteristics such as “sympathy with those about them,” “abnegation of self in the interests of others,” “tenacity of purpose,” and “resolution” (400).

For Larson (1930), his Edenic Mongolia makes a civilizing mission unnecessary. His interactions with Mongolians, despite his earlier history as a religious missionary, do not occur at Younghusband's (1896) scale of civilizations and ethical generalizations. Larson's (1930) Edenic Mongolia is a personal one, based on emotional identifications with Mongolians that are saturated with memories about his childhood and working-class experiences. The homesick Larson tells his readers that he admired the image of Mongolians he first encountered in 1893 in Inner Mongolia: "I admired their free, easy grace and the jolly good nature with which they seemed to joke with each other" (3). These traits separated Mongolians from the Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia (4); also, the Mongolian affinity with horses reminded him of his working-class background in rural Sweden. Larson depicts relationships of conviviality with Mongolians and a vast network of friendships with elites throughout Inner and Northern Mongolia. Larson's intimate identification allows him to state, "I lived as the people of Mongolia lived. I entered into their sports, and I was drawn into their affairs as I traveled from state to state. I liked the people and they liked me" (268). The simplicity of his interactions belies the significant transformation that Larson undergoes: he arrives in Mongolia as a working-class Swede and by the 1920s he is a Swedish-American cosmopolitan adept at making his way through Mongolia; he has been awarded a ceremonial aristocratic title, *gün* (duke), by the Bogd Khan during the Autonomous Period (7), and he has undergone a "gentlemanly" education in Inner Mongolia: "In Ordos I was taught to conduct myself as a Mongol gentleman, and in addition I learned much concerning life in the country and the method by which each ruler governs his small state" (7). As Larson expresses in his advice to Western readers for starting businesses in Mongolia, his cosmopolitanism is based upon three cultural factors, which emerge from his extended and close contacts with Mongolians: language, a friendship network, and an intimate cultural knowledge of Mongolian desires and practices (242). To show these cosmopolitan approaches in practice, Larson compares successful ways of integrating new businesses in the pastoralist way of life, such as the placement of Russian trade stations along caravan routes (243), with those that failed to satisfy Mongolian cultural expectations, including the international banking industry, mining, and the importation of European luxury items (245).

Despite this intimate and long-term cultural identification with Mongolians, Larson's cosmopolitanism is limited by the fact that it is asymmetric: it is a product of Western liberalism, which recognizes the opportunities of Western travelers and intermediators to encounter and understand

rich cultural differences in distant countries yet fails to recognize cosmopolitanism as a dynamic conversation between at least two different cultures. Western cosmopolitans interact with ultra-parochial Mongolians, whose national identity, according to Larson's (1930) Edenic conception of Mongolia, is based necessarily on an ideal, unchanging primitivism (47).<sup>7</sup> Larson's Edenic Mongolia means that for Mongolians to remain vital—that is, ethnically distinct from the Han Chinese—they need to remain static, rejecting modern influences and maintaining a strong cultural frontier. Equivalent to Chatwin's (1977) depiction of indigenous groups in South America whose worldview is “shackled” to their homeland, Mongolians, according to Larson's (1930) imaginative geography, remain tethered to their land, language, and cultural practices. Invoking the idea of the primitive paradise, Chatwin (1977) depicts the internal worldview of these parochial groups: “A tribal territory, however uncomfortable, was always a paradise that could never be improved upon. By contrast the outside world was Hell and its inhabitants no better than beasts” (138). The Mongolians of Larson's (1930) pastoral paradise, likewise, see no value in the technologies of the modern world, such as automobiles, newspapers, and the telegraph.<sup>8</sup> Automobiles can weaken their natural connection to the land (161), and they have little interest in banks, money, fine metals, and European consumer goods (245), distrusting “the suffering influences of luxurious modes of life” (7).

The unchanging Mongolian world is based on negative constructions. Mongolians possess no innovations in clothing and style (Larson 1930, 47); in their *gers*, their construction, and their interior design (57); in work or actions beyond “the accepted needs of Mongolian life” (44); and in their native language, in which, according to Larson, there are no dialects (72). The final negative comparison with the West is Larson's belief that Mongolians possess no intellectual life. Following Whyte (1871), Larson (1930) claims that Mongolians are not a literary people and that they have little interest in writing letters or writing histories, which Larson admits has been harmful

7 To be fair, Larson (1930) does recognize the fact that young elite Mongolians have traveled abroad for the purposes of education (34).

8 Mildred Cable and Francesca French (2008) describe isolated and parochial Mongolian groups in the Gobi that refuse to accept new claims or beliefs from outside their local desert community. Cable and French categorize their initial relationships with these groups as “raw,” based on suspicion and distrust (35). Over time, gradual interactions with these desert groups produce “ripening” outsider-local relationships, in which outsiders show themselves “able to share its outlook on life” by becoming “familiar with the language, sayings, customs and traditions of the people” (35). Cable and French's slow-paced civilizing and proselytizing mission is thus a cultural cosmopolitan one that corresponds to these Mongolian groups' worldview.

for Mongolians who have been unable to articulate their history accurately and represent their relationship with the Manchu in the Qing Empire as an “agreement of allegiance” among equals (12).

### **Conclusion: Exceptional Mongolias**

A. S. Kent (1919), an employee for the British American Tobacco Company who traveled through Mongolia in 1914 and worked on his travel narrative after the 1917 Russian Revolution, hints at an exceptional and Edenic Mongolia in his appeals to male readers. These men, according to Kent (1919), are attracted to the “charm” of nomadic lands like Mongolia (1). They are atypical “adventurers,” seduced by “majestic” landscapes (2) and by the historical depth and primitiveness of Mongolia: “[I]t is this impression of primitive vigour, belied by the political status of the people as a whole, which fascinates the Occidental and takes him into forbidding country, on trying and monotonous journeys” (10). Kent conflates the natural landscape with the Mongolian people, making it an exceptional place for Western travelers, who hold an affinity for these landscapes, the challenging journeys, and these forays into the “primitive.”<sup>9</sup>

Another way of framing Mongolia as an exceptional, Edenic place is James Roberts’s (1903) missionary narrative of the escape of American and Scandinavian missionaries and their families from Northern China through Mongolia during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. Roberts describes crossing a visual, emotional, and symbolic frontier when the missionaries enter Inner Mongolia, a place with “immensity,” “freedom,” and “stillness,” qualities associated with the Christian Sabbath (57). The Mongolian landscape is exceptional, tricking the travelers’ perceptions and allowing them to see for a long distance (59). They are placed in a “dreamland,” in which “every breath is exhilarating” (60). Relying upon Mongolian ethnographic tropes that are similar to those of the Victorian travelers, Roberts distinguishes these “simple-minded,” honest, and impetuous “childlike barbarians” from the “smart and treacherous Chinese” (81); unlike the Chinese, Roberts also

9 Appealing directly to his readers by writing in the second person, the American engineer and politician, Lindon Bates, Jr. (1910), offers another reason why men travel: to confront difference. Entering Mongolia for the first time, Bates writes, “You three in the tarantass are as men from Mars, isolated, and moving among people foreign to your every interest and experience. The solitary strangeness of your little party in the tarantass, started into a forbidding land, the first confronting vision of the eternal Orient—these are the things for which men travel” (176).

reports that the Mongolians experience less stress than their Chinese neighbors.<sup>10</sup>

Other accounts that circulate the imaginative geography of an Edenic and exceptional Mongolia are those of the American travelers, Roy Andrews (1921), Langdon Warner (1927), and Owen Lattimore (1928), and the Scandinavian writers, Henning Haslund (1934) and Gustav Ramstedt (1978). In the following chapters, I continue to explore several of these travelers, including their ability to identify with Mongolians through their linguistic fluency and, at the same time, to enhance their credibility as travelers. In the final chapter of this book, we will confront Jiang Rong's (2009) absolute imaginative geography of a masculine Edenic Mongolia, one which cannot coexist with a rapidly developing and urbanizing China. These Edenic conceptions of Mongolia are masculine spaces, primitive and authentic landscapes, as Kent (1919) and Younghusband (1896) intimate, that are constructed for exceptional male travelers. Larson, in fact, is depicted in heroic terms in Roberts's (1903) missionary adventure story. According to Roberts, because of Larson's bravery, fluency in Mongolian, and network of Mongolian contacts, he was able to lead the missionary groups through Mongolia to Russia (100). Like Larson, these European travelers represent themselves heroically, taking on the mythical roles of imperial explorers of canonical nineteenth-century travel writing (see Thompson 2019, 116–17), as they meet their readers' anti-tourist expectations for distant and intrepid travel (Thompson 2019, 122) and exemplify the freedom and authenticity of the primitive Edenic Mongolia.

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10 Roberts (1903) reports that it is difficult to proselytize in Mongolia because the people are hyper-parochial; Roberts describes them as "ignorant, superstitious, [and] bigoted" (188).



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## 2 Language Scenes in Travel Writing about Mongolia: Hybrids and Heroes

### Abstract

This chapter examines language scenes in travel writing, the moments saturated with ideology in which language becomes the main factor in how travelers identify with Mongolians and construct their ethos. Travelers may frame their interactions with Mongolians through Orientalizing language ideologies, or alternatively, they may use a hybridizing strategy, demonstrating through language how their identities blend with those of Mongolians, a process that makes Western readers more sympathetic towards Mongolians and their culture. Other travelers show their ability to accept Mongolian perspectives, but they do so to adopt a “heroic” persona and, consequently, enhance their credibility and authority over others and their own narratives.

**Keywords:** authority, credibility, hybridizing, ideology, language scene, Orientalizing

Alexander Williamson (1870), a Scottish Protestant missionary traveling in an eastern Chinese seaport in 1865, describes a scene in which he hears English spoken by Chinese men “who wished to let us know their accomplishments” (190) in the hope, presumably, to look for a job opportunity. Rather than remark on how this use of English reflects the absorption of British culture and values in Chinese communities, Williamson veers in a different ideological direction. Declaring hearing English as a “bad omen,” Williamson states, “English-speaking Chinamen are generally great rogues, having to pass through a course not only of Chinese wickedness, but of foreign wickedness in acquitting the language” (190). In other words, the English language, tied in this specific situation to the unspiritual realm of commerce and trade, degrades Chinese men who are learning the language for impure, immoral reasons. Williamson follows up with a rationale for

why missionaries should not teach English: it gives Chinese students a “smattering” of English useful enough to enter a commercial career, yet they will not persist in their language studies long enough to develop their reading and their speaking; they will remain, consequently, difficult to convert to Christianity. English, in short, represents a sinful temptation.

In this chapter, I will refer to examples like Williamson’s as “language scenes,” borrowing the spirit of Shirley Brice Heath’s “literacy event” (1983, 386), a term that has been useful for literacy researchers and anthropologists to illuminate how discussions about literacy say something significant about the speakers’ and writers’ cultural and intellectual lives. Similarly, I demonstrate how we can apply “language scenes,” those particular “contact zones” (Pratt 2008) in which travelers comment upon and make more explicit the language or languages that they are using or encountering. In language scenes, travelers may make meta-linguistic comments about the roles of language, language learning, the aesthetic qualities of languages, reading and writing, and the ways in which languages interconnect themselves with the people they meet—or, conversely, the ways in which languages create conflicts among people.

In the introductory example, Williamson uses this language scene ostensibly to make a point about language learning, morality, and the commitment to religious faith. He may also be using language in this case to differentiate himself, as a Protestant, from the Roman Catholic Church, which used English-language classes for the purposes of proselytization. As we will see later in James Gilmour’s (1895) critiques of Buddhist religious practices and literacy, the debates about language provide an opportunity for these travelers to clarify their identity. More implicitly, Williamson is also making a point about hybridity, in which English-language learning by a non-Westerner implies an ethical and racial degradation (see Young 1995). Given that such Protestant institutions as the London Missionary Society emphasized the language learning of their missionaries to allow them to connect better to their possible converts, Williamson is expressing an asymmetric hybridity, in which Westerners are strengthened by their ability to learn local languages and identify with non-Westerners, whereas Chinese people, Mongolians, and non-Western others are weakened by their verbal hybridity. Ma Ho-t’ien (1949), in his travels through Mongolia in the 1920s, shows that this asymmetric hybridity could also describe Chinese-Mongolian linguistic interactions; Ma Ho-t’ien singles out Mongolians who spoke Chinese as having more “guile” (7). As we will see in chapter 6, Jiang Rong (2009) continues this asymmetric logic of Mongolians and Chinese people in his twenty-first-century *Wolf Totem*.

Language scenes isolate and expose the asymmetric relationships of power between Western travelers and the non-Western others they depict. They magnify the ideologies that constitute these contact zones, justifying, as we will see, Orientalizing depictions of Mongolians as naïve, anachronistic, and peripheral. At the same time, language scenes can depict Western travelers as all-knowing heroes, who rarely encounter scenes of incomprehensibility and whose control over language enhances their credibility for their readers. On the one hand, this rhetorical credibility may strengthen their colonizing persona as an objective, accurate traveler, who can reproduce their experiences faithfully to their readers. On the other hand, travelers can also express an ethical persona, usually through language-learning scenes, in which they demonstrate their commitment to these new communities to the extent that they are sundering their identities as travelers and their ties to their readers—in other words, they are “hybridizing” their identities. Yet, we can’t forget that travel writers may, perhaps unintentionally, reveal moments of agency among the non-Western Orientalized others they depict. Susan Thurin (1999) contends that we need to pay more attention to the ways in which Mongolians and other non-Westerners find ways to interject their voices. Language scenes, after all, can be tinged with danger, suspicion, and violence. We get unique views of how Westerners and non-Westerners negotiate power in these language scenes, especially in scenes in which Mongolians mock the language of Western travelers—such as Julius Price’s (1892, 269) Russian pronunciation—or when Mongolians distrust Western travelers’ reading, note-taking, measuring, and mapmaking, declaring them to be the acts of enemies, spies, or sorcerers. Of course, there are happier moments, in which language scenes represent inter-ethnic sharing, celebration, and conviviality, such as the scenes of Ella Maillart (1937) in her travels through northwestern China in 1935, when she shared photographs and images from books with Mongolians and those from Moslem ethnic groups. These scenes of social harmony, we need to remember, need to be interpreted through the travelers’ biases, their own tropes of representation, and their beliefs about race and ethnicity.

Considering the language scene as a feature of travel writing criticism contributes to Michael Cronin’s (2020) intervention to challenge the “language transparency” of travelers, the tendency to take language for granted and to consider it as a neutral medium that lies outside of the ideologies of representation and expression. Cronin writes about language in terms of power, “the relationship of travellers to other languages and how this relationship has affected, in turn, their relationship to their mother tongue” (294). By framing travelers as translators, Cronin emphasizes that language

is an unescapable feature in the travel experience, and he asks us to consider how travelers use and reflect upon language, such as the ways they identify (or distance themselves from) major or minor languages, consider the social dynamics of the local interpreters they use, and communicate when they do not share the same language as their interlocutors (296, 298–302). This chapter, likewise, asks us to see language as always entangled, and oftentimes problematically so, in Western travelers' relationships with non-Western others, the assumptions they make about them, and the ways travelers represent themselves as authorities over their narratives.

In the following sections, I introduce the concept of the language scene by exploring its appearance in Peter Fleming's *News from Tartary* (1936). Then, I focus on Orientalizing language ideologies, in which Western travelers make problematic generalizations about Mongolians and other non-Westerners, doing so through language ideologies. Afterwards, I look at the language-learning scenes and meta-language attitudes of James Gilmour, the Scottish missionary who traveled widely in Mongolia in the 1870s and 1880s and whose *Among the Mongols* presents an influential proto-ethnography about Mongolians in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Finally, I return to questions about the credibility of travelers through these language scenes, in which travelers show themselves as hybridizing—submerging themselves in Mongolian cultural identities—or, conversely, as colonizing “heroes” whose linguistic skills stabilize their subject positions and help them take control over the interactions that constitute these contact zones.

## Language Scenes & Language Ideologies

Examining language scenes necessitates a social definition of language, one that primarily functions to unite travelers with those from non-Western communities or, conversely, to sunder relationships from those who do not “belong” in the community. We use language to construct identities for ourselves and for others. Rosina Lippi-Green's (1997) definition of language is a canonical one: language is a “societal tool for the emblematic marking of social allegiances. We use variation in language to construct ourselves as social beings, to signal who we are, and who we are not and cannot be” (63). For our purposes, the language scenes in travel writing show these writers' reproductions of initial interactions and meta-awareness of the role of language, in which they articulate commitments towards or judgments about the non-Westerners they meet—that is, their stances towards these people, different cultures, and distant places. Language scenes, in

other words, reveal this social process of solidarity or division, which, in both cases, illuminates a language ideology, “the promotion of the needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalized groups” (Lippi-Green 1997, 64). To what extent are travel writers solidifying solidarity and creating allegiances—creating new communities—with the people they encounter? To what extent are they constructing or reinforcing social divisions between themselves and others? In both cases, the travelers depict language and their own interactions in ways that enhance their own credibility for their readers, solidifying their personas and subject positions as travel writers and making their travel accounts more authoritative. A language ideology becomes significant when travelers show awareness of the social work of language—that is, by creating solidarity or sundering relationships—by basing these allegiances or divisions on language itself. Language becomes “emblematic” (Lippi-Green 1997, 63), serving the same function as other emblems of difference, such as skin color, preconceived notions of attractiveness, clothing, lifestyle, and other possibilities. By illuminating the ways in which ideologies saturate language scenes, this chapter holds some affinity to contemporary research applying sociolinguistics to the discourse of tourism. Although much of this work examines multilingualism in a global capitalist framework (e.g., Heller, Jaworski, and Thurlow 2014), I focus on historical examples of travel writing to tease out some earlier possibilities of language attitudes and identities that result from these collisions between Western languages and Mongolian, Chinese, and other languages and dialects that were present in Mongolia and northern China.

Fleming’s *News from Tartary* (1936), which describes his travels with Maillart through Western China, is a rich source for language scenes. Fleming’s travelogue foreshadows the reflectiveness that marks contemporary travel writing (see chapter 5), and he explicitly states Maillart’s and his desire to confront the efficiency of modern travel and to slow down to “Asia’s pace,” Fleming’s Orientalizing term for the non-mechanized, pre-modern form of travel by camel caravan, which, it is important to note, was already regarded as an antiquated form of transportation and economic practice. Fleming invokes widely diverging historical precedents—Alexander the Great, Chinggis Khan, and Marco Polo—to show the “immemorial obstacles” that he and Maillart had to contend with and to emphasize that they were intent on documenting an experience, not reporting the results of a scientific study. Describing the comforts and speed of scientific expeditions using motorized transport, Fleming emphasizes that these modern scientists would not “know what the desert feels like” (167). Language—or, better yet, his awareness of language—becomes an important part of this experiential travel and a way



to construct his alternative modern travel persona, one that recoils against depicting a colonial “adventure” that has the “modern tendency to exaggerate [and] romanticize” places that are distant and peripheral for Western readers (27). It is his inadequate grasp of Chinese and the lack of guidebooks that become a form of credibility. Without these more stable forms of knowledge, he claims he needs to be more “truthful and objective” (90) in his descriptions.

Fleming (1936) acknowledges the inadequacy of his Chinese as the lingua franca of the caravan trip. His Chinese language learning consists of a limited vocabulary from “half-dozen records of a linguaphone course” that he had acquired in a preliminary trip to Manchuria (162). Because of his limited knowledge of Chinese, Fleming describes his communication strategies, including one to verbalize a “string of place-names linked by the simpler verbs of motion” and to use a simplified grammar, which he exemplifies by saying, “Bad men no importance,” when he is attempting to calm the apprehensions of his non-English-speaking travelers who are worried about bandits on the trail (93). Moreover, Fleming’s Chinese does not improve, and he explains the reasons why: there was no common language, the focus of his conversations was limited to travel, his co-travelers were “uneducated, unimaginative and slow-witted” (162), and the dialect that he learned did not correspond well to the Shansi dialect spoken by many of the caravanners. Fleming justifies his limited Chinese through this humorous analogy: “I found myself [...] in roughly the same position of a Chinese [person] who, after cursorily studying the first chapters of a modern English primer, is turned loose in the remoter parts of eighteenth-century Yorkshire” (163). Despite his awareness of his own linguistic limitations, we can see that Fleming’s attention to language does not necessarily enable him to rethink his Orientalizing strategies of ascribing a lower form of intellectualism to non-Westerners and to placing them indirectly, in his comical analogy, in an earlier historical period.

Fleming (1936) provides glimpses of the literacy and linguistic worlds of the Mongolians he encounters or with whom he travels. They repurpose, for example, pages from Fleming’s and Maillart’s literary texts, making them into visors or boot supports. Beyond these books, Fleming surmises that the “only other form of literature the Mongols can ever have seen was prayer-books in their own lamaseries” (141). In a home owned by a Mongolian and a Chinese couple, Fleming spotted “crude, old-fashioned, highly coloured pictures (with the captions in Russian) of the Russo-Japanese war” (110). Fleming also adds an anti-Japanese imperialism poster to this multilingual and multimodal landscape, depicting Japan as a “fat and oafish fisherman” catching a fish—Mongolia—and placing it in a basket that already holds Manchukuo (91).

Fleming is aware of the folk language ideologies that he and other Westerners may use. For example, an American missionary he meets is convinced that the Chinese have a much stronger grasp of English than they are letting on to. While traveling through southern Xinjiang, Fleming expresses frustration over the inability of his “Turki” interlocutors to make their speech more intelligible for him: “They all spoke at once, in loud voices, and none of them seemed capable of conceiving that the world held human beings unfamiliar with their language” (222). Here, he is voicing a language ideology of “linguistic naiveté,” which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. It is one important way that Western travel writers, using language to make judgments about identity, can make their readers dis-identify with these groups of people, whose inability to be reflective about their language use makes them less modern and less Western—that is, less like Western readers. Fleming, in a final language ideology connected to identity, suggests how bilingualism in a Western language does alter the subject position—or “personality”—of, in this case, a Tadjik, who “was thereby endowed—as all Orientals who speak a Western language are—with a twofold personality” (348).

In this brief exploration of Fleming’s language scenes, we can see that he does not take language for granted. He contributes moments of language learning, reflections on his own lack of fluency, and scenes of Westerners and non-Westerners drawing on their language resources—across English, Chinese, Mongolian, Russian, Uyghur, and other languages (303). Resembling the self-awareness and self-deprecatory strategies of more contemporary travelers (Hulme 2002), Fleming is not interested in exploiting the language scenes to create a “heroic” persona. He recoils from a “correspondence theory” of travel writing (Lisle 2006), a strategy of credibility in which travelers attempt to reproduce the reality of the “foreign” for their Western readers. He uses his own lack of linguistic fluency to provide his readers with an experiential credibility; in short, he wants them to “feel” the desert travel. He acknowledges his attempts to be “truthful and objective” (9), yet he does so with no “dates, no figures, [and] hardly any facts” (90). This is not to say that Fleming avoids colonizing and Orientalizing assumptions, which also come through strongly in his language scenes. He uses language to fix the identities of the Mongolians, Chinese, Uyghurs, and others that he encounters, applying the Orientalizing tropes of historical anachronism. By doing so, he creates a category of people whose language indicates that they are pre-modern (or, at least outside of Fleming’s historical period) and whose lack of awareness about language—their linguistic naiveté—limits the ability of Fleming’s readers to identify with them. For those who have

developed a bilingualism with a Western language, Fleming carves out a specific space: this “twofold personality” (348) makes them more like “us”—Fleming’s readers—simply because of their linguistic flexibility.

### Linguistic Naiveté: Orientalizing Language Ideologies

*If sheep in one part of the world make the same kind of noises as sheep in any other part of the world, why is it that men don't talk the same all over the world?*

—Eleanor Holgate Lattimore (1934, 117)

The question above, reported by Eleanor Holgate Lattimore (1934) in *Turkestan Reunion*, depicts a language scene in Xinjiang, between an inquisitive Mongolian and Holgate Lattimore’s partner, Owen Lattimore. The question is prompted by the Mongolian’s surprise, who has just been told that not all Westerners can understand each other. This question represents a brief meta-commentary about language: the Mongolian interlocutor is using language to talk about language itself and to consider the Babel paradox of language. Why is a communication “technology” such as language, which is meant to unify people, a force that separates people? In other words, why can’t people be more like sheep?

Holgate Lattimore (1934) does not include this language scene to argue about the philosophical and meta-linguistic reflectivity of Mongolians in Xinjiang. Quite the opposite: this language scene is recalled to point to a Mongolian folk language ideology, one that reveals for Holgate Lattimore troubling ethical and character dispositions held naturally by Mongolians. In this case, the sheep question implies “linguistic naiveté,” a language ideology that marks Mongolians as anti-cosmopolitan and anti-modern, an exaggerated parochialism that tremendously limits their worldview and simplifies how they consider Westerners and others. In other words, to ask a question about sheep and language is to suggest that Mongolians have little understanding about how language works and little exposure to other languages; moreover, linguistic naiveté corresponds to a simplistic worldview of “us”—Mongolians—versus “them”—Westerners. Roy Chapman Andrews (1921, 35) makes a similar linguistic observation, in which all “natives” are depicted as believing that all “white men” speak the same language. Additionally, although not necessarily tied to language scenes, similar Western assumptions surface in “misrecognition” scenes, in which travelers are mis-recognized as White Russians (Fleming 1936; Holgate Lattimore 1934, 92), Japanese, Korean, or other travelers (e.g., Maillart 1937, 114).

These parochial dispositions are characterized as “natural” by travelers, who provide a list of Orientalizing tropes that they ascribe to Mongolians, including laziness, stubbornness, and a lack of curiosity. Mildred Cable and Francesca French (2008) encounter several hyper-parochial communities in their missionary travels in the Gobi Desert, describing Inner Mongolian communities that possess “intensified characteristics of exclusiveness, distrust and rigidity” (29) and tolerate no new belief systems: “No discussion which might open the door to another view-point was tolerated” (30). For another parochial Inner Mongolian group, Cable and French (2008) use a typical trope of anachronism to show how these groups’ lack of curiosity or ability to consider new ideas make them pre-modern; these groups represent a “primitive culture which had overlapped from a previous age” (269; see also de Windt 1889, 287). Here is what may account for Cable and French’s fascination with hyper-parochialism: as missionaries, they were unable to convert such unpersuadable groups.

These language ideologies revealing Mongolian linguistic naiveté are persistent. Harry de Windt (1889), in his Mongolian travel account, relates his frustration with Mongolians who are unable to accommodate or understand his pronunciation. After relating his difficulties learning Mongolian, de Windt complains about the inability of Mongolians to accommodate alternative pronunciations: “[U]nless you say a word exactly as it is pronounced, you might as well address them in Sanskrit or double-Dutch” (208). De Windt’s example is the inability of Mongolians to understand his rendering of “Tie up your dogs,” a culturally specific phrase when visitors approach a Mongolian *ger*. An American missionary had approximated the pronunciation for de Windt as “No high. Ha-ru” (208–9). De Windt continues this language scene: “[W]hen I tried this, it failed signally, and the Mongols could make nothing of it for a long time. At last a light dawned on them. ‘Nohoi Hare, oh, we understand that!’” (209). Partially, de Windt is describing an amusing story, and we can find the same humorous intentions in Holgate Lattimore’s (1934) “sheep question.” Language, in this case, can be a rich source for humorous misunderstandings and self-deprecatory bumbling by the travelers. Yet, the source of the humor relies upon an asymmetric relationship between the traveler—as the cosmopolitan—and the local interlocutor, as the socially isolated and linguistically naïve parochial Mongolian. As Debbie Lisle (2006) argues, though from the context of contemporary travel writing, we need to be aware of the colonial imagination that may circulate behind these uses of language and humor.

In a final example, which dates sixty years after de Windt’s linguistic naiveté scene, the Danish journalist and photographer, Jorgen Bisch (1963),

narrates an extended language scene in Ulaanbaatar in the late 1950s. After having arrived in Ulaanbaatar, he avoids his government minders and sets out on his own to purchase a pair of boots, a shopping experience that concludes in complete communication breakdown. Bisch explains the language scene in the following quotation:

I have never found it so difficult to deal with people who spoke a language I did not know. It was harder here than among the Indians of the Amazon, for example; perhaps because the Indians are surrounded by other tribes who all speak different languages, they can understand gestures. Not so the Mongolians. They had never met anybody who spoke a different language, not even on the steppe, and the poor shop girl must have thought that I was mad. (22)

As Bisch explains, Mongolians like this store clerk are analogous to the hyper-parochial Gobi Desert dwellers encountered by Cable and French (2008), so peripheral and isolated that they cannot communicate with anyone else who does not speak their same language. Bisch underscores this language ideology by showing historical travel precedents from the thirteenth century. Bisch cites Matthew Paris's account, in which the medieval traveler reports how Mongolians "know no other country's language except of their own, and of this all other nations are ignorant" (Bisch 1963, 27; see also Carruthers 1914, 300, who cites the same passage). By doing so, Bisch collapses the thirteenth century with 1950s socialist Ulaanbaatar, moving beyond the typical humor of these scenes to make a point about Mongolians: they are "naturally" peripheral, distant, and isolated; they exemplify, in other words, an anti-cosmopolitanism that contradicts the Soviet Mongolian project of creating a new modern, socialist identity.

To what extent could Bisch's (1963) observations be a realistic reflection of the linguistic isolation of Mongolians in the 1950s? Given Bisch's own estimates during his second trip in 1961 of 30,000 Chinese construction workers in the country (73) and the large number of Russian and Eastern European Soviet advisors in Ulaanbaatar, this idea of cultural and linguistic isolation fits more neatly into the Orientalizing and Eurocentric narratives of Mongolia as always peripheral and always distant. As Fleming (1936) demonstrated, these linguistic naiveté ideologies can coincide with rich, multilingual depictions of these same, purportedly isolated people.

The overlapping set of ideologies in these language scenes can become complicated. In fact, we do not have a clear idea about Mongolian language ideologies at all—instead, we know a great deal more about the folk linguistic

beliefs that are ascribed to Mongolians and that reveal the representational power of travelers, who define Mongolians as possessing pre-modern dispositions and whose language has been geographically determined by their isolation. According to this Orientalizing logic, it is impossible for Mongolians to extricate themselves from this isolation, making them unable to imagine cultures, societies, and languages beyond their own local communities. In other words, linguistic naiveté is inevitable.

### James Gilmour and the Ideologies of Language-Learning Scenes

As we will see in the language scenes of Gilmour's *Among the Mongols* (1895), Gilmour's proto-ethnographic accounts of his Protestant missionary trips to Mongolia in the 1870s, language-learning scenes offer travelers opportunities to depict themselves as vulnerable and to use self-deprecatory, oftentimes humorous ways to downplay their authority in how they interact with Mongolians and other non-Westerners. Because of the time and personal investment in language learning, they appear only in the accounts of travelers who stay for a longer duration of time in Mongolia. Short-term travelers, with more limited opportunities to learn and use the language, as we saw with de Windt (1889), may depict language scenes that still place them in positions of Western authority. More extended moments of language learning may divest travelers of their authority, in that they will be more interested in showing their commitment to their Mongolian hosts, even to the extent that they emphasize their complete identification with Mongolians—what is referred to as the hybridizing strategy in this chapter. Nonetheless, these travelers' fluency in Mongolian, Chinese, Uyghur, or other languages bestows them with an enhanced credibility and authority. In this case, authority refers to travelers' attempts to make their subject positions more stable—they have, in other words, control over their narratives, their interlocutors, and their readers (see Lisle 2006).

Gilmour's account of his language learning is the most comprehensive of all the travelogues set in Mongolia. His intimate experience with Mongolian extends from his arrival in late Qing Mongolia in 1870 until his death in 1891, before which he had shifted his proselytizing efforts to Inner Mongolia. The Russian explorer, Aleksei Pozdneyev (1971), also exemplifies a researcher and traveler who understands the long duration of Mongolian language learning; although Pozdneyev had already spent more than three years in Mongolia, he bemoans the fact that he had not enough time to get to know this "little-studied language" (xxxiii). Pozdneyev's expectations for

knowing Mongolia are exhaustive, including language, religion, history, archaeology, administration, geography, customs, ethnography, and the attitude of Mongolians towards foreigners and towards Russians (xxxiii). For other well-known travel writers, including Sven Hedin (1898) and the American folklorist, Jeremiah Curtin (1909), language learning may show less cultural commitment and demonstrate, instead, their authority over their own travel accounts and knowledge of Mongolian history, geography, and folklore. For both Hedin and Curtin, language learning appears to be a rather easy process. While traveling in Inner Mongolia, Hedin (1898) shares his “curriculum” of what he learned from one of his Mongolian guides: numbers, parts of the *ger*, and verbs (1086). As he traveled, his growing fluency in Mongolian was “merely a question of extending your vocabulary and acquiring the necessary fluency of speech”; after several months of daily interactions with Mongolians, Hedin claims that he no longer needed an interpreter to engage in formal conversations with Mongolian leaders (1087). Curtin’s (1909) learning of Mongolian is more miraculous. In less than two months, from July 19 to September 15, 1900, Curtin becomes fluent enough in Mongolian to record and translate the oral folktales of his Buryad informants by himself (84)—though, that being said, Curtin divulges little about his learning process and his method for transcribing the folktales; in the preface of Curtin’s posthumously published *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, Charles Eliot explains that Curtin acquired the “strange language” of Mongolian from a Buryad who spoke Russian (Curtin 1909, v–vi). This statement represents a language ideology of its own, one that clearly evaluates the worth of languages based upon their centrality or peripherality (see Cronin 2020) and that celebrates the Western linguist who masters a “minor” language. It also hints at the reality of Curtin’s Mongolian language achievements: more than likely Curtin communicated with his Buryad Mongolian informants in Russian.

Unlike these language-learning accounts, Gilmour’s *Among the Mongols* showcases his reflectiveness about language and literacy. Gilmour, ordained in Scotland (Lodwick 2008, 151), was recruited to the Mongolian mission in 1870 by the London Missionary Society. Gilmour was aware of the challenges of this mission and the fact that Mongolia, after the removal of a Protestant mission in southern Buryatia in 1841, had no missionary presence for close to three decades (Lodwick 2008, 150). Importantly, the London Missionary Society’s mission charge for Gilmour showcased the importance of language:

He should study the Mongolian language and literature, make acquaintance with the Mongolian people, gather information respecting the

localities most suited to closer intercourse with them, and the forms of labor best adapted to accomplish the great purpose of evangelizing them. (Qtd. in Lodwick 2008, 151)

Gilmour's ethnographic contributions and his identification with the Mongolian language occur early in his career. In 1872, his first article about Mongolia, "The First of the White Month," is published in *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* (Hoinos 1872), and it is important to note the use of Mongolian in his byline: "Hoinos," or "from the north," indicating Gilmour's self-identification as the only missionary working in the far north of the Qing Empire (see also Lodwick 2008, 163). Although this section does not focus on Gilmour's biography and his hardships and personal tragedies as a missionary, Gilmour's identification with Mongolia brought him credibility, to the extent that he became an "icon" of the London Missionary Society as a symbol of self-sacrifice and perseverance (Lodwick 2008, 148); after his death, he became a role model, similar to that of David Livingstone, for young people in London Missionary Society publications. In fact, John Hedley (1910, 35, 41), a Protestant missionary who travels throughout Inner Mongolia in the first decade of the twentieth century, visits several of Gilmour's residences as a form of reverential pilgrimage.

In 1870, soon after he arrives in China, Gilmour (1895) first takes Mongolian lessons with a Mongolian teacher in Kalgan who had been affiliated with an American missionary group; the common language between Gilmour and his teacher was Chinese. Gilmour had access to Isaak Jakob Schmidt's *Mongolian Grammar* as well as a Mongolian map, which included Mongolian phrases in the margins "to assist the studious traveler in holding communication with the natives of the desert" (11). At this stage, Gilmour renders the Mongolian pronunciations in the Latin alphabet to aid his studies, and he shows awareness—unlike several other travelers (e.g., Larson 1930, 72)—about different Mongolian dialects, which make language learning more difficult (Gilmour 1895, 12). Afterwards, Gilmour travels to Kyakhta, where he makes an amusing discovery about an introductory phrase that his Kalgan-based teacher taught him:

As I began to understand more of the language, I became aware that in using the sentence which he had given me, and which I had been in the habit of repeating with great satisfaction to most of the Mongols who saluted me, I had not been expressing my desire to learn the language, but had been telling all and sundry that I knew and spoke Mongolian! (12)



As we saw earlier in several of the language scenes, Gilmour is using this scene in a humorous, self-deprecatory fashion. It is a way to playfully mock his credibility and question his authority.

In Kyakhta, as a Mongolian language student, Gilmour (1895) crafts his own natural-learning approach, in which he acts as an active participant. In addition to this, Gilmour demonstrates his ethnographic methods, in which he seeks out informants and language situations, taking notes on words and phrases, a practice that generates a great deal of suspicion from several Russian Buryads. Writing, according to Gilmour's reconstruction of Mongolian folk literacy beliefs, has a supernatural dimension; the local Mongolians fear that he may be a "wizard carrying off the good luck of the country in his note-book" (173–74). This trope about the fear of writing, like many of the language scenes and ideologies, is historically durable. Ney Elias (1873, 113) reports this Mongolian paranoia over writing, as do Janet Wulsin (Cabot 2003) and Ma Ho-t'ien (1949) in the 1920s, the latter whose mapmaking and sign-making, quite understandably, stirred up the suspicions of local Mongolian government officials (see also Lattimore 1928, 276). Hedin's (1898) anthropometric measurements, similarly, inspired distrust: although Hedin's subjects agreed to sit for portraits and be measured, they refused to have their heads touched—a cultural taboo—and stand in front of a tent pole for the measurement of their height (1098).

To intensify his language learning, Gilmour (1895) travels south of Kyakhta into Mongolia and lives with a Mongolian Buddhist monk, an opportunity that, once he rejects in a comical fashion the monk's pedantic instruction of the Mongolian traditional script (17), allows Gilmour to take on the role of linguistic observer as visitors drop by and converse with the lama. At this stage in his learning, Gilmour prioritizes vernacular communication, taking close notes in what, presumably, is a Latin-based inscription system of his own devising; Gilmour does not begin learning how to write in the Mongolian traditional script, *mongol bichig*, until 1874, when he is back in Beijing. He describes his language-learning method as a natural form of collecting:

[C]onversation carried on by Mongols just as if no one had been listening—[this] was exactly what I wanted, and I used to sit, pencil and note-book in hand, and take down such words and phrases I could catch. Exclamations and salutations made by and to persons entering and leaving the tent; remarks made about and to neighbours and visitors; directions given to servants about herding, cooking, and mending the fire, were caught in their native freshness and purity and transferred to my note-book. (16)

One consequence of this observer-participant approach is that the lama's interlocutors may have regarded Gilmour a "chield [*sic*] among them taking notes" (17) and may have sanitized their language for Gilmour's benefit (18). Another consequence of the natural approach is that he learned words and phrases in contexts that were not generalizable to other contexts. Gilmour's explanation of this consequence, which he frames in terms of linguistic morality, is tantalizingly obscure: "I found only two, on fuller acquaintance with the language, to be unfit for use. Of these the more objectionable was after all very harmless, and the other was more absurd than objectionable, while both were perfectly free from any taint of impurity" (17). In a similar scene about language morality, Gilmour acknowledges the fact that Mongolian can include an immoral element to it, which is not only because of the rustic conditions and nomadic pastoralist culture, but because of the origins of "corrupt thought":

Yet, it would be a great mistake to suppose that the ordinary conversation of Mongols is pure. Very far from it. In addition to a great many sayings and expressions that would shock civilised ears, but which are due more to the unsophisticated nature of their manners and customs than to any impurity of mind and thought, there is in daily use a vast amount of impure language for which no excuse can be found, and which is simply the expression of corrupt thought. (16–17)

Gilmour questions why he was not initially aware of such "impure language." In addition to cleaning up their language in front of him, Gilmour, wonders whether they conducted their conversations through innuendo, which he would not have been able to pick up on as a beginner of the language; however, Gilmour concludes that his host had a strong, moral character, and this type of language was not used by him or in his presence.

Gilmour's (1895) emphasis on the morality of language and literacy practices is hardly surprising. Constituting one of his main language ideologies, this integration of morality and literacy guides his evaluations of the ethical commitment of Buddhist monks, such as an eminent lama who is admired by many yet who is illiterate (70); the fetishizing of the materiality, aesthetics, or size of sacred texts (145, 211–12); the dependence on "images and pictures for their [Mongolians'] spiritual lives" (211), which includes Mongolians' propensity to ask for Christian material that includes gaudy color images (191); and, finally, the reliance upon mechanical reading, memorization, and recitation of sacred texts for the purposes of gaining merit (234–35). For the purposes of this chapter, what is significant about Gilmour's language

scenes and observations is that he exemplifies how a traveler could hold two clashing, conflicting language ideologies at once. In the first, Gilmour's own language-learning narrative, he shows his commitment to identifying with the Mongolian community and his hosts; in short, language becomes one of his most important missionary resources. For example, Gilmour depicts his exchanges with a different Buddhist monk, one who reads Mongolian—according to Gilmour, “a very extraordinary thing for a priest” (83)—and who possesses handwritten books as well as fables and folktales. Gilmour reads to the monk's visitors from both a “Mongol prayer-book” (83) and a Mongolian translation of the Bible and describes, in the same occasion, the Buddhist monk reading Christian scriptures printed “from wooden blocks” in Beijing (84). Beyond these scenes of literacy and cultural exchange, on the other hand, Gilmour describes several negative Buddhist-related language scenes, his point being that Buddhist literacy demonstrates the moral hypocrisy of Buddhist religious leaders and the linguistic and spiritual naiveté of Mongolian Buddhist practitioners. Gilmour, akin to other travelers whom we have already considered, justifies his criticisms of Buddhist literacy through language ideologies related to linguistic naiveté.

One naïve literacy belief that Gilmour (1895) ascribes to Mongolian Buddhist practitioners is their material fixation on the size and ornateness of texts as commensurate with their spiritual value and the benefits, or merit, they will bestow upon their readers. Gilmour claims that Mongolians demean the religious value of Protestant Christianity because its scripture—the Bible—is so small. Gilmour writes,

When a Mongol understands that Christianity is intended to supersede Buddhism, his first thought seems to be a tendency to despise the smallness of our Scriptures as compared with his own. Their Scriptures form a library of large volumes which it takes a good string of camels to carry. The idea of such Scriptures being superseded by a small book which a child can carry in one hand! (194)

This naïve materialism reveals itself when Buddhist Mongolians, according to Gilmour, value the materials that make up the sacred texts more than the message itself: “The Mongols believe that to write out a sacred book in black ink brings much merit, to write it in red brings more merit, but to write it in gold brings most merit” (145). Another Buddhist literacy belief, which is strongly contradicted by Gilmour's Protestant literacy practices, is the idea that certain languages and scripts are more capable of carrying sacred messages than others. In the case of Mongolian Buddhists, they

explain their use of Tibetan and the Tibetan script as an appeal to purity and authenticity:

The reason the Mongols themselves give for using Tibetan in preference to Mongolian is, that as water when poured from one cup into another becomes less in quantity and loses its purity, so the prayers suffer in translation from one language to another. So they keep to the Tibetan, and maintain that the merit lies in saying the prayer, not in understanding it. (234)

This Buddhist Mongolian literacy belief about language and sacred purity clashes directly with the London Missionary Society's emphasis on local vernacular languages, including such projects as the Edward Stallybrass and William Swan translation of the Bible into Buryad Mongolian in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Gilmour notes the negative consequences of this emphasis of the Tibetan script, one of the first statements about Mongolian linguistic and literacy anxiety. Gilmour criticizes the fact that Buddhist monks and common Mongolians are discouraged from learning how to read and write in the Mongolian script, which Gilmour assures his readers is more "phonetic" than English (229) and easier to learn than the Chinese script. Gilmour claims that, overall, Tibetan-based Mongolian Buddhism deters learning (229).

Two related naïve beliefs that Gilmour (1895) explores in a series of language scenes addressing the deleterious effects of Mongolian Buddhism are the Mongolian interest in images and photographs and the mechanical nature of spiritual reading. Gilmour's Protestant values come into play when he remarks about how icon-focused the Mongolian Buddhist faith is, such as Tibetan letters used as charms (212). Mongolians, Gilmour attests, eagerly collect his religious texts, yet they do so not for religious instruction but for the pictures: "It is not till a case of Scripture pictures, gaudy with colors, is produced, that old and young find their tongues, and crowd around" (191). Finally, several language scenes are devoted to how Buddhist Mongolians read: they do so to receive future religious merit—not a bad thing in itself,

1 Charles Bawden (1980) describes the story of the translation and the printing of the Old Testament and the New Testament into Buryad-Mongolian as an early instance of research in Mongolian language and linguistics; Stallybrass and Swan, in their Siberian mission north of Kyakhta, had to work in Russian, Manchu, and Tibetan, in addition to Buryad-Mongolian, and produce their own grammars and dictionaries. They also had to negotiate individual differences, Russian censorship over printing projects, and translation philosophies that separated the Kalmyk and Buryad missions.

according to Gilmour—but it is the process of reading that is the problem. Mongolian Buddhists read mechanically, pronouncing the Tibetan words, without any understanding of what they have read. In one language scene, Gilmour encounters a Mongolian who owns ten volumes of a religious text and who reads through these volumes once a year. Yet, by “reading,” the Mongolian means a reading ceremony in which ten Buddhist monks read through each text at the same time (234–35), a reading process that Gilmour indicates “is simply mechanical, whether performed by the mouth, the hand, or the windmill” (235). In another scene, Gilmour describes a technological reading innovation, a larger prayer wheel, containing “shrines, images, books, and prayers” (146), which, when turned, can act as a mechanical and especially quick way of receiving merit.<sup>2</sup>

### Hybrid or Hero?

With the reminder that travelers can be inconsistent and can juxtapose anti-colonizing against Orientalizing positions, their uses of language to identify with Mongolians demonstrate a hybridizing ideal, in which their credibility and authority as travel writers reflect their ability to consider Mongolian perspectives and enact Mongolian subjectivities. Gustav Ramstedt (1978) impresses the Mongolian Buddhists he meets because of his Mongolian fluency and knowledge of *mongol bichig* and the history of Mongolian. He is awarded with several titles, such as *sain biligtü* (“well-knowledgeable”) and *biligtü bagshi* (“knowledgeable teacher”) (63), and he gains access to an important Mongolian temple, Amarbayasgalant, largely based on his linguistic knowledge (68). One Mongolian rejects Ramstedt’s claims to Finnish nationality and, because Ramstedt learned Mongolian so quickly, defines him as a Mongolian with an “old Mongolian soul” (63).<sup>3</sup>

Henning Haslund’s *Tents in Mongolia (Yabonah)*, first published in 1934, provides another example of a traveler’s credibility that is derived from a close affiliation with Mongolian language and subjectivity. Arriving in Mongolia in 1923 with a group of Danish adventurers, ostensibly to start up an agricultural colony, Haslund (1934) depicts scenes of language learning

2 This argument compares Gilmour’s Protestant literacy values with those of Mongolian Buddhism, yet it does not explore Western travelers who express their suspicions about Catholicism through criticisms of the Buddhist lamaist system (Bishop 1989, 94, 129).

3 Peter Bishop (1989) recounts similar cases of Tibetan lamas who ascribe earlier incarnations onto Western travelers, a naming and identity practice that “neutralize[s] alien and potentially disruptive influences” and “sustain[s] the coherence of their social world” (229).

with a Mongolian associate, who already speaks Russian despite his dislike of the country and who begins to learn Danish. Haslund describes the creation of Mongolian-Danish word lists (91) and, in approximately five months, indicates that he is speaking fluently with local Mongolians (103). Haslund provides a photograph of himself, captioned “Acclimatized,” in which he wears a traditional Mongolian *deel*, belt, and knife. In short, he demonstrates the hybridizing ideal, in which his credibility is based on seeing the world in the ways Mongolians purportedly do. Moreover, his incorporation of Mongolian mystical beliefs (227–29), equivalent to Ferdinand Ossendowski’s (1922) retelling of stories about the Mongolian Buddhist Shambhala, exaggerates this ideal.<sup>4</sup> In this case, Haslund (1934) writes with his Western audience’s construction of Mongolian beliefs in mind.

Haslund (1934) demonstrates his identification with Mongolia—or, at least a particular rural, pastoralist, and pre-revolutionary expression of Mongolian subjectivity—when he encounters Soviet influences and travels to the border towns of Soviet Russia. Haslund, who sees himself no longer as a colonizing European but as a fluent Mongolian speaker concerned about traditional Mongolian values and cultural practices, confronts a young Soviet Buryad, who, “aping” Western conduct (252) and wearing “imitation” Western clothes (251), greets Haslund in Russian, not Mongolian. In addition to this scene of cultural misidentification, when Haslund is briefly arrested in Russia, the Soviet authorities cannot believe his inability to speak Russian (264), and Haslund continues to communicate in Mongolian or, in several instances, in German. Returning to Mongolia, Haslund writes about his “excursion into ‘civilization’”:

I had met a whole lot of white people, but very few of them had regarded me with friendliness. I had seen quantities of modern weapons and a great many typewriters, but nothing of all this had particularly appealed to me. (283).

Haslund’s association of “typewriters” with “modern weapons” is significant for the language concerns of this chapter. From Haslund’s constructed pre-modern Mongolian perspective, the typewriter is no longer a neutral communication technology, yet one that arrives, like the Marxist ideology of the new Soviet world, from distant European industrial centers (250).

4 Ossendowski’s adventure story was extremely popular, generating twenty-four editions two years after its initial publication; at the same time, several critics, including Sven Hedin, challenged the veracity of Ossendowski’s travel narrative (“Ossendowski” 1925).

The typewriter becomes an instrument of the modernist state, helping authorities to standardize language and script and, in the process, control and make more “legible” such distant, mobile groups as Mongolians (see Scott 1998, 1–2). Ironically, Haslund, as a travel writer projecting his own interpretation of Mongolians and their culture to a Western audience, remains unreflective on his own indebtedness to modern systems involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of writing.

In addition to the hybridizing persona, travelers may showcase language in ways that enhance another form of credibility: instead of showing an ethical and close commitment to Mongolians, they frame themselves as the center of the narrative, casting themselves as the “heroes” of their travelogues. If those who adopt the hybridizing persona aim to blend their subjectivities with Mongolians and other non-Western others, those who adopt the “hero” strategy make their subject positions even more prominent and rigid for their readers. Travelers such as the aristocratic Jacques de Lesdain (1908) do not require interpreters—or, that is, they may erase interpreters from their narratives. Lesdain (1908, 239), in an adventure scene, overhears his Mongolian and Chinese caravan laborers plotting against him, although it is not clear what language they are speaking in and how easily it would have been for him to understand what they were saying. Yet, as the hero of the scene, Lesdain uses threats of violence to make sure his leadership is not questioned again. Andrews (1951), in a fictional short story based on his explorer persona, stages himself as the Mongolian-speaking Western hero. From the perspective of Hopalong, a poor, disabled Mongolian, Andrews describes the approach of a fearful Western hunter, who then calls out to Hopalong in Mongolian and greets him kindly: “Don’t be frightened. No one will hurt you. Our wind carts come very fast, I know, but we have no other way to travel” (80). The Westerner’s language is the key for Hopalong to accept his help: “At first Hopalong couldn’t believe his ears, but finally the words cut through the fog of fear that numbed his brain” (80). In one final example, Henry Perry-Ayscough (Perry-Ayscough and Otter-Barry 1914) shows how it is language—but not language facility or fluency—that demonstrates his leadership qualities. As he travels to western Mongolia in 1913 from Khüree, Perry-Ayscough uses harsh, simplistic multilingual commands, including “Yao, yao, yao,” “Che, che,” and “Djar, djar!” (217) to drive the Mongolian crew. Perry-Ayscough writes, “My language, a medley of broken Chinese, Mongol, Russian, and forcible English, when trying to make the Mongols and their camels move, amused my companion very much. It was effective” (207). Although Perry-Ayscough may be offering his multilingual commands in a lighthearted way, he juxtaposes them

against his observations about how effective the Mongolians were as workers and soldiers. Relying upon his obvious Eurocentric beliefs about Western superiority, he claims that the Mongolians, as “fools” (206), could not lead themselves; however, he concludes that with proper leadership, they “would make fine scouts” (218).

It may be tempting to contrast the hybridizing traveler and the “hero” as two different ideological positions—the hybridizing strategy as an anti-colonizing, more reflective, and more ethical stance, and the “heroic” stance as the one that uses language scenes to demonstrate European superiority and make paternalistic and Eurocentric and Orientalizing judgments about Mongolians and other non-Westerners. Yet, we need to bear in mind that the hybridizing persona is exactly that—a pose and a narrative strategy. As Richard Kerridge (1999) points out, readers typically expect travelers to return to their homes and their core identities (166). Langdon Warner (1927), while returning from his important discoveries in Xinjiang, is misrecognized two times by his Western associates: the first time, in Xian, he is mistaken for a “Chinese carter in a fur-lined skull-cap and baggy sheepskin breeches” (250); in Beijing, he is misrecognized as a “a disreputable figure in a fur skull-cap” (253). Despite these moments of misrecognition, Warner, like most travelers who perform the hybridizing persona, eventually takes up his Western identity again.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have encountered several ways that language scenes can be crafted to meet Western travelers’ purposes. The language ideologies that underwrite these scenes can do anti-colonizing as well as Orientalizing work, or, as we saw in the cases of Gilmour and Fleming, serve several of these purposes simultaneously. Language scenes can show moments of travelers’ ethical commitments to their Mongolian hosts, depicting social harmony and cultural exchange. For example, when comparing the aesthetics of languages, the travelers typically prefer Mongolian over Chinese (Bulstrode 1920, 52).<sup>5</sup> Hedley (1910), similarly, prefers the ways in which Mongolians speak: “The harsh, strident tones in which the average Chinese will address you I never once heard from Mongols on this trip, and that alone predisposes one in their

5 Tim Severin (2003) and other contemporary travel writers are less complimentary about the aesthetics of Mongolian. Severin writes that Mongolian speakers “sounded like two cats coughing up and spitting at each other until one finally threw up” (38).



favour” (28). Hedley provides an early account of the language dynamics in the first decade of the twentieth century in Inner Mongolia, observing that Mongolians only use Chinese when they communicate directly with the Chinese “usurpers” (28). Hedley also cites Gilmour’s accounts from 1885, in which Hedley’s predecessor documents how “town resident Mongols” have “forgotten Mongolian, and laugh at themselves as not being able to speak their own language” (qtd. in 33). In these examples, like many other travelers, Hedley is showing sympathy towards the Mongolians—though many of his claims are paternalistic and Orientalizing—and suggesting the gradual disappearance of Mongolian culture.

These examples show the generative power of language and language scenes, which for Cronin (2020), although he does not use the second term, is important for evaluating the believability and accuracy of travel narratives (294). Focusing upon language scenes also reminds us to challenge correspondence theories of travel writing. Language scenes reveal little about Mongolians and the cultural and social aspects of Mongolian language use. Rather, they refer almost exclusively to Western travelers’ conceptions of Mongolians and other non-Westerners and their attempts to define Mongolians as hyper parochial and trapped in a pre-modern past. Furthermore, language scenes, when used as a strategy, enhance the credibility and authority of travelers, regardless of their hopes to identify closely with non-Western others or to illuminate the heroic role they play in their own narrative.

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### 3 **Traveling Women: Beatrix Bulstrode's *A Tour in Mongolia* and Strategies of Reflection**

#### **Abstract**

This chapter examines gender identity and its consequences for how Western travel writers represent Mongolians and other non-Europeans. In short, this chapter asks the following: Do women represent Mongolians and Mongolia differently than men? By focusing on Beatrix Bulstrode's biography, her role as an international club woman committed to Asian causes, and her journalistic strategies, I argue that Bulstrode's travel writing allows her opportunities to enter public discourse and to reflect on the gendered expectations of British expatriate life in China, her own gender as a traveler, the ways in which non-Europeans view her, the lives of Mongolian and Chinese women, and her own metropolitan audiences.

**Keywords:** chauvinism, club women, gender, reflection, representation, women travelers

*American and English women, touring the world in luxurious cabins and seeing foreign countries from the angle of first-class hotels, occasionally come up from Kalgan by car, equipped as though prepared to climb to the moon, in practical boots, and breeches, and covert-coats, and with a revolver in their serviceable pockets; full of courage and sportsmanship, though often a little lacking in womanliness.*

—Roland Strasser (1930, 124)

This quotation from Roland Strasser's *The Mongolian Horde* (1930) is an early and rare account of the woman traveler in Mongolia expressed as a type. As Strasser suggests, she is wealthy and elite, who travels in comfort and

whose experience in Mongolia is insulated by her material wealth. In other words, according to Strasser (1930), women travelers are incipient global “tourists” in Mongolia, traveling for “adventures they never found” (124). Strasser emphasizes that they are elite American and British female tourists, contrasting them with Russian women in early socialist Ulaanbaatar who struggle to imitate European fashions and tastes. Yet, Strasser’s description extends beyond that of social class and nation. He comments, after all, on these Western female tourists’ masculine clothing and values and questions their gender identity—their “womanliness”—entering earlier debates about whether women were suited for travel, especially after women travelers were inducted as members of the Royal Geographical Society in the 1890s amid a male backlash (Middleton 1965, 13).

Responding to Strasser’s contemptuous stance on women travelers, this chapter focuses on gender as opposed to national and class identity to explore claims about travelers’ representational strategies and the degree to which they view Mongolia through a colonizing imaginative geography. If gender is isolated as a variable, do women represent Mongolians and report about Mongolia differently than their male counterparts? Do they relate to Mongolians and non-European others in different ways? Or, for that matter, do they relate in different ways to their Western readers? More specifically, to what extent do female subjectivities disrupt the claim that travel writing circulates tropes about civilization, Eurocentrism, and racial superiority? And, if so, what are the written or rhetorical traces that allow us to differentiate women’s travel accounts from those of men and in what ways do they allow us to complicate the national and class-based assumptions we make about travelers? As we explore these questions, we need to remain skeptical about overly clean attempts to distinguish women’s travel writing from that of their male counterparts, as we run the risk of essentializing women and writing and making crude and monolithic overgeneralizations about the attitudes and stances of male and female travel writers. For example, Robert Aldrich (2019), by focusing on three women travelers, argues that we need to pay attention to the differences that exist among them, a point that Julia Kuehn (2016) extends by examining nineteenth-century women travelers in China who manifest “varying degrees of Orientalism, sympathy, identification and knowledge” (398). Alasdair Pettinger and Tim Youngs (2020), furthermore, remind us that we may be disappointed if we seek out radical positions by travelers “solely on the basis of ethnicity or gender or sexuality” (4); in other words, we should not expect a generalized tradition of women’s travel writing that counterposes male writing.

With these considerations in mind, I explore women's travel writing by first providing an overview of Western women travelers in Mongolia, after which I identify the extreme masculine stances of Jacques de Lesdain, a French aristocrat whose travel accounts help to clarify obvious colonizing approaches. Next, I focus on the biography of Beatrix Bulstrode as a traveler and "club woman," whose public activities and Asian commitments connect her to audiences up to the beginning of World War II. Exploring Bulstrode's travel accounts contributes to our understanding of how she reflects on her gender, her writing and observational methods, and her readers' expectations. I conclude this chapter with a twenty-first-century account by a German cyclist, Anne Westwards, who resurrects colonizing and Orientalizing tropes about rural savagery and primitiveness to explain the sexual harassment she experienced from male Mongolians.

## Women Travelers in Mongolia

The women's travel writing archive about Mongolia is slim. In comparison to the number of women travel writers in China in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> far fewer women travelers in Mongolia and on the Mongolian frontier wrote about their experiences. Perhaps the earliest woman travel writer was Lucy Atkinson, an English governess for a Russian family, who married Thomas Atkinson in 1846 and traveled throughout Russia and western Mongolia (Byrne 2022, 24). Atkinson (1863) published her travel experiences as letters, the content of which she addresses in the preface as "the strange incidents which befell myself, often left alone with an infant in arms, among a semi-savage people, to whom I was a perfect stranger." In terms of travels linking China, Mongolia, and Russia, Catherine de Bourboulon (Catherine Fanny MacLeod), a Scottish-French traveler, accompanied her husband, Alphonse de Bourboulon, on his French diplomatic visits in the 1850s to Shanghai, Tianjin, and Beijing, including five trips by sea. Her journal entries about her experiences in China and her overland journey from Beijing to Paris in the summer of 1861 were published

1 Several British Victorian female travelers in China, most notably Isabella Bird, traveled along the path of the Yangtze River. Annie Taylor, a missionary, traveled in the periphery of Tibet; Isabella Williamson, the American-born wife of a Scottish missionary, and Emily Daly, an Irish expatriate who lived in eastern China and Manchuria in the late 1880s and the 1890s, also left important travel accounts. These travelers have attracted recent scholarly attention, especially in the ways their advocacy for Chinese women against foot-binding practices can be re-examined as imperializing moves (Kuehn 2008).

as *L'Asie Cavalière: de Shanghai à Moscou, 1860–1862*, soon after her death in 1865. Bourboulon accompanies Madame de Baluseck, a wife of a Russian government minister, who had already completed the land travel to Russia. Bourboulon presents an early Romantic view of Mongolian primitivism and comments about how the Gobi Desert had blocked Chinese civilization from entering Mongolia. Bourboulon writes:

The free child of Nature will let you treat him as a rude barbarian, but in himself he despises civilized man, who creeps and crawls like a worm about the small corner of land which he calls his property. (Adams 1906, 290)

In this articulation of a Mongolian perspective on “civilization”—in this case, pertaining to an agrarian or sedentary economy—we have a hint of the Edenic qualities of Mongolian “primitive” pastoralism that serve, as we saw in chapter 1, as an alternative to Western urbanism, industrialization, and commercialism.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, women remain as silent background characters, although evidence of women traveling through Mongolia exists, such as a “cultivated” Scottish woman, whom an American traveler, George Kennan (1889, 72), meets in Kyakhta, or a female English companion traveling to Kyakhta with the Russian wife of an English businessman (Meignan 1885, 115). In terms of travel writing, women also play roles as the silent and largely forgotten wives of male travelers, including those of James Gilmour, Aleksei Pozdneyev, and Gustav Ramstedt, and, into the twentieth century, Jeremiah Curtin, Roy Chapman Andrews, and the partners of North American and Scandinavian missionaries. More notoriously, the American adventurer, Mabel Bailey, supposedly disguised herself as a male caravanner to accompany Lesdain on his 1904 trip through Inner Mongolia—and then married Lesdain in the middle of this journey.<sup>2</sup> Bulstrode, the most important figure we consider in this chapter, wrote a travel narrative based upon her experiences in Inner Mongolia and Mongolia in 1913. Bulstrode’s *A Tour in Mongolia* (1920) is the most thorough and sustained travel account by a female traveler in Mongolia up until the 1990s. Bulstrode’s influence far outstretches her literary output and her brief time in Mongolia, and her travel account has been critiqued by many subsequent travelers and researchers (e.g., Montagu 1956; Zolboo 2012). Despite the fact that Bulstrode was accompanied by Western male travelers, including

2 Lesdain (1908) does not include this sensationalist story and refers to his wife in the Introduction as a “newlywed.”

Manico Gull, her future husband, she was an “independent” traveler to the extent that she was in control of the funding and travel destination decisions.

After World War I, several more British and North American women traveled and wrote about their experiences; typically, however, they wrote from the Mongolian frontier and explored Mongolian communities in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang. Ethel Lindgren, an American ethnographer, arrived in early socialist Mongolia in 1928 to conduct research but was expelled from the country in 1929 with all other Western expatriates. After marrying Oscar Mamen, a long-term Norwegian resident of Khüree (Ulaanbaatar) and who had worked and traveled with Ramstedt, Lindgren shifted her research to peripheral Mongolian groups in Northeast China (Dudding 2019). Three China Inland Mission representatives, Mildred Cable and the two sisters, Eva and Francesca French, proselytized for many years throughout the southern Gobi. In addition to them, Eleanor Holgate Lattimore (1934) wrote an account of her travels as she met her husband, Owen Lattimore, in western China; although, when Lattimore (1962) returns to Mongolia in the 1960s, Holgate Lattimore takes a less active role, comparable to that of Ivor Montagu’s (1956) and William Douglas’s (1962) partners. Ella Maillart, a Swiss journalist who traveled with Peter Fleming, published *Forbidden Journey* (1937) about her 1935 journey from Beijing to India. The fact that both Maillart and Fleming wrote travel accounts of the same journey has contributed to gender comparisons in travel writing (Forsdick 2009). Finally, although male travelers still outnumber independent female travelers in the 1990s and 2000s, many women travelers have made important contributions, including Erika Warmbrunn (2001), Jill Lawless (2002), and Louisa Waugh (2003). In chapter 5, I examine their reflective strategies as contemporary travel writers.<sup>3</sup>

## Count de Lesdain and Masculinist Travel Writing

Susan Blake (1992) distills the inquiry about gender and identity down to this question: “In the relation of European travelers to empire, what difference does gender make?” (19). According to Blake, the hope behind this question is that women will recognize the racist logic of colonial oppression in their

3 This brief historical overview focuses on women travelers from North American and Western Europe. In the second half of the twentieth century, more women from the Soviet world traveled in Mongolia and made research contributions, including the Polish paleontologist, Zofia Kielan-Jaworowska (Man 1997, 151).



intimate experiences with the sexist logic of patriarchal domination. Blake compares three travel accounts, the first two written by men and the third by a woman, to demonstrate, on the one hand, that male travelers' attitudes and narrative strategies can differ from each other and, on the other hand, that women's perspectives can challenge tropes of racial superiority and enable non-imperial forms of relationships between travelers and their non-Western interlocutors.

The travel writing of Lesdain presents an extreme case of a masculinist explorer. Notwithstanding researchers' concerns about overgeneralizing the political value of travel writing on an identity factor such as gender, I briefly showcase Lesdain's colonizing strategies, like Blake (1992), to point to some of the reflective possibilities that Bulstrode (1920) anticipates. Based on Lesdain's travels in northern China in 1904 with his American wife, Mabel Bailey, his travel narrative in Inner Mongolia and northern China reinforces the idea that travel is a masculine game. Lesdain's hyper-masculinity is expressed by his enthusiasm for hunting, a common interest for many male travelers that has, according to Stephen Donovan (2006, 46), parallels to "imperial conquest." Lesdain's racial and class-based chauvinism appears several times throughout his travel account in the scenes of hunting and his reactions to Mongolians who object to his hunting. For example, despite the protests of several Buddhist monks, Lesdain (1908) shoots several partridges roosting near a monastery, which he justifies by way of his stomach: "Our fear of offending them [the monks] gave way before our desire for a good dish" (85). Similarly, while sailing down the Yellow River, he shoots a tame antelope "decked with the prayer-slips and bits of red cloth with which the superstitious Mongols dedicate all sorts of beasts to the gods" (65). Lesdain tries, unsuccessfully, to drag the antelope on the boat before the outraged Mongolians arrive. He pays them for his sacred transgression, complaining about the high cost for his "tender and tasty [...] booty" (66). Lesdain's lack of empathy with the Chinese and Mongolian people he encounters also extends to his amateur archaeological interests when he forces his Chinese assistants to raid ancestral tombs. Lesdain remarks about how his Chinese assistants "fully believe in [their] superstitions that such an act will cast an evil spell over the rest of his life" (72). This awareness, however, does not encourage Lesdain to rethink his orders.

A final masculinist stance repeated by Lesdain (1908) is his need to present himself as the hero of his own narrative. In a scene reminiscent of an adventure story, Lesdain relates how he crept up on his caravan employees in the middle of the night and overheard them plotting to abandon him in the desert (239). As the hero of the story, Lesdain confronts his assistants and

violently demands their obedience (see chapter 2). This scene of mutinous non-Westerners becomes more sensationalized when it is retold in the American press in the 1920s. Interest in Lesdain was rekindled at that time because he had started divorce proceedings against his wife. In his travel account, Lesdain (1908) only acknowledges the existence of his wife in the Introduction, referring to her as a nineteen-year-old newlywed, and does not mention her again until more than halfway through the book. Yet, in the 1920s, Bailey's participation takes on a far more vital and sensational role. According to one newspaper account, Bailey was an adventurer and disguised herself as a man to take part in Lesdain's expedition. Lesdain uncovered her disguise and, adding to the romance of the story, he then married her ("Paris" 1926, 16). Another American newspaper depicts an image of her shooting a pistol alongside Lesdain with the caption: "The Adventurous American Girl Shared Every Hardship and Danger of the Man with Whom She Loved, and When the Count de Lesdain's Mongolians and Chinese Mutinied and Attacked Him with Their Knives She Stood Back to Back with Him, Her Pistol Spitting Death Until the Mutineers Broke and Fled" ("No Wife" 1926, 108). My purpose for including this brief digression is not to admit the veracity of this latter account, but to emphasize how Lesdain's highly masculinist travel text could not include a major role or voice for his wife. He needed to be the master of his own story and have his status as an aristocrat recognized by local Mongolian princes and Chinese officials.

Additionally, the sensationalistic nature of the newspaper accounts about Bailey may tell us something about the different expectations of Western readers for women travelers. With a great deal more agency than Bailey, Holgate Lattimore (1934) acknowledges the influence of readers' gendered expectations. Holgate Lattimore admits that readers are interested in the uniqueness of her "interests, experiences, and sensations" (xi) because of the fact that she is a "white woman." According to Holgate Lattimore, the message she gets from her editors and agent is that "the public wants thrills and that any account of my experiences exaggerated to the limit of credibility would be acceptable" (217), yet she writes that she is incapable of inventing the "kinds of thrills the public wants" (217). Holgate Lattimore's invocation of her racial and sexual identity—"white woman"—in the context of traveling in non-Western spaces becomes an important part of the sensationalism and titillation, similar to the earlier travels of Bailey and, to a lesser degree, Bulstrode. The danger and vulnerability of these women are magnified by the racial and gendered assumptions of Western readers: if hyper-masculine male travel writers represent themselves as sexually conquering the landscapes they penetrate (Blake 1992), for women travel writers, the logic of

this sexual trope is reversed: women travel writers jeopardize their sexual virtue by their interactions with “immoral” non-Western women, the ways in which they are misrecognized, and the possibility of sexual violence by non-Western men.

### **Beatrix Bulstrode: Traveler and International “Club Woman”**

This section, in addition to viewing Bulstrode’s impact as a woman travel writer, considers her contributions as an elite international club woman, whose fascination with Mongolia and China can help clarify some of her reflective and journalist strategies to appeal to readers. In the first half of her life, she traveled widely in Europe—though, according to Bulstrode, never farther east than Genoa (Church 1914). After her Chinese and Mongolian travels, she remained committed to public and social expatriate activities in Shanghai in the final period of British control over the treaty ports. In addition to details from *A Tour in Mongolia* (1920), this biographical sketch relies on Bulstrode’s journalism, her various letters to the editor, newspaper accounts of her travels, and findings from census reports and last wills.<sup>4</sup>

Born in 1869<sup>5</sup> as Mary Beatrix Nunns in Apuldram, Sussex, in southern England, Bulstrode grew up in the local parsonage with her father, the Reverend Robert Augustine Luke Nunns, who served as the vicar of Apuldram from 1865 to 1890; her mother, Eliza P. Hall; and a younger sister and two younger brothers (Peile 1913, 537). In 1891, Bulstrode married Herbert Timbrell Bulstrode, who worked as a government health inspector and researched tuberculosis. Bulstrode’s husband traveled extensively in the United Kingdom and Europe to inspect the conditions of tuberculosis sanatoria. As Bulstrode (1920) reports that she had traveled for fifteen years through many countries (97), she presumably accompanied him on many of these trips. For example, in a 1909 letter to the editor to *The Times*, she showcases her knowledge about skiing in Switzerland (Bulstrode 1909). These early European travels may have stimulated her interest in investigating public institutions, which will become important in her travel writing and journalism. In London, Bulstrode was active in medical charitable organizations. As a founding member of the Society of Women Journalists

4 Bulstrode also wrote under the name of Beatrix Manico Gull and other variants.

5 By the 1931 census, Bulstrode changed the year of her birth to 1877, shaving off eight years of her life and eliding the fact that her second husband, Edward Manico Gull, born in 1883, was fourteen years younger than her.

(Lunt 1922, 123), she took on a professional identity as a journalist, reporting this profession on the 1911 census.

In July of 1911, Bulstrode's husband suddenly passed away, leaving her with £4518 (equivalent to £522,770 in today's currency [Bank of England 2019]). She now had financial independence and could follow earlier Victorian female "globetrotters" who "had need of an emotional as well as of an intellectual outlet" (Middleton 1965, 4). Bulstrode arrived in China in November of 1911 (Lunt 1922, 123). According to one newspaper account, Bulstrode initially explored the Chinese interior by sailing up the Yangtze River to Yichang and then back to Hankou (Church 1914). Afterwards, she lived in Beijing, though as a somewhat reluctant member of elite expatriate British society (1920, 5). In any case, it was a propitious and exciting time to live in the Chinese capital: the Qing Empire had only recently collapsed, and Bulstrode was able to witness the opening of the first parliament of the Republic of China in the spring of 1913.

As a travel writer, Bulstrode only published *A Tour in Mongolia* (1920), which recounts two separate trips: the first from Beijing to southern Inner Mongolia in April and May of 1913 and the second, conducted a couple of months later, from Russia to Khüree (Urga), the capital of Autonomous Mongolia. Altogether, Bulstrode traveled in Inner Mongolia and Autonomous Mongolia for approximately three months. The historical context in which Bulstrode traveled is significant. Arriving in China in the fall of 1911, Bulstrode was able to observe the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Qing Empire and its impact on Inner Mongolia and Autonomous Mongolia. At the end of 1911, Northern Mongolia declared its independence, with the ambivalent support of the Russian Tsarist government (Ewing 1980, 27–28). Autonomous Mongolia became a theocratic state centered around the head of Mongolian Buddhism, the Bogd Khan, offering at least superficially a modern central government (Ewing 1980, 37). Several other Mongolian ethnic areas in China planned to unite with Autonomous Mongolia, sparking throughout 1913 several battles between Autonomous Mongolian and Chinese forces in Inner Mongolia (Ewing 1980, 52–53).

At the end of her Mongolian travels, Bulstrode returned to England through Russia. In the following year, she presented on her Mongolian travels to the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and during World War I, she first served as a nurse in London. In 1916, Bulstrode remarried, to Edward Manico Gull, her travel companion during her trip to Autonomous Mongolia, who had been a journalist as well as a British insider in Chinese trade. Bulstrode, from 1917 to 1918, participated in the War Office Emigration Agency Weihaiwei (Weihai), which organized the export

of Chinese laborers in Shandong Province from Weihaiwei, a northeastern Chinese port controlled by Great Britain since the late 1890s (Davis and Gowen 2000, 96). An article about the Chinese Labour Corps, written by Bulstrode—yet erroneously attributed to Gull by several researchers—shows Bulstrode’s contribution to how Chinese people could be represented to British audiences. Although readers may be skeptical of Bulstrode’s highly positive portrait of British involvement and the depiction of the Chinese workers’ treatment (see Bailey 2016, 114), one passage demonstrates a theme that Bulstrode repeats throughout *A Tour in Mongolia* and in her journalism: her desire to confront chauvinist depictions of Chinese people and to show that they have the same universal emotions and commitment to their families as Europeans:

People [...] who know China only from office or club window, talk of the Chinese coolie as though he were a soulless wage earner with feeling and thought for nothing but food and money. They forget he has other characteristics, among them reverence and family affection, and that in a very large number, if not, indeed in the majority, of cases it is as much this as any selfish motive which takes him abroad. (Gull 1918, 133)

In the 1920s, Bulstrode and Gull lived in Shanghai until they returned to Great Britain in 1926. They were leaders and insiders in the British expatriate society in China. Gull served as the secretary of the Associated British Chamber of Commerce in China and Hong Kong, and Bulstrode served as the chairperson for the British Women’s Association in Shanghai, an organization that supported destitute British citizens (Thompson 1938, 1338) and other social causes, such as the treatment of wounded Chinese soldiers (Gull 1924). In 1923, for example, in the capacity of Bulstrode’s service as vice-chair on the Joint Committee of the American, British, and Chinese Women’s Clubs, she appealed to the Chinese government to legislate the protection of child laborers (Anderson 1928, 133–34), participating in an active newspaper debate about child labor, for which she deleted the “Mrs.” in her byline, an early feminist strategy (Littell-Lamb 2011, 151). Another example of Bulstrode’s commitment to the work of social organizations was her official visit to a “model prison” in Beijing. What prompted this visit was the reality of the approaching end of European control over its Chinese territories and the abolishment of extra-territoriality by the Chinese government, meaning that citizens of European nations would be subjected to the legal processes of the Chinese—not to European legal authorities (Gull 1927). In this article, Bulstrode emphasized the differences that she observed in how Chinese and

Russian convicts were treated by the Chinese prison officials, again showing her ability to reveal the ways in which Chinese people were represented differently from Europeans.

After Bulstrode and Gull's return to England, they stayed closely committed to their Chinese interests. Bulstrode, for example, responded to the 1937 Japanese attacks by raising funds to support aid and medical supplies for Chinese soldiers and refugees (e.g., "Aid," 1937). In 1935, Bulstrode's reputation as a travel writer and an expert of China and Mongolia was strong enough to prompt the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* editors to ask her to review Henning Haslund's *Tents in Mongolia* as well as W. H. Murray Walton's *Scrambles in Japan and Formosa* (Gull 1935). Bulstrode spent the last two decades of her life in southern England and died in Guildford, Surrey, on November 14, 1951. Her will, as well as that of Gull, who passed away ten years later, reveal lives that had been dedicated to China, expatriate life, and travel. In Gull's will, for example, he lists a "silver cigarette case" that Bulstrode used in her Mongolian travels, a photograph of Bulstrode with Japanese students in Tsingtao, books and dictionaries from China and other Asian nations, a "carved blackwood paneled Chinese screen," "two Chinese smoking pipes," and rubbings of Chinese characters.

It is important to consider Bulstrode's experiences as a travel writer with those of her professional responsibilities as a "club woman," one who enacted the role of an "international feminist" (Littell-Lamb 2011, 134). In both cases, her roles as a travel writer and as an international club woman provide her access to public forums and discourses, in particular, those related to nursing and medical issues, Chinese social causes, and journalism. Writing about women travelers in the early nineteenth century, Carl Thompson (2019) emphasizes the public prestige that travel writing could offer women, which he describes as "an assertion of rationality, education, and public agency" (113). As a travel writer, Bulstrode finds opportunities for entering the publishing industry, extending the opportunities that were previously available to Victorian middle-class women (Johnston 2013, 31, 35). Furthermore, as a club woman, Bulstrode gains networking and professional opportunities, an extension of the late Victorian "homosocial spaces" of literary and dining clubs in the 1890s (Hughes 2007). Elizabeth Littell-Lamb (2011), while discussing whether the activities of international club women in China should be considered imperialist practices (135), points to the complicated challenges of identity and power relationships for British women in the International Settlements in China. On the one hand, as British citizens, they experienced the privileges of their national identity and colonizing status; on the other hand, as British women, their

access to male-dominated public spaces was limited. In fact, Littell-Lamb (2011) reminds us that these international women's clubs provide opportunities for women to seek out access to the public. Littell-Lamb (2011) writes: "Increasingly during the interwar years women used professional expertise to define their authority and businesslike language to defend their involvement in public life" (134). As we have already considered in the position of the British woman travel writer (Blake 1992), their dual identity—that is, their national and gender identities—complicates the ways their readers interpret their representations of others and themselves as maintaining or resisting the assumptions of British colonialism. In the following section, we will see more closely the ways in which Bulstrode responds to these challenges bound up in her dual identities as a middle-class British woman traveler.

Bulstrode's attempts to shift to a public voice and discourse are limited by audience expectations of her as a travel writer. For example, a 1914 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article, published to mark Bulstrode's return to Great Britain and her presentation at the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (Church 1914), associates her with a growing number of "intrepid" North American and British women who have explored the periphery of Africa and Asia. The implication of this article is that these non-Western spaces are particularly dangerous places for "white women" traveling independently. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* article sensationalizes the danger of Bulstrode's trip, which is obvious in the teaser headline: "Woman Traverses Forbidding Deserts of Chinese Empire... / Braves Greatest Perils / Passes Safely Through Scenes of Civil War and over Seas Swarming with Boats of Pirates." The "Chinese Empire" no longer existed when Bulstrode traveled to Inner Mongolia in the southern Gobi Desert, and her travel account does not mention "seas swarming with boats of pirates." Additionally, by emphasizing her independence, the article neglects to mention the fact that, on Bulstrode's first trip to Inner Mongolia, she had a Swedish male missionary travel partner for a part of her trip and on her second trip to Mongolia she was accompanied the entire way by Edward Manico Gull, who would become her husband the following year. Later, after the publication of *A Tour in Mongolia*, elite American and British audiences could read sensationalized excerpts from Bulstrode's Mongolian travels in *Travel*, a magazine that advertised luxury travel destinations and aroused audiences with adventure. In an issue that focused readers on headhunters in the Philippines as well as travel to Sicilian Greek temples, Sweden, Costa Rica, and the indigenous lands of British Columbia, the *Travel* editors showcased Bulstrode's photography and announced Bulstrode's adventures with this caption: "The Landlocked Asiatics of Mongolia—The Most Frankly Immoral People in the World—Life

on the Great Gobi Desert—A Visit to the Barbarous Prison at Urga” (Bulstrode 1921, 19). Again, the *Travel* editors frame Bulstrode’s Mongolian experiences in terms of adventure and exoticism and, at least indirectly, sexually titillate these middle-class and elite readers.

### Depicting Women: Reflectiveness, Misrecognitions, Comparisons

One way to begin the discussion about Bulstrode’s contributions to travel writing as a woman is her awareness of the gendered expectations for Western and non-Western women in China and Mongolia. After arriving in China, Bulstrode (1920) expresses dissatisfaction with the narrow opportunities offered to British women in Beijing. She writes,

[I]t had been much borne in upon me that any deviation from the narrow path to the golf links, or from the delightful picnics held in one or other of the recognised show places within hail of the Legation quarter, was looked upon with cold disfavour. Few things seem to cause a certain type of mind more annoyance than that one should care to travel on lines other than those parallel with their own. (5)

Though we know little about Bulstrode’s motivation to travel to Mongolia besides her explicit Orientalizing statements about the quest for primitiveness and the past, it partly may have been an effort to reject the confining gendered expectations of expatriate women in China, a travel purpose that placed her in the same category as Isabella Bird and other Victorian female travelers (Thurin 1999, 138–39). Bulstrode’s reflectiveness about gender extends to the Chinese women she observes, who have to conform to patriarchal expectations in Kalgan (1920, 21). While first traveling north of Kalgan, Bulstrode experiences these patriarchal challenges as her Chinese and Mongolian travel employees attempt to keep her concealed, “completely obscuring my view, and putting me on a level with the native women who are neither seen nor heard” (1920, 50).

Bulstrode’s (1920) depiction of herself as an independent woman traveler demonstrates the ways she challenges these expectations. In Inner Mongolia, she describes nights in cold and filthy guesthouses, where she out of necessity roomed with male Chinese and Mongolian travelers and slept with a revolver under her pillow. Obviously, this association with weapons and the threat of violence subverts the domestic expectations she had earlier disparaged. Bulstrode announces that she can “play the game” (44); she can rough it, taking on a persona of a rugged traveler, one who rejects the gendered and



class-based amenities of travel that Strasser (1930), later, mocks. In other scenes in which Bulstrode challenged the expectations of her gender, she figuratively and at times literally used her “whip-hand” to make sure that her Chinese and Mongolian employees were not taking advantage of her. Twenty-first-century readers, though, may need to untangle Bulstrode’s challenging of gender norms with her assertion of her social class and national privileges. Bulstrode consistently can reflect on her own gendered perspectives and experiences and yet be far more blind to the national, Orientalizing, and quasi-imperialist filters that guide her representations of Chinese people and Mongolians.

Bulstrode’s gender reflectiveness appears in various misrecognition scenes. These are scenes in which travelers’ national, gender, racial, social class, or other identities are questioned or misperceived by their non-Western interlocutors. Male travelers may be misrecognized, but these confusions are almost always based upon national identity or social class. Male travel writers can be mistaken as “White Russians” or even as “Japanese” by their Chinese and Mongolian interlocutors, and these travelers may represent racial and national categories that do not fit neatly in how worldviews are reckoned. In addition to national misrecognition, male travel writers can also be misrecognized in terms of social class, and their class status may be exalted (Holgate Lattimore 1934, 277; Sidenvall 2009, 93–94; Younghusband 1896, 83). In Lesdain’s (1908) case, he reacts to moments in which his French aristocratic status is not recognized publicly by local *khoshuu* princes and enforces his high status to maintain the proper order of social decorum. According to Lesdain, these national and social misrecognitions occur because of a blurring of European identities after the Russian defeat to Japan (20).

Unlike male travel writers, the national identity of women travelers is not at stake. For one thing, the representatives of Chinese and Mongolian patriarchies do not recognize them as security threats. As a woman, Bulstrode (1920) claims that Chinese border officials ignored her as she represented no national threat, meaning that she had more freedom to move than if she had been a man (33–34). Bulstrode takes advantage of this official failure to recognize her, unlike Maillart (1937), when traveling in western China, who speculates that her journey required a male presence to obtain official travel documents from a local administrator, who probably “would have considered it beneath his dignity to concern himself with a woman like me” (237).<sup>6</sup> Bulstrode’s (1920) interaction with a young flirtatious Mongolian woman, who misrecognizes Bulstrode’s gender, introduces a comedic form

6 Maillart (1937) is also misrecognized as a “White Russian” and a man (253).

of gender reflection. While traveling northwards to Kyakhta, Bulstrode (1920) encounters a “very pretty” woman who “obviously mistook [her] for a man” (221), as she used her “coy and merry” flirtatious strategies to obtain candies and other articles from Bulstrode, making at the same time her male lama partner extremely jealous. Repeating a typical form of misrecognition for female travel writers, hermaphroditism (Forsdick 2009, 293), Bulstrode, comically, becomes the male Western traveler and places herself as the butt of the joke: she is now one of the “swains” who is being manipulated by the young woman. The humorous way that Bulstrode presents this scene shows her consciousness of her own gendered identity—a reflective move that male travelers are not forced to consider. Sara Mills (1991) credits this type of awareness, in which women present how comical they may appear to non-Westerners, as a key way to distinguish women’s travel writing from the patriarchal and colonizing traditions of travel writing (58).

By depicting other moments of gender misrecognition, women travel writers, according to Mary Louise Pratt, enable “indigenous modes of expression” (Clark 1999, 5), allowing the voices and assumptions of non-Europeans—in this case, the voices of Mongolians and Chinese people—into the travel narrative. Bulstrode, in her initial trip to Inner Mongolia, finds her identity an object of conversation among the Chinese male passengers on the train ride to Kalgan. In this case, they have mistaken her for the wife of her Scandinavian missionary travel partner who travels first class while she travels second class. For the first time, Bulstrode allows her readers to hear the perspectives of Chinese passengers, who critique the marriage customs of Westerners and dispute the supposed equality of women in these relationships. They are subverting, in other words, Western discourses that critique Chinese patriarchy and represent Chinese Han female identity largely through foot-binding practices.

A final strategy, which Bulstrode repeats when she classifies Mongolian national identity as contraposed to that of Chinese, is to compare Mongolian and Chinese women as generalizable types. This comparison strategy, in particular, for British travelers in this period, is an important way for them to rank non-Western cultures and to classify them according to their level of civilization (see Phillips 2014); a third comparison is taking place implicitly, as the decorum and civilizing influence of British women set the standard of comparison (Jarvis 2016, 94). The sexuality of Tibetan, Kazakh, and Mongolian women, for example, becomes a difference to account for the lack of societal order, the lower level of culture and civilization, and the symptoms of ethnic and national decay. Other gendered variables, such as the levels of equality, independence, and freedom of women, also play an

important role in these comparisons and social generalizations. By using this comparison strategy, Bulstrode generates essentialized generalizations about Chinese and Mongolian women. On the one hand, Bulstrode (1920) argues that Chinese women fare better in the Chinese family structure (86) and reports that Mongolian women, similarly, prefer informal marital relationships with the temporary Chinese merchants because of their gentleness (173). Bulstrode also characterizes the lifestyle of countryside Mongolian women as “drudgery” (173). On the other hand, according to Bulstrode, Mongolian women are freer (173) and more independent and have more agency, exemplified by the fact that they can attend such public events as wrestling matches (187).<sup>7</sup> Mongolian women, moreover, exert power and manipulate their male admirers through such feminine strategies as coyness and flirtation (116–17, 173).

Given these three strategies, what distinguishes Bulstrode from male travel writers? Bulstrode is more aware of her gender identity and the implications of being a woman as she travels through Inner Mongolia and Mongolia. She reflects on the challenges and constraints of British expatriate gender and middle-class expectations, and her attempts to challenge these expectations extend to her observations of non-Western women and non-Western patriarchal cultural and social assumptions. Unlike male travel writers, Bulstrode depicts how non-Westerners make judgments about her. Cable and French (2008), similarly, imagine how Moslem women in Xinjiang regard them:

We moved in and out of that women's court as enigmatic and inexplicable beings who were independent and unattached, celibate yet satisfied, childless yet happy. There was no son to mourn for us when we should die, and no one to secure us continuity of existence through coming generations, yet we were serene and unafraid. All these women watched us and marvelled. (74)

Their gender and their ability to perform roles beyond those of wives and mothers fascinate these non-Western women. A final obvious difference from male travelers is the fact that Bulstrode, like Holgate Lattimore (1934) and Cable and French (2008), pays more attention to the lives of women. Yet,

7 Charles Campbell (1903) emphasizes the freedom of Mongolian women, even when compared to European women: “A European cannot see much of the country without noticing the great freedom of intercourse between the sexes. The movements and actions of the women are, from the character of the life, completely untrammelled by the conventions to which we are accustomed” (501).

we need to be careful about making strong claims correlating Bulstrode's reflectiveness and awareness with a feminist stance. Bulstrode, in short, can show awareness about gender and patriarchal institutions, yet she hesitates to take on the role of a Western authority advocating for more equality and opportunities for women. She writes the following about Mongolian women:

There is on occasions a great sense of gaiety in Urga when the people seem full of the joy of life, and perhaps the women are wise enough to accept their privileges rather than to worry too much about their rights. Mongols, however, are said to mistrust women greatly, never taking them into their confidence, or allowing them a finger in the pie of any important business transaction. (174)

In the following section, I explore Bulstrode's journalistic persona and her conflicting claims about her observational methods and objectivity. Her tacit acceptance of Mongolian women's inability to fend for their "rights" and to enter the public spheres of business and politics—the spheres that Bulstrode is entering, ironically, as a travel writer—may be a consequence of her journalistic stance. Given the fact that she holds many of the same Orientalizing and imperializing assumptions and attitudes as her Western male counterparts, we may also conclude that Bulstrode feels uncomfortable critiquing these patriarchal institutions too harshly.

### **Journalistic Personas & Bulstrode's Reportage**

Bulstrode's (1920) reflectiveness about gender and non-Western women aligns with her awareness over her observational methods and her quest for journalistic objectivity. She adopts a journalistic persona and participates in the public discourses about women, non-Westerners, and other issues on the periphery of the British Empire. Travel writing allows Bulstrode this opportunity to observe public institutions, one that was open to middle-class Victorian women travelers and translators in the second half of the nineteenth century (Johnston 2013, 28–29, 35). If we extend Judith Johnston's (2013) observations about the role that reportage and travel played in the writing lives of nineteenth-century British women, Bulstrode's methods and objectivity become a gendered strategy—one that allows her to project a public voice as long as she frames her experiences in terms of a confession (Mills 1991, 81) and does not veer from her readers' expectations of the truth or blend fact with fiction (Johnston 2013, 33). Like Victorian women travel writers before her, Bulstrode finds an unexplored travel frontier—in this

case, Mongolia—where she can test and verify commonplace Western assumptions about non-Westerners (see Johnston 2013, 28). Of course, Bulstrode does not “disappear almost completely from sight through the adoption of an objective, reporting voice” (Johnston 2013, 22). By challenging these restrictions to women’s reportage and to avoid being depicted as a female “eccentric” (Mills 1991, 61), Bulstrode describes her own social and cultural blunders in self-deprecatory ways, emphasizes her desire to be fair in her generalizations of Mongolians and Chinese people, and shows an interest in reflecting on her own Eurocentrism. Bulstrode’s shaping of her reportage methods may distinguish her travel writing from that of male writers; however, it is also easy to spot the Orientalizing ideologies that express her class snobbery and British chauvinism and shape the ways she depicts common beliefs about civilization and Western superiority.

Bulstrode (1920) acknowledges the values of journalistic objectivity, recognizing her personal limitations: “It would indeed be absurd to generalise at all upon those with whom one came into personal contact in the space of a few weeks, and in the complete absence of knowledge of the language” (164). In another passage, Bulstrode appeals to the values of objectivity and neutrality in how she represents the Mongolians she meets, claiming that she was “[a]nxious to see the Mongols as they really are and through the unprejudiced eyes of those unconnected with political considerations” (147). Yet, in this latter quotation, Bulstrode discloses an assumption about whom Mongolians “really are”; for Bulstrode, Mongolians are a pastoral cultural group, one whose authentic identity means seeing them outside of the political and economic discourses that, unsurprisingly, circulated intensely around elite Mongolians in the early years of Autonomous Mongolia. As we will see shortly, Bulstrode’s journalistic objectivity collides with the Orientalist and Romantic tropes that justify her desire to travel to Mongolia in the first place: her desire to experience the “primitive” and “picturesque” and to witness “medievalism untouched” (1), which, in the final words of her travelogue, she refers to as a “call to the wild” (234).

Although Bulstrode is unable to contribute to this ethnographic potential, she does provide reportage set pieces, which enable her to take on the journalist persona and show her empathy towards non-Westerners. In Inner Mongolia, Bulstrode (1920) encounters a Chinese soldier who had been shot by Mongolian soldiers. This experience allows her to test one British assumption about the Chinese (and other non-Westerners, presumably), that they possess less sensitivity to pain than Westerners (96). Similarly, Bulstrode justifies her observation of a military execution of three Mongolian soldiers, reassuring her audience that she did not attend the execution out of prurient

interest: “I was present, not indeed from any morbid curiosity, but in order to witness the much vaunted Mongol courage in the face of death” (199). In other words, Bulstrode offers a proto-anthropological experiment, one that allows her to test dominant tropes about Mongolian masculinity: their bravery and their ability to confront death nonchalantly. Another set piece, Bulstrode’s visit to a Khüree prison, is one of the most well-known scenes from *A Tour in Mongolia*. Perhaps building off her experience visiting European sanatoria with her late husband, Bulstrode’s prison visit demonstrates her ability to narrate and—through the use of photographs—represent the suffering of non-Westerners. In the prison, Bulstrode estimated that close to 150 Mongolian and Chinese prisoners in five separate “dungeons” were confined to small wooden chests with only a small hole in the side for ventilation and food. The accompanying photograph, captioned, “Prisoners at Urga, shut up for the remainder of their lives in heavy iron-bound coffins,” was dramatically framed: Bulstrode’s camera is positioned at the back of one of the dungeons; a Mongolian official leaves through the open door, with four heads of prisoners visible protruding through the holes. Bulstrode is unmistakably trying to recreate the perspective of those who are imprisoned. She shows empathy especially towards the “gentle, highly civilised Chinese” (197) who had been charged for aiding the Republic of China and had been imprisoned, they claimed, without any trial (198).

Despite these moments of empathy, Bulstrode’s representations of Mongolians are filtered through late Victorian ideas about ethnic purity (73), phrenology (161, 197), and civilization. Ideas about civilization dominate Bulstrode’s ubiquitous comparisons of Mongolian and Chinese people. When Bulstrode, at the start of her second trip to Autonomous Mongolia, travels southward from the Russian border, she suggests the ways in which civilization can be expressed as hierarchical layers of culture, defining Mongolian culture as the absence of civilization—primitiveness and simplicity—yet, in this case, doing so with a favorable purpose: Mongolian “simplicity” is better than the false and superficial European “civilization” found in Russia, which “destroys simplicity while in no sense augmenting comfort” (119). When Bulstrode descends southward into the heart of Mongolia, she sees the impoverished Russian inhabitants in the area shift backwards in terms of civilization (125). This Victorian step-by-step hierarchical model of civilization also dominates Bulstrode’s representation of Mongolians.

Bulstrode’s (1920) journalistic reports about the global politics of Autonomous Mongolia are directed by these ideas about civilization. Acknowledging the fact that Mongolians and Chinese people hold “no natural affinity” (201),

Bulstrode finds it difficult to believe that the Mongolians could flourish independently of the Chinese, on whom they depend for everything beyond their immediate pastoral products and practices:

In no sense do politics come within the sphere of my observations, but having seen a certain amount of Chinese, Russians, and Mongols in juxtaposition, there appears to me to be but little doubt as to which two nations form natural allies. The Mongols, beyond breeding ponies and cattle, making the felt of their yourts and engaging in a certain amount of transport business, do practically nothing, make practically nothing, for themselves. Their very clothes and ornaments are of Chinese manufacture, and certainly it is the Chinese who are alone responsible for anything that is beautiful in Urga. (153)

In this case, Bulstrode stakes her claim about Mongolian and Chinese people being “natural allies” on the fact that the Chinese sustain the religious architecture, clothing fashion, aesthetics, and consumption of the Mongolians. The Chinese create a sense of beauty in Mongolia, unlike the Russians, whose ability to “civilize” the Mongolians Bulstrode doubted. Related to Bulstrode’s depictions of the geopolitical contest between Tsarist Russia and the Republic of China were her own doubts that Mongolians could adapt to changing political and economic exigencies. Similar to other male Western travel writers, including Lesdain (1908) and Julius Price (1892), Bulstrode (1920) claimed that Mongolians were overly lazy, too dependent on their Buddhist faith, and incapable of adaptation: The typical Mongolian’s “utter laziness and hopeless lack of gumption make him useless in an emergency, and where, I always felt, the Chinese are our superiors in their wonderful resourcefulness and quick adaptability, the Mongol is stupid and shiftless in the extreme” (172). In the context of a new political and economic regime in Mongolia, Bulstrode’s offensive depictions can be regarded as statements about the future of Mongolia—of which Mongolians may not be an active part.

Bulstrode (1920) also tells her readers a great deal about the interactions between the Chinese and the Mongolians. Bulstrode remarks on the gradual encroachment of Chinese agriculturalists on the grazing lands of Mongolian pastoralists:

By their assiduity, their perseverance, thrift, and industry, the Chinese here are persistently pressing onward and forward into Inner Mongolia,

year by year a little more and a little more, colonising, and putting land under cultivation, ploughing up great tracts which perhaps the previous year had furnished grazing ground for Mongol live stock. (40)

This passage relies on Bulstrode's assumptions about stages of civilization, in which an agrarian economy is inherently superior to a pastoral one; these ideas about civilization were also reflected in her chauvinistic attitudes towards "picturesque" Mongolians who were described as inherently lazy, especially when compared with the hardworking Chinese. In terms of Bulstrode's uses of phrenology, Mongolian faces suggest "strong character" (161), whereas the smaller heads and physique of Chinese men suggest that they are "gentle" and "civilized" (197).

Bulstrode's (1920) representations of Mongolians, moreover, are resilient. Her romantic set piece of a Mongolian encampment is the scene that best aligns the Mongolia she experienced with that of the Mongolia she imagined. Looking down on a pastoral Eden from the vantage point of a mountain pass, where galloping herders on horseback gather their livestock for the evening, Bulstrode claims, "Colour, form, and motion were literally rampant" (126). Bulstrode appeals to that Romantic longing for a place and a people who have stepped outside of history and have resisted social change, modernization, and colonialization. Although these tropes about an anachronistic Mongolia are common (e.g., Andrews 1921, 64; Holgate Lattimore 1934, 157), Bulstrode (1920) realizes that the travelers' ability to apprehend these scenes of primitive life are ephemeral:

I had attained the desire of my heart for the moment—primitive life among an unmistakably primitive people—realising alas! too well, that the freshness and novelty of all things wear quickly away in the face of one's amazing adaptability to the immediate requirements and realities of life. (131)

In other words, despite her ability to capture this Romantic ideal of primitive simplicity, she realized that the everyday practicalities of travel dulled her experience. More than two decades later, however, when reviewing Haslund's *Tents in Mongolia*, Bulstrode returns to her binaries of "astute Chinese" and "temperamental and superstitious nomads" and recreates a romantic scene of a young Mongolian musician basked within the sunlight of a *ger*, "leaving all that fell outside of its range in deep and mysterious shadow" (Gull 1935).



## Conclusion: #MeToo & Women Travelers in Mongolia

In a travel blog post, “The Dark Side of Mongolia,” Anne Westwards (2016) describes a bicycle trip in the summer of 2016 when she biked alone from Ulaanbaatar to Khovd Aimag in Western Mongolia. Westwards first expresses her annoyance at the lack of privacy in Mongolia, a common response that marked the complaints of earlier women travelers (e.g., Cabot 2003). Westwards (2016) also notes Mongolians’ incredulity about her desire to travel by herself. Beyond these different cultural conceptions about bodily space and gender, Westwards documents persistent sexual harassment from Mongolian males in the countryside, ranging from requests for sex “by boys barely 12 years old up to men of about 60” to physical groping. The most dramatic moment is her retelling of the aftermath of a five-day trek through a particularly isolated part of Mongolia, in which one of the first people she meets physically assaults her as she refills her water bottle. Westwards writes, “I had been so much looking forward to making it to civilization, to get somewhere safe where humans can live. And the second human I meet is assaulting me. Is using, no abusing my mental and physical exhaustion for his perverted idea of sexuality.” In her blog post, Westwards attempts to understand why sexual harassment has become a part of the Mongolian countryside, conjecturing about the representations of Caucasian women in Russian pornography and comparing Buddhist religious practices, which presents “no barrier” to counter this sexual behavior, with those of Islamic practices in Central Asian countries, where she had traveled without such an intense degree of sexual harassment. Westwards generalizes her experience to all Mongolian men: “It is a fucked up society (excuse me) that teaches even young boys that it’s fine to assault women.” Westwards’s experience should not be considered an anomaly. Other lone Western women travelers have written publicly about violent and sexualized experiences with Mongolian men, including Sarah Marquis (Weil 2014), who describes hiding at night in a “cement sewage pipe” to avoid the nightly harassment of men on horseback. Finally, the form of Westwards’s writing—the travel blog—creates an intimate space for her readers who are drawn to the “authentic experience,” immediacy, immersive experience, and independent persona that this genre projects (Cardell and Douglas 2016, 299–300).

Westwards’s (2016) experience over a hundred years after Bulstrode’s 1913 travel is important for two reasons. First, the twenty-first-century travel blog platform simplifies our discussions about audience and audience reception. Westwards’s readers become far more tangible—that is, we have a good idea of who makes up the “audience addressed” (Ede and Lunsford 1984). The readers include Western cosmopolitan travelers, writing

in English or German, who sympathize with Westwards and share their own examples with sexual harassment or violence in Mongolia. Many Mongolian readers, who may have been prompted to go to Westwards's blog based on a Mongolian newspaper article, apologized for the actions of rural male Mongolians. Zolbo's (March 4, 2018) comment is representative of these apologies that create a strong division between urban modernity and pastoral pre-modernity:

I am so sorry what all happened to you during your journey in my country. I agree with you, our country rednecks are not civilized, far far away from the real modern world, not educated savage wild people. I wouldn't recommend to go on a trip all by yourself through the small villages and countryside. Those people get really interested in foreign people because they have never seen any before and express it in very dumb fucked up way. I was so fucking embarrassed reading this post about all this happened to you. The redneck society will hardly ever change as they would not know what civilization and gentle culture is. I am so sorry on behalf of my people. And i just want to tell you not all of us are fucked-up minded like the dumb rednecks. We started out late in democracy and civilization and many of the people are still not educated about the civilization. But i promise people are changing on to the bright side.

In a few cases, Mongolian readers shift Westwards's personal account to a larger scale, the sexual exploitation of Mongolian women by Western men. For example, one comment to the newspaper article mentions a case of a sexual molestation by a German tourist in Selenge Aimag, yet it was a case that the police and judicial system decided not to prosecute. Sun (March 4, 2018) claims to be a Mongolian woman living in Australia, who has been sexually assaulted several times by Western men. Tuugii (March 6, 2018) writes, "Also, another side of sexism, most of the white man when visited in Mongolia, they had searching for sex in the country. Everybody knew this situation, and then when local man saw white person, they think sex. So sorry for that." With this larger scale, Westwards's experience becomes a global issue related to sexual harassment, one that also affects Mongolian women.

Second, Westwards's travel narrative links Mongolian masculinity, Western attitudes towards "civilization" and modernity, and pastoral spaces. In other words, Westwards, like Bulstrode, represents pastoral Mongolia as a metaphorical "time machine," a way of returning to a pre-modern period. Yet, for Westwards, she does not encounter Bulstrode's innocent "children of the steppe" or other versions of the "noble savage," but, in the words of the writers

of the comments, “beasts” and “rednecks.” Of course, Westwards’s account is an extreme case, yet, given our interests in travel writing and cultural representations, these claims about rural and pastoral Mongolians—in particular, male Mongolians—are persistent and cling to twenty-first-century accounts. As always, rural, pastoral male Mongolians are depicted as pre-modern, uncivilized, uncivil, isolated, peripheral, parochial, with little education and little knowledge of others beyond their local areas. Ironically, they are perpetually described as being on the brink of vanishing, yet they have proven as tenacious as the tropes that have historically marginalized them, despite, in the twentieth century, the socialist “civilizing mission” of transforming the pre-modern pastoral rural space into a modern space of health, hygiene, literacy and education, ideology, urbanization, electrification, high culture, collectivization, and science (Marzluf 2018, 91–95; Myadar 2017). In short, although Westwards’s experience is shocking, it is not necessarily surprising. Her claims about Mongolian male sexual excess are akin to earlier claims about Mongolians’ dirtiness, superstition, laziness, and lack of commercial ability and time management. These cultural and social factors, all of which are filtered through Western moral expectations, perpetually differentiate rural male Mongolians from urban, cosmopolitan, and Western identities, disrupting the cosmopolitan expectation of social harmony.

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## 4 Byambyn Rinchen's and Tsendiin Damdinsüren's Socialist Travel Writing: Nationalist, Internationalist, and Cosmopolitan Strategies<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Challenging assumptions that travel writing is a European cultural practice, this chapter focuses on socialist Mongolian travel in the 1950s and 1960s. It examines Byambyn Rinchen's two travelogues, *Account of a Journey to the West* and *Account of a Journey to the South*, and Tsendiin Damdinsüren's *Notes about Japan* in terms of three rhetorical strategies: a nationalist strategy, in which Rinchen and Damdinsüren proclaim the significance of Mongolian language and cultural history; an internationalist strategy, in which they represent their experiences in terms of Soviet discourses; and, a cosmopolitan strategy, in which they express their fascination with cultures beyond the Soviet world. Rinchen and Damdinsüren demonstrate their rhetorical flexibility by making their nationalist perspectives acceptable by interweaving these other strategies.

**Keywords:** anti-imperialism, cosmopolitanism, internationalism, nationalism, Soviet travel writing

According to Tabish Khair (2005, 5), travel writing has been defined as a colonial and colonizing genre to the extent that publishers and academics have ignored non-Western travel writing (13), universalized travel experiences (11), and centered travel as a Western practice. Khair writes, "One is faced with the fact that human mobility came to be seen and continues to be seen as a predominantly European prerogative" (7). For example, despite the

<sup>1</sup> All translations in this chapter are mine. Cyrillic has been transliterated using the Tibet and Himalayan Library system, except that *V* has been used for the Cyrillic *B*.



essentializing of Mongolians as highly mobile pastoralist nomads (Myadar 2021), this mobility is discounted as travel as it does not emerge from the modern, middle-class lifeworld in which time is divided between work and leisure; from this perspective, travel is necessarily a leisure activity and a form of consumption (Urry 2002). For Debbie Lisle (2006), the popularity of contemporary travel writing suggests that it recreates the colonial past for modern Western readers, which “reproduce[s] a dominant Western civilization” and “secure[s] their privileged positions by categorizing, critiquing and passing judgement on less-civilised areas of the world” (3). In other words, travel writing is a unique genre that fulfills the identity needs of privileged Western writers and readers.

This chapter interrupts this exclusive Western framing of travel writing by exploring the work of two leading Mongolian intellectuals during the socialist period, Byambyn Rinchen and Tsendiin Damdinsüren. In the 1950s and 1960s, after the denunciation of Stalinist authoritarianism and the advent of “mature socialism” and the more intense involvement of the Revolutionary Party in the lives of Mongolian citizens, Rinchen and Damdinsüren traveled widely in the Soviet world and beyond, crafting travelogues out of nationalist, internationalist, and cosmopolitan rhetorical strategies. These strategies offer a relatively safe way to express a hybrid Mongolian national identity, one that does not deny its socialist or internationalist commitments yet does so from a Mongolian perspective and for a range of sympathetic and possibly hostile audiences. More specifically, in Rinchen’s (2015) two travelogues, *Account of a Journey to the West* (*Baruun Etgeeded Zorchson Temdeglel*) and *Account of a Journey to the South* (*Ömnö Etgeeded Zorchson Temdeglel*), I argue that Rinchen unites the socialist emphasis on literacy with his nationalist-based critiques of Mongolian language and modern language usage. By looking at Damdinsüren’s (1998f) *Notes about Japan* (*Yapony Tukhai Temdeglel*), I argue that Damdinsüren shows an awareness of how Western travel perspectives have depicted Mongolians and bases his anti-imperialist message less on internationalist socialist formulas and more on personal observations and an ironic form of anthropology.

## Mongolian Travel Writing

This section outlines the history of Mongolian travel writing in the late Qing and the socialist period and surveys the influences of Soviet travel writing.

*Late Qing Travel Writing.* Mongolian travel writers in the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century adapted non-Russian and

non-Western travel genres for their purposes as religious travelers or to perform their international Qing or other political identities. According to Johan Elverskog (2006), pilgrimage travel became a “cult of empire” (122), a way for Mongolian elites, whom Elverskog defines as Inner Mongolians, to express their identity as loyal Qing subjects, one that is based upon Tibetan Buddhism, separating them from earlier, pre-Qing Mongolian Buddhist practices (124) based on vernacular Mongolian texts (120–21) and uniting them with Tibetans and Chinese as opposed to Chinese Moslems (139). This international and trans-ethnic Buddhist Qing identity generated a tremendous interest in pilgrimage travel, especially in northern China. Because of the importance of Mongolian travelers to the economy, Isabelle Charleux (2020, 110) reports that Chinese entrepreneurs set up traveling inns, and Chinese shopkeepers were motivated to learn Mongolian (Charleux 2015, 274). We can see examples of this Mongolian-based tourist industry in James Gilmour’s (1895) travels to Wutaishan, where he observes that local Chinese entrepreneurs designed Mongolian advertising for travelers, such as this following sign: “The men of this inn are honest and mild, everything is ready and cheap, therefore, O ye Mongols, our brothers, you could not do better than rest here” (149). Charleux (2015) documents the various genres that were available to pilgrims, including travel diaries, guidebooks, translations of Chinese mountain gazetteers, maps of the pilgrimage sites, and guides for Buryad travelers (13–15).

*Early Socialist Travel Writing.* In the first four decades of the twentieth century, from the late Qing to the early socialist period, Mongolians became more conscious of the modern impact of transportation technology that sped up their conceptions of time and space (Wickhamsmith 2020, 32). Early-twentieth-century writers considered new travel forms, such as the Inner Mongolian, Gamala, who wrote a praise poem about the car, though still in terms of a Buddhist worldview (Wickhamsmith 2020, 36). In the early socialist period, travel, especially from the countryside to the new urban and secular center, Ulaanbaatar, plays an important role in the fiction of Mordendeviin Yadamsüren and Sonombaljiryn Buyannemekh, in which Ulaanbaatar indexes such modern changes as electrification and women’s education and anxieties over the negative effects on urban life for young women (Wickhamsmith 2020, 246). Dondongiin Tsevegmid (1963), for example, in *Ganbat the Student* (*Suragch Ganbat*), compresses the travel of the main character from western Mongolia to Ulaanbaatar in five verse stanzas depicting the beauty of the countryside; more importantly, the identity of this character hinges on the ways in which Tsevegmid characterizes the differences between rural and urban life. Damdinsüren’s (2001a) proto-socialist realist poem, “Train” (“Galt

Tereg”), is another attempt to mark the changing conceptions of travel. Damdinsüren depicts the violence of a steam train “shaking the earth” (“gazar delkhiig donsolgoj”) and “vibrating the air” (“agaaryn khiig dolgiluulj”) (22); in other words, the steam engine is a powerful technology, one that links Vladivostok with the Baltic coast, yet Damdinsüren suggests that it does not blend into its natural surroundings (22).

Dashdorjiin Natsagdorj’s (1961) “Notes on the Trip to Berlin” (“Berlin Yavsan Zamyn Temdeglel”), a poem of 82 stanzas and 324 lines, is the most important travel narrative from the early socialist period. Written in 1927, Natsagdorj’s long poem incorporates an earlier travel technology, the stage post (*örtöö*) system, with train and steamship, projecting his readers beyond the borders of Mongolia through the Soviet Union and to Germany. The purpose of Natsagdorj’s journey was to join a large group of students studying in Germany as part of the Administration for Mongolian Students in Germany and France, a study abroad program for young Mongolian students who took language lessons and academic classes and gained experience in useful vocational skills, such as cartography and printing (Wolff 1971, 269–70). Another purpose for his travel poem may be his awareness, according to his biographer, Baldangiin Sodnom (1961, 15–16), that Mongolians had been represented by Russian and other Western travel writers as unclean, lazy, and overly religious and superstitious; moreover, these accounts depict Mongolians tied to pastoral ways of life that were dying out. Although Sodnom does not specify which Western travel accounts Natsagdorj is talking about, the young poet would have had access to Ivan Maiskii’s 1921 *Contemporary Mongolia* as a student in Leningrad as well as the work of researchers such as Andrei Pavlovich Boloban, whose low estimates of the Mongolian population were influenced by beliefs in Mongolian decline (see Maiskii 1956).

Serving as a response to these colonizing Western representations, Natsagdorj’s (1961) “Notes on the Trip to Berlin” projects a modern image about Mongolians as well as a tentative, incipient modern identity for Mongolians. The travel genre and formal elements hint at these larger ideological projects: Natsagdorj works in verse, using such traditional features of Mongolian poetry as alliteration in the first word of each line, the description of landscapes, and the use of parallel structures (Marzluf 2021). Beyond the level of formal characteristics, Natsagdorj’s (1961) poem showcases an urban identity, as the narrator leaves Ulaanbaatar, admires rural landscapes and pastoral activity without becoming a part of them, and feels comfortable in Leningrad and Berlin. Moreover, in his descriptions of Soviet Russia and Germany, he rarely depicts non-Mongolians: besides the mention of one

Russian woman and a group of incomprehensible Germans on the steam ship, he meets and interacts with other Mongolians; at other times, he anticipates his readers' expectations, such as when he compares Buryatia and the Kyrgyz Steppe to Mongolia or when he visits a Buddhist temple in Leningrad. The identity that Natsagdorj presents is an incipient, complex, and transitional one, placing together an earlier, traditional pastoralist subjectivity with those of modern, urban, European, international, and Soviet socialist possibilities. Natsagdorj's legacy as a writer and intellectual reflects this complex identity, as he was canonized as the Great Writer (*Ikh Zokhiolch*) of the Mongolian socialist period and has survived into the twenty-first century as a key symbol of authentic Mongolian nationalism (Marzluf 2021, 56–57).

*Mature Socialist Travel Writing, 1950s–1980s.* As historians of Soviet travel writing have contended, Soviet travelogues played an important role in apprenticing citizens, in particular, those from Eastern European and Baltic countries that became a part of the Soviet Union after World War II, into the official values and social identities of the larger socialist state. Throughout this period, elite, pro-regime intellectuals functioned as “political pilgrims” (Slobodník 2018, 41) and traveled throughout the Soviet Union and to important Soviet-allied countries such as Mongolia (as well as, occasionally, further abroad to the capitalist West). They participated in highly orchestrated trips where they met fellow pro-regime writers and researchers, toured high-profile factories and agricultural collectives, and visited natural landscapes as well as those that had been transformed by Soviet industrial and scientific development. In turn, these travel writers produced “ideological travelogues,” propagandistic and homogenous texts, the purpose of which was to “present, create and reinforce an ideologically biased and tendentious [in the case of non-socialist destinations] image of the destination country” (David and Davidová Glogarová 2017, 296). The contexts of publication and circulation were also tightly controlled. In Czechoslovakia, the pro-Soviet publishing house, The World of the Soviets, published a series about the Soviet Union for Czechoslovakian audiences, *The USSR through Our Eyes* (David and Davidová Glogarová 2017, 297). Czechoslovakian travel writing about Mongolia was heavily edited and re-evaluated to ascertain how positively Mongolian socialism was represented (Slobodník 2018, 53–54).

Furthermore, these state-sponsored trips facilitated a complex web of personal and professional friendships, including that of the Latvian writer, Mirdza Kempe, and Rinchen in 1947 (Burima 2016, 67). Kempe's correspondence to Rinchen demonstrates how much official travel these

writers undertook: she had traveled to Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Abkhazia. Rinchen, in 1956 and 1957 alone, traveled to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, China, Burma, and India. Likewise, Damdinsüren's travel itineraries in the late 1950s and 1960s include Soviet Russia, Inner Mongolia and China, Hong Kong, Japan, Azerbaijan, Latvia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. His travelogue based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where he participated in the Asian-African Writers' Conference, shows the interconnections among Soviet and Soviet-allied writers. In addition to travel, Rinchen and Damdinsüren, as well as other scholars such as Shadabyn Lubsanvandan, were on the official itinerary for Soviet or other foreign writers, artists, and scholars when they visited Ulaanbaatar (e.g., see Chandra 2013, 71–72).<sup>2</sup> As Katerina Clark (2011) explores in an earlier Soviet context, these travel opportunities, correspondences, and interactions distinguished the special status of these scholars.

Zunduin Dorj's (2011) travel narrative, "The Family of the Lenin Collective," which was written in 1977 for a book about the Hungry Steppe in Uzbekistan, provides an opportunity to document how Mongolian socialist travel writing resembles that of the Soviet travel genre. According to Jaroslav David and Jana Davidová Glogarová, a key quality of Soviet travelogues is its "homogeneity" (2017, 298), suggesting its value as propaganda and the official requirements that it present an "uncritical admiration" (2017, 298) for the Soviet Union. Dorj's (2011) travelogue demonstrates many of these typical Soviet strategies, in which readers expected depictions of well-run socialist societies, ethnically diverse and harmonious working groups, and beautiful landscapes that have also been controlled by socialist development.

When Dorj (2011) first arrives to the Lenin Collective, he reports on its open and multiethnic nature; the secretary of the Lenin Collective Komsomol Committee tells him that it is an *Intyernatsional* district, inviting him to talk to any of the many ethnic groups (*olon ündesten yastan*) who lived there. When Dorj enters the house of an elderly Uzbek family, he notes how he is immediately welcomed and treated as a guest, and Dorj declares that this is the case for all visitors to homes in the Soviet Union (31). As the couple prepares food for him, Dorj notes signs of education in the home, including books by Marx and Lenin as well as a recent novel by the Kyrgyz

2 Damdinsüren appears as a character in René MacColl's *The Land of Genghis Khan* (1963) in a particularly comical scene: two Western travelers—a know-it-all British anthropologist and a crass American publisher—vie for Damdinsüren's attention. Humorously, the American publisher shows Damdinsüren his prized possession, a "Charles Dickens pickle spoon," which Damdinsüren understandably accepts as a gift, forcing the American to beg for its return (209).

writer, Chinghiz Aitmatov; there are six musical instruments in the room as well as a piano, and we learn from the father of the house that he has six children, some of whom are “scholars” (*erdemten*) and some who are “performers” (*jüjigchin*). When the oldest son arrives, carrying pails of mountain strawberries, he is ready to respond to Dorj’s inquiries about how many tons of cotton were delivered and how many harvester trucks were used in the cotton fields (31). Halfway through the travelogue, Dorj shifts to the first-person perspective of the elder Uzbek host, who tells the history of the region, including Lenin’s proclamation to irrigate the Hungry Steppe in 1918; the establishment of a small commune, in which his father was a member (33); and then the gradual irrigation development and growing cotton production, the construction of the Farkhad hydroelectric dam and the new town of Shirin, and the labor of 18,000 youth laborers in 1949 (33). The Uzbek host’s historical narrative emphasizes the ways in which Soviet theories, labor, institutions, and technology have transformed the natural landscape and shaped it for the use of Soviet citizens. David and Davidová Glogarová (2017) emphasize this point when writing about how Czechoslovakian travelogues depict Soviet landscapes, in particular, those of agricultural collectives: “Landscapes in which the natural world was combined with anthropological features became an ideological image celebrating the triumphant achievements of mankind” (302). According to the elderly Uzbek host who narrates the story, the Soviet transformation of the barren, arid, and unpopulated Hungry Steppe is a dramatic one, showing the positive intervention of the Soviet state to benefit its non-Russian citizens.

Besides the industrialization of the rural landscape and depictions of a successful, multiethnic modern collective with happy, educated agricultural workers (Bold 2013, 34), Dorj (2011) makes one rhetorical move that may challenge the “homogeneity” of the Soviet travelogue. Through the perspective of the Uzbek elder, Dorj relates the socialist development of the Hungry Steppe to a local retelling of the Persian Shirin and Farkhad folktale in which the death of the two heroes acts as an origins story of the bringing of water to the area. As we will see below when we examine Rinchen’s and Damdinsüren’s travelogues, this folktale, which predates the history of the Soviet Union (Dorj 2011, 33), provides a glimpse of alternative folk ideologies and different narratives and non-socialist discourses. It also provides an alternative to Soviet reportage and interviews with role models.

In summary, socialist Mongolian travel writing represents a hybrid of Western, Soviet, and Mongolian literary forms, including the use of dated diary entries (see Damdinsüren 1998f); Soviet formulas, moralistic conclusions, and reportage strategies, such as interviews and family visits with

socialist role models; and poetic threads describing landscapes and personal emotions. To provide but one example of this hybrid form, Rinchen (2015), when flying northwards towards Russia, uses metaphorical language to describe the Mongolian landscape from the airplane window. Giving his impression of Mongolian *gers*, he compares them to puffball mushrooms (4), and as he flies over Tsagaan Ereg (Sükhbaatar City) and Altanbulag, he spots the railroad “glinting in the sun” and “twisting like a snake” (5). His poetic landscape descriptions are a hallmark of patriotic poetry (Wickhamsmith 2020) and may have a pragmatic purpose, making his impressions more understandable to readers who may never have flown before. As we will see in the second half of this chapter, this hybrid travelogue genre can be adapted successfully for the rhetorical purposes of Rinchen and Damdinsüren, who appeal to their immediate, sympathetic readers as well as their Revolutionary Party gatekeepers and meet their rhetorical purposes by interweaving nationalist, internationalist, and cosmopolitan strategies.

### Rinchen and Damdinsüren: Travel Contexts

Rinchen’s (2015) *Account of a Journey to the West* and *Account of a Journey to the South* and Damdinsüren’s (1998f) *Notes about Japan* as well as six travel articles from the late 1950s and 1960s are authoritative Mongolian socialist travel texts. They were published by the official state publisher or appeared in Revolutionary Party newspapers or magazines, such as *Spark* (*Tsog*), *Truth* (*Ünen*), and *Literature and Art* (*Utga Zokhiol Uurlag*). Rinchen’s 1956 visit to Hungary was instrumental in motivating a small group of Hungarian students to conduct fieldwork in Mongolia, many of whom would become leading Mongolian Studies scholars (Teleki 2018, 70). Similarly, Rinchen’s 1957 trip to India was followed by that of the well-known artist, Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, and other students (Chandra 2013, 209). Damdinsüren’s travelogues, meanwhile, were reproduced in his *Collected Works* (*Tüüver Zokhiol*) as early as 1969 (Pürevjav 2008).

The historical contexts of both travelers are the same. After the deaths of Choibalsan in 1952 and Stalin in 1953 and the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress in the Soviet Union, in which Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s “Cult of Personality” (Edele 2019, 159–61), opportunities arose for Mongolian scholars during the Soviet “Thaw” to conduct research on Buddhism and pre-revolutionary texts and cultures—research that before 1955 would have been regarded as too nationalistic and inimical to the goals of building the modern socialist state (Bawden 1989, 414–16). In this specific historical

context, Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's travels are bound up in the politics of the Soviet Union. Rinchen, for example, traveled to Hungary, by way of Moscow, Lithuania, and Prague, leaving Ulaanbaatar on August 2, 1956; he then left Hungary on October 17, only a week before the Hungarian Uprising and, soon after that, the entry of Soviet troops. Despite Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's reputation as oppositional figures, it is important to note that their travel writing, unlike that of writers in the 1960s from the Baltic States and Eastern Europe (Burima 2016, 68, 70–71), does not challenge the Soviet Union and its expansion into Eastern Europe, Mongolia, and other parts of the Soviet periphery. As we will see below, the interweaving of nationalist, internationalist, and cosmopolitan rhetorical strands blunts such direct criticism of the Soviet Union.

Another historical factor is the status of the Soviet-Sino relationship. Damdinsüren, in 1956, wrote about his travel to Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, conducting literacy and script policy research, and both Rinchen and Damdinsüren traveled through China in 1957 on their way to India and Japan, respectively.<sup>3</sup> However, by the end of 1959, Soviet criticism of Mao's Great Leap Forward and the Chinese Communist Party's complaints about Soviet revisionism (Li 2012) rendered this type of travel and research impossible. The final political point of context is the cosmopolitan role of travel writing. Beyond the Soviet internationalist purposes of making connections between Mongolian and other parts of the Soviet world, Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's travels occur roughly at the same time as the beginning of official diplomatic relationships between Mongolia and India in 1955 and the efforts of political elites to make Mongolia a member of the United Nations, which occurred in 1961. In other words, the travel writing of Rinchen and

3 The dates of Rinchen's travels to China are not clear. In a meeting with Raghu Vira in December of 1955, Rinchen claims that he was sent to Hohhot "to warn them [Inner Mongolian officials] not to introduce the Russian script for writing Mongolian" (Chandra 2013, 89). In *Account of a Journey to the South*, Rinchen pinpoints his departure from Ulaanbaatar on March 27, 1957, at 11:30 in the morning, and he claims that he traveled to Inner Mongolia in the summer of that year to conduct research on ancient Mongolian documents (Rinchen 2015, 223); however, there is a discrepancy in this account, as Rinchen did not arrive in India until November 6, where he stayed for seven weeks before departing back to Mongolia on December 23 (Chandra 2013, 94). In any case, Rinchen's travel purposes to Inner Mongolia conflict with those of Damdinsüren, who while in Inner Mongolia, remarks about the modernization of Mongolian under the communist government in China. According to Damdinsüren (2001b), in the pre-communist feudal period, the Mongolian language of the various areas diverged into different dialects; yet, with the central government and a stronger official relationship between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, the dialects of Inner Mongolian "have the possibility of gradually becoming closer to each other and develop alongside the same path" (114).



Damdinsüren supports the political project to represent Mongolia as an independent modern socialist state.

A final point to consider is Rinchen's (2015) and Damdinsüren's (1998f) awareness of the colonizing assumptions about Mongolia that appeared in Western and Soviet travel writing. These concerns, as I indicated earlier, emerged in Natsagdorj's "Notes on the Trip to Berlin" and his political project to depict Mongolians as independent and modern subjects navigating urban and rural spaces. Other hints about Mongolians responding to these travel representations appear in literary sources. For example, Bökhiin Baast's (2021) "Images from a Single Day," published in 1964, demonstrates his awareness of how non-Mongolians depict Mongolian landscapes: "When the heat is so intense, we Mongolians describe the blue sky not as the overly clear blue sky that foreigners are so desperate to write about, but as the dense heat haze of a deep glowing blue that smells of burning" (122). What Baast is doing here is responding to Western travelers' clichés about Mongolian landscapes and comparing them to an internal, ethnic-based perception that these travelers cannot experience. Rinchen (2015) shows his knowledge of Western travel writing, citing the Austrian-American Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg's travel work on China (225) as well as Évariste Régis Huc and Joseph Gabet's fascination with the handicrafts of Mongolian women in the nineteenth century (204). In addition to this awareness, Damdinsüren's (1998f) appreciation of the fact that his Japanese hosts referred to his country by its official name, the Mongolian People's Republic, instead of "Gadaad Mongol," Damdinsüren's word-for-word translation of "Outer Mongolia" (615), divulges his sensitivity to how Mongolia is depicted in travel and political discourses outside of Mongolia.

### Nationalist, Internationalist, and Cosmopolitan Strategies

*If someone had read D. Natsagdorj's "From Ulaanbaatar to Berlin," they could have followed the old route to Berlin without being confused in the slightest. If they had such travelogues as Ts. Damdinsüren's Notes about Japan and B. Rinchen's Account of a Journey to the West with them while traveling in these places, they wouldn't have gotten lost.*  
—Zunduin Dorj (2011, 35)

In the quotation above, Dorj describes the travel writing of Natsagdorj, Rinchen, and Damdinsüren in terms of a "correspondence theory" of travel writing, emphasizing their utility as guidebooks. My interpretation differs

drastically, and I will examine these texts as deeply rhetorical, analyzing the details that Rinchen and Damdinsüren choose to include in terms of nationalist, internationalist, and cosmopolitan strategies, writing moves that have ideological consequences, especially in how these travelogues are received by a diverse group of Mongolian readers. For Rinchen (2015) and Damdinsüren (1998f), they state a rhetorical purpose of conveying these foreign spaces through the “eye” (*nüdeer*) or perspective of a Mongolian traveler. For Western readers, this perspectival methodology would intimate a personal, individualist subjectivity. For the purposes of Rinchen and Damdinsüren, however, this methodology may refer less to a personal perspective and more to ideological perspectives guided by nationalism, internationalism, or cosmopolitanism. In short, are these writers working from a Mongolian national perspective? A “universal” Soviet socialist perspective, which adopts the moral assumptions of the Soviet intellectual? (see Tromly 2012). Or, a cosmopolitan perspective that projects a different liberal universal subjectivity?

Within the brief historical context of the late 1950s and 1960s, I claim that travel writing offers an acceptable, non-oppositional medium for Rinchen (2015) and Damdinsüren (1998f) to express nationalist appeals to their readers. The malleability of travel writing offers these intellectuals opportunities to articulate a nationalist perspective by intermixing them with internationalist and cosmopolitan rhetorical strategies. This mixture of strategies allows Rinchen and Damdinsüren to reach sympathetic Mongolian readers as well as those official, “gatekeeper” readers who are interested in surveilling the ideological force of public texts. Unlike Clark’s (2011) and Benjamin Tromly’s (2012) uses of these concepts to express larger intellectual movements, dispositions, and roles for socialist intellectuals, I define them as rhetorical strategies, textual methods to persuade audiences and simultaneously blunt and amplify messages to different readers.

*Nationalist Strategies.* Rinchen’s (2015) and Damdinsüren’s (1998f) shaping of travel writing to express acceptable nationalist stances makes this genre a good platform to share their research in linguistics, literature, Buddhism, and pre-revolutionary culture. For example, in Rinchen’s (2015) introductions to his travels to Hungary and India, he mentions literary texts that he had read from his childhood, including the sixteenth-century Chinese novel, *Journey to the West*, and the ancient Indian folktales of King Araji Booji. Rinchen’s larger point is this: Mongolian literary history—and, hence, Mongolian identity—is not limited to the recent socialist past but to a more distant past involving Chinese, Tibetan, and Indian traditions. Similarly, Damdinsüren’s travel purposes, though on face value scholarly and related to the interests of socialist

institutions, are also tacitly nationalist. In his trip to the Asian-African Writers' Conference in Tashkent, for example, he tells his readers that he is interested in showing the relevance of old, pre-revolutionary texts to new (i.e., socialist) audiences (1998e, 613); in his month-long visit to Buryatia, he divides his travel purpose into a Soviet-mediated interest in the modern socialist conditions of Buryad Mongolians as well as an opportunity to study ancient literary texts (1998a, 630). Consistent with this scholarly purpose to rediscover these pre-revolutionary texts and to study the early links of Mongolia with China, Tibet, India, and other cultures, Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's nationalist appeals occur when they ground the origins of words and place names in Mongolian, reflect upon Mongolian word usage and syntax, compare the places they are visiting with Mongolia, focus on the history of *mongol bichig* and Mongolian literacy, and comment on the historical, textual, and intellectual relationships between Mongolia and other countries.

In addition to poetic, personal appeals in which Rinchen and Damdinsüren relate directly to their readers as fellow Mongolians, misrecognition scenes are another way for these intellectuals to suggest nationalist hints. On a stopover in Kazan, Rinchen (2015, 17) is misrecognized as a Russian Tartar by an airport official, a moment of confusion that then initiates the cultural sharing of comparable words in Tartar and Mongolian as well as folk songs. Later, in Rinchen's first morning in Budapest, several countryside Hungarians introduce themselves, yet Rinchen, responding in German, informs them that he does not understand Hungarian. Surprised, they ask him why he can't speak his own native language (i.e., Hungarian), having misrecognized him as someone from the Kartsag region, where, according to one of the elderly Hungarians, there had been historical connections with Mongolia (50). Quite subtly, these misrecognition scenes allow Rinchen to remind his readers of the central role of Mongolian in Russian and Eastern European history; similarly, Rinchen's "recognition" of Mongolian facial features in the people he observes in Rangoon, Burma, also shows the historical presence of the Mongol Empire (242).

Comparable to Rinchen, Damdinsüren's rhetorical purposes focus on the national role of Mongolia and its historical and continuing presence in the world. When traveling through Soviet Central Asia and meeting with Soviet and non-Soviet authors, Damdinsüren shares with his readers cultural examples of how these authors' countries intersect with Mongolia, including the Mongolian word for "leather" (*bulgaar*), coming from Bolgar in Soviet Asia, comparisons of place names in Uzbekistan and Azeri words with Mongolian origins (1998b, 640–41), the similarity of folktales, and the idiomatic use of "bedouin" (*biduin yavakh*) (1998e, 614, 617–19; see also 1998c).

*Internationalist Strategies.* Rinchen and Damdinsüren interweave nationalist appeals with those of Soviet internationalism, which should be considered as complementary rhetorical forces. Both intellectuals are aware of the values and institutions of modern Soviet internationalism, which they address through Mongolian socialist formulas about literacy, the exploitative nature of Western capitalism, and Soviet scientific and industrial progress. In Uzbekistan, Damdinsüren (1998e) honors the mediating role of the Soviet Union and Russian, the language of Soviet internationalism, in uniting writers and intellectuals from postcolonial Africa and Asia. In Azerbaijan, Damdinsüren (1998b, 638) takes pains to show his readers how this distant place interconnects with Mongolia, including the sights of hydroelectric dams and newly constructed towns in Azerbaijan that he compares to Darkhan<sup>4</sup> in Mongolia, as well as a factory that produces large steel pipes on the Caspian coast, which are used in modern Mongolian construction. Similarly, in Riga, Latvia, Damdinsüren (1998d) visits several museums, factories, and collectives; in a radio factory, he reminds his readers that they are the source of all the Riga-10 radio receivers that are in many Mongolian homes (645). In Riga, he is also aware of the internal Soviet travel “industry” when he encounters 500 Russian Buryad Mongolians who arrived in thirteen train cars: “It was an interesting sight to see Soviet people traveling together in the summer through their wide and beautiful homeland” (647). Damdinsüren’s use of “homeland” (*nutag*) to depict the Soviet Union for the travel of the Buryad Mongolians emphasizes the internationalist point that the Soviet Union was a multiethnic society shared by European Latvians and Buryads as a common homeland.

*Cosmopolitan Strategies.* Juxtaposed alongside nationalist and internationalist strategies are cosmopolitan strategies that signal interests beyond the national Mongolian borders and those of the Soviet world. Clark (2011) defines cosmopolitanism as “a desire to interact with the cultures and intellectuals of the outside world, and especially of Europe, and to expand their [i.e., the socialist intellectuals’] own horizons and those of their compatriots” (5). Nicolai Volland (2017), relating cosmopolitanism to Chinese socialism, defines it as the “global socialist culture” that served as the “underlying framework” of the national culture (188). Volland describes the uneasy, quiet persistence of cosmopolitan scholars, arguing that even during the most xenophobic moments of an authoritarian state like communist China, cosmopolitanism, though “underground,” still holds an

4 Darkhan is a planned industrial town in north-central Mongolia and was constructed in the early 1960s (Atwood 2004, 132–33).

important role for intellectuals (187). For our purposes, cosmopolitanism, which, similar to internationalism, should not be regarded as the opposite of nationalism, provides an alternative to Soviet internationalist culture; that is, the cosmopolitan impulse offsets the cultural power and shared socialist culture of Soviet institutions, enabling Rinchen and Damdinsüren to consider cultural connections with the West or non-Soviet countries such as China, Burma, India, Hong Kong, and Japan. If Russian is the language of internationalism, then cosmopolitanism encourages language learning, comparative linguistics, translation, and the development of world literature. For example, Rinchen, who corresponded in French, German, and English in addition to Russian and Mongolian, also cites many non-Soviet texts in his travel writing, including John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the works of Stefan Zweig, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and many ancient Chinese and Indian texts that fall outside the expectations of Soviet internationalism.

It is important to remember that the cultural cosmopolitanism of Rinchen and Damdinsüren differs from the Edenic projects of Frans Larson and other travelers and expatriates. These Europeans' cosmopolitanism bases itself on a deep understanding of Mongolian culture and language, to the extent that it elides their national identities and, more problematically, depicts Mongolian culture as unchanging and outside of history. Moreover, Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's cosmopolitanism is different from that of the Western travelers who visit Mongolia in the twenty-first century (see chapter 5). These more reflective and cynical contemporary travelers demonstrate an awareness of their Western privilege, one that allows them to travel and represent Mongolia freely to their Western audiences.

### **Rinchen: Literacy and Nationalism**

In the introduction to *Account of a Journey to the West*, Rinchen (2015) explicitly tells his readers that he is relating his observations of foreign places through a "Mongolian journalistic perspective" ("mongol setgүүлчын нүдээр") and, at the same time, as a "writer who truly loved his mother country and its people" (22). In addition to these statements, Rinchen clarifies that the "culture" of Hungary and the other places he visits in Soviet Russia are his main interest (22). For Rinchen, these journalistic goals do not conflict with his nationalist perspectives, nor with his fascination with cosmopolitan culture, which will present him many opportunities to make comparisons with Mongolian language and culture, thus reinforcing his nationalist goals.

How Rinchen makes a nationalist-filtered travelogue acceptable to the various ideological tastes of his readers is by magnifying socialist literacy themes and language scenes and saturating his readers with examples of Mongolian language and language usage. By doing so and working within Soviet internationalist institutions and applying Soviet formulas and travel reportage expectations to his otherwise unorthodox travelogue, Rinchen makes his overall nationalist rhetorical strategy fit with his internationalist goals and cosmopolitan cultural interests.

Most obviously, Rinchen saturates his readers with observations about language, language usage, etymology, word choice, literacy, and language change. This sensitivity to language is only tangentially related to his travels yet directly related to his ultimate purpose: to place Mongolia firmly into the center of the Soviet internationalist world in which he is traveling and to promote the role of Mongolian language and culture, by which he means the culture embedded in the thousand-year-old traditions of oral and written language. Flying into the airspace of the Soviet Union, Rinchen immediately explores the etymological origins of Siberia and Lake Baikal, tying both to Mongolian origins. After comparing Lake Baikal with Lake Khövsgöl, he quickly digresses to explain that the pronunciation of this place term has shifted due to the influence of Russian travelers. In Irkutsk, Rinchen describes a brief conversation with a Buryad Mongolian from eastern Buryatia, showing more examples of Mongolian dialects. After discovering that the Buryad is a doctor, Rinchen asks him why he used “*argachin*” (“method person”) and not the more common (i.e., Khalkha) Mongolian term “*emch*.” The doctor explains that *emch* has negative connotations tied to the medical practices of Mongolian Buddhism. Rinchen also reports the Buryad doctor’s praise for the role of the October Revolution in developing and educating the Buryads. In these examples, Rinchen demonstrates his rhetorical flexibility, shifting from nationalist points of Mongolian identity, language, and culture ubiquitous in the Soviet Union to the internationalist themes of anti-Buddhism and socialist education, and citing indirectly through the Buryad doctor a Soviet theme about the development of ethnic groups under socialism.

As Rinchen (2015) tours the typical Soviet itinerary of exhibitions, Academy of Science institutions, and Hungarian historical sites, he continues to use his observations and experiences to focus his readers on Mongolian language and word choice. One digression is prompted by a Soviet ethnic agricultural exhibition in Moscow, where Rinchen enters an early Islamic Azeri stone pavilion, an experience that triggers a paragraph-long discussion on the preference of urban Mongolians to use “*pavilion*” instead of an older

Mongolian word, “*asar*.” Rinchen critiques urban Mongolians’ cosmopolitan preference for Western words:

People who like to use “*pavilion*,” don’t know that “*asar*” is still used in foreign languages, [the same as] a word like “*maslo*” [butter], which is our “*tos*,” or “*yaablog*” [apple], which is used by some city people, who are not aware that “*alim*,” the word we use in our written language, is similar to that in other international languages related to ours such as Hungarian, Tartar, Bashkir, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kirgiz, Azeri, Turkish, and Uyghur, and they use “*yaablog*,” not showing off their culture through foreign words but revealing their word choices are only a thin film of gold gilded onto brass. (25)

Rinchen’s critique of urban word choice collapses these cosmopolitan desires for European words with the influx of Soviet Russian internationalist terms into the socialist Mongolian vocabulary. That is, it is not always certain whether Rinchen is critiquing the false sophistication of European loan words or the colonizing infiltration of Russian Soviet words. Related to the popularity of “*pavilion*,” for example, Rinchen expresses disappointment that *süüder zurag* (movie; literally, “shadow picture”) had fallen out of use in favor of the “foreign, affected word of ‘*kino*’ in the city” (23–24). In both cases, “*kino*” and “*pavilion*” are commonly used words in Soviet and non-Soviet European discourses. Rinchen also stresses the redundancy of terms such as “*emiin aptek*” (pharmacy; literally, a “medicine medicine store”), a mixing of Mongolian and Russian terms, and other terms, including the Russian loan word “*gradus*” (“degree”), which has a Greek etymology, as opposed to the Mongolian “*khuvi*” for telling the temperature (51). Although the rhetorical force of his criticism is undoubtedly nationalist, Rinchen does not base these word choice judgments on indigenous notions of value, which he tacitly does do, for example, when he talks proudly about the “million-word” vocabulary of Mongolian (103) or its rich ability to convey numerical concepts (54). Instead, going back to the “*pavilion*” digression, he favors “*asar*” not because it is essentially Mongolian, but because it is still in use in Turkey and Soviet Central Asia. In effect, he discourages modern European cosmopolitan and Soviet internationalist word borrowing in favor of a historical and Central Asian cosmopolitanism. When relating the history of Rome and Egypt, for example, he self-consciously mentions the forms of Egypt (“*Misir*”) and Jerusalem (“*Orislim*”) that appear in *mongol bichig*, not the Russian or French forms (58). In one final example, Rinchen focuses on the written literary verbal form, “*-myi*,” not word choice or lexical borrowing;

in a four-page digression, Rinchen alerts his readers to the impoverishment of Mongolians expressing themselves if these types of subtle verbal forms are elided by the Cyrillic writing system (88–91).

Rinchen (2015) uses language scenes and humor to subtly emphasize what is lost by the official script change from *mongol bichig* to Cyrillic as well as the destruction of Buddhist and other pre-revolutionary texts. In a conversation that Rinchen holds with a young Tungus Russian about literacy, the Tungus man realizes that his language—which previously had no script before the socialist period—had a longer history in Cyrillic than Mongolian, which Rinchen tells him was mandated in 1942 (11). When it comes to alphabets, thus, the Tungus man claims that he is the elder in their “older brother, younger brother” relationship. Rinchen presents this scene as a comical one, yet he does explicitly tell his readers that the Tungus literary culture is “not the same as our great 1000-year literary tradition and culture” (11). Rinchen returns to the theme of the thousand-year history of Mongolian literacy several times throughout the travelogue, including when he lands in the Lithuanian airport on his way to Hungary, which allows him to emphasize the age of *mongol bichig* when compared with the relatively late date of the Latin-based Lithuanian alphabet (40). Clearly, Rinchen does not want to be regarded as a “younger brother.” Rinchen mutes his nationalist strategy by using a humorous tone and invoking the internationalist formula of “older brother, younger brother” that describes the paternalistic relationship between the Soviet center and the developing ethnic groups under its protection. Yet, Rinchen’s rhetorical crafting of this language scene becomes striking if it is compared against a letter he sent to the Indian intellectual, Raghu Vira, soon after his return from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Rinchen writes,

I have not forgotten our talks about the sad destiny of our national alphabet and of our beautiful and rich literary language which has been annihilated by Cyrillic and its barbaric orthography. At a single stroke we have lost all the progressive traditions of our literature, all our translations of the chief works of Chinese and Indian literature. We have been put in line with the Eskimos and other tribals who had the misfortune of not having a national script and literature. (Qtd. in Chandra 2013, 91)

In Rinchen’s correspondence to a non-Soviet intellectual, the playful bantering between Rinchen and the young Tungus, who was a member of the “other tribals who had the misfortune of not having a national script,” has been replaced by anger and hostility towards Cyrillization. In another



letter to Raghu Vira, when Rinchen is writing about three Mongolians who are traveling to India to learn Hindi, he derides two as “Cyrillic persons” who consider “yours is a country [i.e., India] of dreadful capitalism and You are an ogre of Capitalist Science” (qtd. in Chandra 2013, 101). In this case, Cyrillic is associated with the attitudes and discourses that constitute Soviet internationalism, which makes a genuine cosmopolitan exchange between students and scholars impossible.

In Rinchen’s (2015) second travelogue, *Account of a Journey to the South*, in which he travels to China, Burma, and India, Rinchen still focuses on the political and nationalist potential of literacy. Yet, paradoxically, as Rinchen travels farther away from Mongolia and the Soviet world, he frames literacy in internationalist ways, including the use of socialist formulas, to comment about Burmese and Indian postcolonialism and to critique American and British imperialism and cultural and linguistic dominance. That being said, his nationalist travel purpose is still clear. Rinchen continues to emphasize the overall importance of the ancient literary tradition of China and India on Mongolian literary culture and, when comparing Manchu colonialism with British colonization of Burma and India, Rinchen advocates for the preservation of Mongolian heritage (254). More personally, Rinchen tells his readers about how he misses his homeland (243) and reminisces about such sensory details as the smell of dried cow manure, or *argal* (255), that he encounters in the streets of Old Delhi.

In China, Burma, and India, Rinchen (2015) uses literacy as the key social variable to measure a country’s development; for Rinchen, literacy is a cultural resource that is contested between local, national, and colonizing British and North American forces. One ideal language scene occurs in Kunming, the last stop in China before Rinchen flies to Burma.<sup>5</sup> At night, Rinchen comes across a children’s street library, in which more than ten children are quietly sitting on chairs and reading by candlelight, only getting up to whisper questions to the street librarian about Chinese characters they did not know. Rinchen’s formulaic conclusion to this language scene, even though it depicts Chinese socialism, sounds close to that of Soviet internationalism: “It was excellent that through the help of the revolution, the masses of Chinese children have had the bright road of learning opened up for them” (232). In Rangoon, Rinchen includes a typical element from socialist travelogues, the conversation with a common worker, when he

5 The itinerary for Rinchen’s trip from Beijing to New Delhi was complicated, including these following stops: Taiyuan, Xian, Chengdu, and Kunming; then, Mandalay and Rangoon; he then flew directly from Rangoon to New Delhi flying on a British Overseas Airways Corporation jet.

questions a rickshaw driver about whether he is literate or not. The driver claims that he has not had the time to become literate as he spends his time trying to earn enough money to survive. When Rinchen asks him directly about the involvement of the local communist party, the driver—perhaps wisely—tells him that, likewise, he does not have any time for politics (239). Rinchen returns to an internationalist formula about Burmese literacy when he talks about the effects of British colonialism, which, though it suppressed the economy and educational development, was unable to destroy completely the earlier culture and the hundreds of years of folk art, architecture, and literature (241). At the same time, Rinchen alerts his readers to the fact that the linguistic environment is dominated not by Burmese folk traditions but by American magazines, gaudy covers, and literature (240).

In India, Rinchen (2015) comments on the inequality caused by British colonialism, which has had consequences for literacy and education. Rinchen critiques the unequal linguistic levels, differentiating an intellectual, business, and government service class educated in English from the Indian masses who do not learn English and who are largely illiterate in Hindi and other Indian vernacular languages (255). What is interesting is that Rinchen frames these criticisms in terms of Mongolian and Soviet internationalism, first referring to the marginalized Indian masses with the socialist Mongolian term for commoner, *ard*, and then comparing their level of literacy with those of Mongolians and Russians before their respective socialist revolutions (256). Rinchen resorts to Soviet internationalist formulas, linking this postcolonial reawakening of education in Indian languages and interest in earlier cultures to the influence of the “social order of the October Revolution” that does not “differentiate small national groups from large ones” and respects all of these groups in common, not determining “the progress of humanity’s cultural traditions” on the basis of race and ethnicity (251–52). Again, Rinchen is showing his rhetorical dexterity, clearly shifting away from his Mongolian nationalist perspectives and his fascination in cross-cultural cosmopolitanism, to focus his readers on the internationalist presence of Soviet literacy and sponsorship throughout the developing and postcolonial world.

### **Damdinsüren’s Anti-Imperialism & Nationalism**

Damdinsüren’s (1998f) *Notes about Japan*, published as an 88-page monograph in 1958, was his longest travelogue, describing his travel to and participation in the Third World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in

1957 as a representative of the Mongolian delegation.<sup>6</sup> Damdinsüren's trip began on July 27, 1957, when he flew to Beijing, and then to Changsha and Guangzhou in the People's Republic of China, before an extended stopover in Hong Kong, where he and members of his delegation awaited for official approval, and then arrived in Japan on the final day of the conference, August 16. The rest of *Notes about Japan* depicts Damdinsüren's travels with the delegation throughout Japan before their return to Mongolia at the end of August. In this travel narrative, Damdinsüren presents himself as a cosmopolitan intellectual, who like Rinchen, criticized Western capitalism and colonialism, yet without speaking entirely from a socialist internationalist framework. Damdinsüren, moreover, anticipates the conventions of Western travel writing, and, although his Soviet-based travel narratives in the 1950s and 1960s show him making these distant Soviet places meaningful for his readers, his *Notes about Japan* demonstrates the ability of Mongolians to operate in a non-Soviet-mediated world. In short, once Damdinsüren finds himself out of the Soviet world, he navigates a complicated set of colonial and postcolonial contexts, and he finds personal and cosmopolitan strategies to supplement his internationalist-based criticisms of the United States and Great Britain. In effect, Damdinsüren's role as a cosmopolitan intellectual enhances his overall nationalist strategies of observing non-Soviet cultures from a unique Mongolian perspective.

Damdinsüren (1998f) shows that he is aware of the conventions of Soviet and Western travelogues, using dated headings as section breaks, listing his Japanese meals, complaining about the heat and about having to wait around for his Japanese visa, taking bus tours, feeding the deer at Nara, going to the movies, categorizing the different types of tourists in Tokyo, and, in short, acting like a typical tourist. In one scene, Damdinsüren takes on the role of the travel writer more directly: looking down from his hotel window over Guangzhou, he becomes the "Western," objective traveler surveying the cityscape and dispassionately observing such intimacies as a young woman bathing herself (529). In Guangzhou he exclaims to his readers that he and his Mongolian travel partners were actually living these experiences and not reading them from a book (532), a stock Mongolian travel idiom that emphasizes how travel experiences are usually mediated through images and textual forms.

In *Notes about Japan*, Damdinsüren (1998f) shows the presence of Mongolia as a central culture—that is, not as a peripheral part of the Soviet

6 In Damdinsüren's 1969 *Collected Works*, this travelogue was retitled to *Travel Notes on the Trip to Japan* (*Yapond Ochson Zamyn Temdeglel*).

Union—and underscores his point by stating: “Despite the fact that Mongolians are few in number, we were happy to see how far the reputation of Mongolia and its language had spread” (537). Damdinsüren hears Mongolian when he first visits the Japanese consulate in Hong Kong, as one of the Japanese administrators had studied Mongolian and had spent time in Inner Mongolia (532). He encounters a Russian Tartar from Inner Mongolia who greets him in Mongolian in Hong Kong; even their Chinese guide in Hong Kong realizes that he had learned some formal Mongolian greetings as a child, though couldn’t remember why. In Japan, they are greeted with signs in *mongol bichig* and Mongolian Cyrillic, and as Damdinsüren and the Mongolian delegation travel throughout Japan, they visit with several Japanese experts of Mongolian Studies and language institutions with Mongolian as one of the language options. Having returned to Tokyo a week before his departure, Damdinsüren visits with several Mongolian-language Japanese students, and he includes a letter in Mongolian that one of the students wrote to Damdinsüren after he returned to Mongolia (589). In addition to the specific focus on language, Damdinsüren reports on many of the speeches from the Japanese representatives that highlighted Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire (566, 581).

Beyond this nationalist purpose of centering Mongolia for his readers, Damdinsüren (1998f) provides an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist critique of Great Britain and the United States. In this regard, Damdinsüren meets the expectations of Soviet travel writing, in which travelers extol socialist accomplishments in Soviet countries and focus on social problems in capitalist economies. As an example of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist criticism, Damdinsüren applies socialist concepts to his observations about the poverty and inequality in Hong Kong; according to Damdinsüren, who resorts to a socialist formula, the only difference between China and Hong Kong is that the working classes in Hong Kong are “sweating” for the wealthy or higher classes (532). Similarly, in two other places in his Hong Kong travels, he contrasts scenes of wealth and beauty with reminders about local people living in poverty (533, 535). In Japan, Damdinsüren focuses more on the lack of opportunities for women to find work (561), the difficulties of paying for postsecondary education and then finding an appropriate career (588), and the reasons for prostitution (594–96). Damdinsüren bases his arguments on personal conversations that he held with Japanese workers.

A more specific and personal criticism of capitalism in Hong Kong and Japan is when Damdinsüren (1998f) guides his readers through his interactions with the news media, cinema, and advertising. According to Damdinsüren, the Hong Kong press dwells too much on sensationalist crime

stories (535) and “distorts” (*guivuuulalt*) news stories about China, such as the poor agricultural conditions in Inner Mongolia, which had prompted ethnic Tartars in the area to migrate to Turkey through Hong Kong. Damdinsüren, instead of relying upon the typical Soviet socialist formulas denigrating capitalism, counters these news stories with a personal account, telling his readers about an encounter with a presumably Russian-speaking Tartar from Inner Mongolia, who claimed that he was not migrating to Turkey because of economic reasons but for those of cultural and linguistic preservation (536). On a tour bus trip through Tokyo, Damdinsüren hears from the tour guide that the residence of General Douglas A. MacArthur (commander of the US occupying forces in Japan from 1945 to 1951) was respected by the Japanese people, yet a fellow Japanese traveler confides in him that the guide repeated these sentiments because there were so many American tourists on the bus (584). Damdinsüren is also impressed by the technology of the Cinerama film he sees, *The Seven Wonders of the World*, yet he considers it an example of American propaganda, one that ignores the fact that the American presence in Japan is unpopular (583). Identical to the press and movie industry, Damdinsüren points out that capitalist advertising doesn't pay attention to the distinctions between truth and lies in order to make money; in this case, he complains about a beer that he ordered that is called a Pilsen, which wasn't the Czechoslovakian beer but an imitation (539).

The point that I am making with these examples is that Damdinsüren (1998f) carefully crafts his observations, experiences, and conversations to depict himself as a traveling cosmopolitan, working in different languages and critiquing the non-Soviet world. In these cases, he interlinks the nationalist, internationalist, and cosmopolitan strategies closely together, and he adapts the genre of travel writing to meet these various goals and, like Rinchen, to appeal to a wide range of Mongolian audiences.

Throughout *Notes about Japan*, Damdinsüren (1998f) foregrounds his criticism of American imperialism. He points directly to the United States as the imperial power in Japan and notes the presence of Americans (560, 572, 593), even the spectral presence of an abandoned military base near Tokyo (600). In an antinuclear proliferation event, Damdinsüren expresses his anger towards an American journalist and a small group of American dignitaries who avoid talking about the United States base in Okinawa and who claim they are only speaking for themselves, not for the United States government (570); Damdinsüren concludes, therefore, that the American public is not genuinely against militarization and nuclear proliferation (570). Similarly, towards the end of the travelogue, Damdinsüren tells his readers that even though the United States forces have left the main island,

they can't forget the fact that Americans still control the sea and the air and have not completely removed their forces (601). As he departs Japan, Damdinsüren reminds his readers that the United States owns 70% of the Japanese airport, commenting that "the smoke of the American jets was polluting the skies, which were no longer blue but black" (611). Damdinsüren repeats these images about blackness, "black spots," and pollution caused by the United States (582), as when he points out that the proliferation of prostitution in Japan is a sign of American "pollution" (*bokhir*) (596).

One final strategy to criticize Western imperialism, perhaps the most personal and powerful, is Damdinsüren's (1998f) application of the ethnographic conventions of Western travel writing and the use of the anthropological gaze. Damdinsüren challenges the travel genre and reverses the gaze. Using an ironic ethnography, Damdinsüren closely observes people from the United States and from Great Britain, reversing the typical ethnographic descriptions of Mongolians, such as their habits, dirtiness, and clothing. On the plane from Hong Kong to Japan, for example, Damdinsüren notes the insularity of the Americans and British passengers, who ignore the other Asian passengers and interact only with themselves (542). He describes what they are wearing: the men's shirts include patterns of people fighting each other, and women wear miniskirts emblazoned with the image of a couple kissing in front of a church (542). Sarcastically, he tells his readers that these are the "cultured" clothes of these Westerners (542). A more emphatic use of his ironic anthropological gaze is his observations of an American man at a Tokyo restaurant who knew nothing about Mongolia and who smelled badly of sweat. Damdinsüren tells his readers: "In a place that has plenty of water, what a primitive person this is who can't wash himself well" (593–94). Most importantly, Damdinsüren's travel writing depicts American and British tourists and expatriates as symbols of parochialism whose habits do not fit the cosmopolitan expectations of Hong Kong and Japan.

## Conclusion

After the 1990 Democratic Revolution, socialist-era intellectual figures such as Natsagdorj, Rinchen, and Damdinsüren have become markers of authentic Mongolian nationalism. They have transcended the socialist past, and their work has been disassociated from their socialist and Soviet internationalist institutions and sponsors. In post-socialist Mongolia, public statuary, exhibitions, awards named in their honor, and new editions mark their public presence. For example, one popular contemporary novel,

Oyungerel Tseveddamba's strongly anti-socialist *The Green-Eyed Lama*,<sup>7</sup> provides a heroic representation of Rinchen. An exemplar of the heroic intellectual ideal, Rinchen—or, that is, the character of Rinchen in the novel—shows his refusal to compromise and his willingness to die for his beliefs (Tseveddamba and Falt 2018).

What I have been attempting in my examination of Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's travel writing is to emphasize that the nationalist strategies they used are not as straightforward as these post-socialist representations. As socialist travel writers, Rinchen and Damdinsüren blended their nationalist perspectives with their cosmopolitan and internationalist strategies, exploiting the rhetorical opportunities of travel writing. They communicate effectively with “ideal” readers—those who can interpret the nationalist force of Rinchen's and Damdinsüren's observations and examples. Rinchen (2015), more than Damdinsüren (1998f), showcases these rhetorical purposes by addressing his readers directly. Anticipating his socialist readers' expectations for observations about the Hungarian economy, industry, and politics—the staples of Soviet reportage—Rinchen reminds (2015) them about his methodological perspectives. Instead of offering them information that will soon be “outdated” (*khuuchrakh*) or that can be easily found in newspapers or on the radio, Rinchen writes about what interests him from the perspective of a “Mongolian journalist,” a “Mongolian specialist” (“mongol sekheetnii nüdeer”), and a “patriot who loves the heritage and culture of the Mongolian people” (213). In the final paragraph of *Account of a Journey to the West*, Rinchen showcases his rhetorical connection with his readers by giving out his post office box address and appealing to his readers to contact him to tell him what they found to be interesting or unnecessary “padding” (“sul ügnii nurshaan met”); Rinchen claims that he will consider their advice and criticisms and create a “close reader-writer relationship” as he writes his upcoming travelogues on Czechoslovakia, China, and India (214).

Though Damdinsüren does not appeal to his readers as directly as Rinchen, a 1975 essay (Damdinsüren 1990) about his writing process in the late 1920s as a member of the Revolutionary Writers' Group shows his desire to manipulate genres to fit socialist themes, meet the expectations of readers, and avoid the problem of delivering “direct propaganda” (“shuud ukhuulga”) (115). Damdinsüren's essay focuses on how he adapted traditional, pre-socialist literature to fit the socialist themes of his short

7 *The Green-Eyed Lama* (*Nogoon Nüden Lam*) remains popular with Mongolian readers; on March 30, 2022, for example, it was read aloud on the Clubhouse audio social media platform.

story, “The Rejected Girl” (“Gologdson Khüükhen”), yet the rhetorical awareness that Damdinsüren demonstrates may also be applicable to his recent travel writing in the 1950s and 1960s. In any case, he understands that genres can be manipulated to meet nationalist and socialist purposes and that his texts can become like *ovoo* (ceremonial rock cairns), built up gradually through a process of research, revision, editing, and responding to criticism (115).

Therefore, for Rinchen and Damdinsüren, the rhetorical power of travel writing is its mercurial nature; it is a textual form, like literary translation (Baer 2006), that allows these Mongolian intellectuals to render these political and oppositional possibilities safely and ironically, blunting their impact on official audiences. It is undoubtedly “rhetorical” for Rinchen (2015) to reflect so obsessively on his own word choice, especially in the genre of travel writing. Simply by pointing out his preference for a Mongolian term such as *davkhar* (floor), for example, as opposed to the Russian term, *eytaj* (253), Rinchen is making a point that can be taken up in several ways by different readers: Is he critiquing the cosmopolitan vanity of elite Mongolian urbanites, who use foreign terms as a type of status symbol? Or, is he making a particular nativist point about Mongolian usage? Or, is he critiquing the infiltration of Russian terms? Or, likewise, is he making a subtle point about Russian colonial influence, juxtaposing it against the linguistic colonialism of Great Britain in India?

From the rhetorical “distance” that travel writing provides, socialist writers like Rinchen and Damdinsüren successfully complicate their nationalist purposes, in effect becoming acceptable patriots, socialists, and cosmopolitans. I use “acceptable” purposefully, to acknowledge the rhetorical strategies of a traveler and socialist intellectual like Rinchen and to avoid hagiographical accounts that focus too heavily on Rinchen’s nationalist goals. In his initial travels in Budapest, for example, Rinchen (2015) appreciated the fact that Hungarian architecture and civic places were different from urban spaces in the Soviet Union (49); yet, Rinchen’s observations do not coincide with Hungarian critics of the Soviet influence, who were wary of the Sovietization of Hungarian public spaces, official symbols, reading material, and language teaching (Lendvai 2008, 28–29). More to the point, at the end of his travelogue, Rinchen is clearly writing from a period after the events of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, yet he carefully avoids discussing the causes of the Hungarian Uprising and the consequences of the Soviet military invasion. Again, the acceptability of Rinchen’s nationalist strategies depends on the ways he interweaves his internationalist and cosmopolitan strategies.



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## 5 Contemporary Travel Writing about Mongolia: Imaginative Geographies and Cosmopolitan Visions

### Abstract

Western travel writing about Mongolia after the 1990 Democratic Revolution has proliferated, consisting of a diverse group of authors writing for niche presses, fragmented audiences, and different media. This chapter explores two imaginative geographies, the “travelers’ frontier” (Tavares and Brosseau 2006) and “pure nomadism” (Myadar 2021). These imaginative geographies constrain how Western travelers experience and represent Mongolia, reinforcing assumptions that Mongolians are limited to rural pastoral identities and stuck in the past or trapped in an ahistorical present. By reading these imaginative geographies through Debbie Lisle’s (2006) “colonial vision” and “cosmopolitan vision,” this chapter shows how contemporary travel writing blends nostalgia, colonizing moves, and reflections about Western privilege and Mongolian identity.

**Keywords:** colonial vision, cosmopolitan privilege, cosmopolitan vision, imaginative geography, pure nomadism, travelers’ frontier

In an August 4, 2019, episode of the BBC travel show, *The Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan*, the British comedian, Romesh Ranganathan, explores key symbols of Mongolian national identity—wrestling, a Gobi Buddhist monastery, shamanism, Chinggis Khan, open landscapes, and eagle hunting.<sup>1</sup> The show’s humor derives from Ranganathan’s negotiations of his vegan beliefs with the challenges of Mongolian pastoralism. For example, he rides on the top of a jeep instead of on a camel or horse; rather than

<sup>1</sup> Ironically, although characterized as a Kazakh cultural practice, eagle hunting has become an important travel symbol for Mongolia.

witness an eagle kill a live animal, Ranganathan has it dive-bomb a remote-control toy (when this doesn't attract the interest of the eagle, Ranganathan acquiesces to tying a piece of meat on top of the toy). According to the BBC website for the show, Ranganathan travels to Mongolia, "a country which he has almost no prior knowledge of, save for the fact that it is famously in the middle of nowhere"; moreover, "It is the most sparsely populated country on earth—a vast wilderness, almost untouched by man." During the show, Ranganathan tries to explore "a country of contradictions," juxtaposing the traffic jams and pollution of the main urban center, Ulaanbaatar, with the "vast empty open spaces" of the steppe and countryside ("Mongolia" 2019).

This chapter begins with *The Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan* to showcase the differences of the contemporary travel era, one inaugurated by the political events and economic reforms of the Democratic Revolution in the early 1990s. Ranganathan takes on the persona of twenty-first-century Western travelers, amateurs who arrive with little knowledge of the country and who poke fun at themselves and the ludicrous situations they find themselves in. Though Ranganathan and the show perpetuate some typical Romantic and Eurocentric notions about Mongolia, such as its peripheralness and, in contrast to a nighttime traffic jam in Ulaanbaatar, its limitless, boundless, and "untouched" primordial landscapes ("Mongolia" 2019), Ranganathan is certainly not performing what Debbie Lisle (2006) calls the "colonial vision," such as envisioning Mongolia from Eurocentric perspectives, making unethical generalizations about Mongolians, and exploiting his national, class, and gender privileges. In fact, as a non-white Hindu British ethnic minority, Ranganathan interrupts the whiteness of Western travel in Mongolia. It is too early to tell whether Ranganathan represents a trend in the democratization and diversification of contemporary Western travel writing about Mongolia, yet this travel era consists of more women travelers, much smaller and niche publishing houses, and more fragmented audiences.<sup>2</sup> Finally, as a documentary, *The Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan* underscores the importance of visual images in representing non-European cultures to Western audiences (Burns, Palmer, and Lester 2010) and exemplifies the proliferation of travel narratives in different media, including other travel documentaries (e.g., *Ash Dykes: Alone in Mongolia*, 2017; *Edge of Blue Heaven*, 1998; *Genghis Blues*, 1999; *The Horse Boy*, 2009; *Joanna Lumley's Trans-Siberian Adventure*, 2015; *The*

2 Other non-white travelers include, in *Genghis Blues* (1999), an African-American musician, Paul Peña, who travels to Tuva to participate in a throat-singing competition, and the Palestinian-Dutch American, Bassam Tarazi (2017).

*Longest Hole: Golfing across Mongolia*, 2019; *The Maestro of Mongolia*, 2014; *Wild Horses of Mongolia with Julia Roberts*, 2000), two reality adventure game shows (*Alone*, 2018; *Lost*, 2001), and Internet photograph platforms, author and travelers' websites, YouTube or other social media comments, and blogposts (e.g., Westwards 2016). Despite the proliferation of film and other media in the twenty-first century, my focus remains on written travelogues for the sake of continuity with the previous travel eras and to contribute to theories on contemporary travel writing that still privilege written texts.

This chapter engages theoretical conversations about the political and ethical potential of contemporary travel writing (e.g., Holland and Huggan 1998; Lisle 2006). Most broadly, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan (1998) question whether travel writing can still flourish without its key role in underwriting the values of colonialism and imperialism for Western audiences; stated differently, do travel writers require the colonial logic that constructs the non-West, the exotic, and "the other"? Lisle (2006) takes contemporary travel writing seriously as postcolonial texts that continue to build the Orientalizing archive, emphasizing the political consequences of travel writing because it operates at the "level of myth, imagination and storytelling" (278) when travelers reconstruct their travel experiences and depict non-European places and people. Lisle contributes two concepts to talk about the political and ethical orientations of contemporary travelers. On the one hand, Lisle's "colonial vision" implies travelers who maintain a Eurocentric framework and who are unreflective about their subject positions, their superiority, and their right to travel and represent others; on the other hand, the "cosmopolitan vision" categorizes travelers who are more reflective about their privileges, who undercut their authority and use self-deprecating humor, and who worry about the effects of their presence and of globalism on the people they encounter.

Lisle (2006) does not offer these two concepts as an unethical-ethical binary, as she is profoundly pessimistic about the political and ethical potential of contemporary travel writing, which she critiques for its political conservatism, its reliance upon stable modern liberal subjectivity, the rigidity of its form, and its tendency to resurrect, at least implicitly, colonial era attitudes and assumptions. Likewise, Lisle is skeptical of writers who adopt strategies of the "cosmopolitan vision," such as reflectiveness and humor, to promote a more ethical, anti-colonialist stance. Lisle warns that these cosmopolitan strategies may conceal the "rearticulation of Western authority" (261) and insufficiently interrogate the effects of Western global hegemony on travel writing and on travelers' cosmopolitan privilege, which

Lisle interrogates with such questions as “Why am I here? What am I doing here? What right do I have to speak for others?” (265).

Although readers, like me, may be frustrated by Lisle’s (2006) highly idealistic depiction of the political potential of travel writing, I enter these conversations to relate them to Mongolian Studies. Contemporary travel writing about Mongolia provides opportunities to explore imaginative geographies, the frames about people, cultures, histories, and landscapes that travelers produce and re-produce. In the following two sections, I examine two similar imaginative geographies, the “travelers’ frontier” (Tavares and Brosseau 2006) and “pure nomadism” (Myadar 2021), which reveal how contemporary travel writers, despite their explicit ethical and anti-colonial pronouncements, parallel the attitudes and colonial vision of writers from earlier travel eras. In the fourth section, I consider the ethical potential of the reflectiveness of several travel writers and their ability to recognize their own “cosmopolitan privilege” (Huggan 2009), arguing that these travel texts are rarely pure, monological public documents that can be easily categorized as perpetuating a “colonial vision” or a “cosmopolitan vision”; in such inconsistent travel texts as those of Louisa Waugh (2003), Erika Warmbrunn (2001), and Stephen Bodio (2003), these travelers demonstrate their ability to play ironically with the images and assumptions of colonial imaginative geographies, enabling them to depict Mongolians and others in more nuanced ways. In the final section, I foreground Mongolian agency in terms of these imaginative geographies and the ways in which Western travel writers produce these tropes, images, and myths about Mongolia. Local Mongolian elites have a vested interest in perpetuating these colonial and Orientalizing assumptions and tropes, as they represent important cultural materials for building a national identity in the twenty-first century.

### **The Travelers’ Frontier**

David Tavares and Marc Brosseau (2006) claim that travel writing about Mongolia published in the 1990s and in the early 2000s relies upon the imaginative geography of the “travelers’ frontier,” which compels travelers to “produce a conceptualization of Mongolia as a frontier travel destination where globalization’s homogenizing influences are yet to have an impact” (299). In other words, as Tim Youngs (2006; 2013) and Sarah Johnson (2006) have argued, Western travelers work from preconceived discourses, assumptions, and frameworks. According to Tavares and Brosseau (2006), writers

such as Nick Middleton (1992), Jasper Becker (1992), and Stanley Stewart (2002) use literary devices that reveal these explanatory frameworks and limit their representations of Mongolians and Mongolian landscapes. The “travelers’ frontier” generates historiographical assumptions that erase, simplify, or fix the Mongolian past, enabling travelers, like those from earlier travel eras, to identify with Chinggis Khan and thirteenth-century travelers and depict Mongolia as a “time machine” to pre-modern or medieval eras (Tavares and Brosseau 2006, 311).

Although Tavares and Brosseau (2006, 300) downplay the history of travel writing about Mongolia, the Orientalizing tropes, images, and strategies produced by the imaginative geography of the “travelers’ frontier” are similar to those we have been exploring in earlier chapters. Among many possibilities, travelers refer to Mongolia nostalgically as a remote, mysterious, and mystical place with rural landscapes and pastoral practices that are “authentic,” whereas urban spaces are “intrusive” and inauthentic Mongolian spaces (309). Moreover, the “travelers’ frontier” influences the travelers’ personas. They depict themselves as pioneers or lone adventurers, declaring themselves the only or the first Westerner in an area. These travelers imagine that global capitalism and mass tourism have yet to penetrate Mongolia. For example, Jill Lawless (2002), in her reportage-based travel account that explores national Mongolian politics in the late 1990s, calls Mongolia the “final frontier” in terms of adventure travel. She writes, “If Mongolians could bottle the soul-stirring properties of their country for export to overstimulated Westerners, they’d grow rich” (114); in fact, these “soul-stirring properties” have been “bottled”—distilled in the “travelers’ frontier” images and myths that appear in almost every travel text.

Instead of updating Tavares and Brosseau’s (2006) research with more examples of the “travelers’ frontier,” I will focus only on a few examples that show how the “travelers’ frontier” can coincide with a “cosmopolitan vision” (Lisle 2006). These travelers, in other words, do not participate in Lisle’s “colonial vision” and avoid making explicit racist, Orientalizing, and Eurocentric claims. However, despite these travelers’ different travel purposes and ethical assumptions, their indebtedness to the imaginative framework of the “travelers’ frontier” dictates their use of persistent colonizing and Orientalizing images and myths.

One example in which a traveler’s “cosmopolitan vision” is framed in terms of the “travelers’ frontier” is Patricia Sexton’s (2013) *Live from Mongolia*. This travelogue narrates the author’s decision to quit her high-paying job on Wall Street to become a television journalist in Ulaanbaatar. First, Sexton uses a “time-traveling” metaphor: Mongolia, by which Sexton means the



“nomadic countryside,” serves as a “trip back in time” (143). The Mongolian countryside is a timeless and unchanging place:

Mongolia’s relationship with the steppe is its ongoing relationship with the past. Tradition is handed down to the next generation as a matter of necessity. Things are done just the ways they were done hundreds of years ago, and we’d soon see this for ourselves. (142)

For Sexton, this Orientalist lens of the anachronistic nature of pastoral and rural Mongolia allows her to relate herself and her readers to the distant historical biography of Chinggis Khan, who ends up fitting a neo-liberal American “rags-to-riches” narrative. Mongolia becomes a place for Sexton to explore her neo-liberal, individualist ethics, a “cosmopolitan vision” that sounds like a cluster of self-help clichés: Sexton finds her destiny and makes her dreams come true. Similarly, Mongolia has a therapeutic role for Western travelers, allowing an extremely shy woman to work with horses and an isolated French woman to “achieve their dreams” (243). Despite her uses of the “travelers’ frontier” and the limitations of her “cosmopolitan vision,” I return to Sexton in a later section and explore her use of reflective writing strategies that divulge more successfully how problematic her traveling ethics may be.

Another way to explore the “travelers’ frontier” is to examine the personal narratives that writers use to reconstruct how they first encountered Mongolia as an idea before they arrived. My point is that these are deeply reconstructed memories, which serve different rhetorical purposes and which become rich moments for writers to show their awareness of the presence of Orientalizing discourse about Mongolia. Stewart (2002, xvi) provides an excellent example, blending the word, “Mongolian,” with his solitary, playful adventures as a child in an idyllic Ireland: when he arrived indoors, his grandmother lovingly referred to him as “like a Mongolian,” a term of endearment that struck Stewart because of its connotations of “unruliness,” “recklessness,” and “praise.” Helen Thayer (2007, 9, 28) and Don Croner (1999, 92) both acknowledge their earlier conceptions of Mongolia and the “steppe”; for example, Thayer first possessed her “romantic” idea of walking the Gobi as a thirteen-year-old in New Zealand. Bodio (2003) acknowledges his earlier conceptions about Mongolia in terms of the “travelers’ frontier,” using evocative, Orientalizing imagery: “But no more than five years ago it [Mongolia] was as strange to me, as unreal and legendary, as it is still to most Westerners; a place out of myth, fable, deep history; a place composed of images from musty old books, faded black-and-white photographs, of dreams and yearning” (7). For Bodio, these images of “nomadic” eagle hunters

from old magazines and travel books, which he first comes across as a child, structure his early understanding of Mongolian and Kazakh culture (11–13). Louisa Waugh (2003) shows an ironic awareness of Orientalizing conventions, reconstructing her own clichéd imaginative geography as she studies a map for places to travel: “Asia and the Orient. My imagination easily evoked a headful of seductive colours and clichés. Cascades of silk. Languorous trains of camels crossing unnamed deserts” (2). Less ironically, Rob Lilwall (2013) explains the origins of the title of his travelogue, *Walking Home from Mongolia*, relying upon the “travelers’ frontier,” such as the tropes of “distance” and exotic adventure, to attract readers to his book, documentary, and fund-raising activities. Lilwall’s preconception of his travel blends conventional Mongolian and Chinese images: “My mind started to fill with images of striding across windy deserts, climbing over misty hillsides, and camping in jade-green terraced fields; of braving epic storms, jumping in tranquil rivers, and meeting smiling people” (xv). Again, despite the fact that Sexton (2013), Bodio (2003), and Waugh (2003) use the “travelers’ frontier” and recirculate Orientalizing images and myths about Mongolia, they may be doing so in a playful, knowing fashion. Bodio (2003) undercuts the power of photography, for example, by revealing how these images are aestheticized and constructed to appear authentic. Waugh’s (2003) clichéd imaginative geography is replaced by her socially and culturally complex observations of how Mongolians, Kazakhs, and Tuvans interact.

### Pure Nomadism

Orhon Myadar’s (2011; 2021) deconstruction of the “pure Mongolian nomad,” a similar imaginative geography to the “travelers’ frontier,” enables readers to see those moments in which contemporary travel writing about Mongolia implicitly and unintentionally projects a “colonial vision.” Myadar (2021) argues that the “pure nomad” is a myth, one that should not serve as the central figure of Mongolian identity. Myadar (2021) traces the origins of the “pure nomad” to European environmental determinism, which stipulates that the Mongolian environment naturally determines a nomadic lifestyle and pastoral economy (9) and documents its appearance as an Orientalizing symbol in travel writing and the mass media. Furthermore, in a clear departure from Tavares and Brosseau (2006), Myadar (2021) gives Mongolians agency, claiming that they embrace the discourse of the “pure nomad” to support a new national identity in the post-socialist Mongolia. In short, Myadar’s intervention confronts the symbolic heart of Mongolian identity.

To be clear, Myadar (2021) does not dispute the fact that many Mongolians work in the pastoral herding economy and that many of these herders are mobile. Her intervention disrupts the highly Romantic idea of the Mongolian nomad as a figure who possesses no conception of a home and who moves around the “boundless” and “limitless” landscape without any fetters or restrictions. Myadar (2011) summarizes her argument here:

But not only are Mongolian urbanites and others who are similarly sedentarised not represented in the discourse of constructing Mongolian identity as a “nomadic nation”; even those considered “genuine nomads”—or pastoral herders—have long left their “smooth” spaces if they ever occupied them. Herders do not move freely as dictated by the needs of their herds, but rather move infrequently—often just once or twice from their summer homes to their winter homes—and almost always within defined territories. (339)

As she signals in the phrase, “if they ever occupied them,” Myadar refers to political and structural restrictions on Mongolian pastoralists during the Qing Empire and the socialist period, enabling her to question the validity of the “pure Mongolian nomad” over several centuries. Myadar is not making an academic definitional argument, one that distinguishes “nomadic” from “semi-nomadic,” for instance. Myadar’s intervention has an ontological force—she is disputing not only how Western travelers, news agencies, and academic institutions represent Mongolians in overly simplistic and monolithic ways, but how Mongolians use the figure of the free nomad to build their own national identity.

A casual look at the contemporary travelogues suggests their indebtedness to the central image of the nomad. At least five of them index the symbol of the nomad in their titles, including *In the Empire of Genghis Khan: A Journey among Nomads* (Stewart 2002), *Grand Centaur Station: Unruly Living with the New Nomads of Central Asia* (Frolick 2004), *On the Trail of Genghis Khan: An Epic Journey through the Land of the Nomads* (Cope 2013), *Dateline Mongolia: An American Journalist in Nomad’s Land* (Kohn 2006),<sup>3</sup> and *Hearing Birds Fly: A Nomadic Year in Mongolia* (Waugh 2003).<sup>4</sup> The title of Liz Carter’s (2013)

3 Given the fact that Michael Kohn (2006, 53) questions the Romantic notion of Mongolian nomads, the title of his book may reflect more the marketing interests of the publishing company.

4 Waugh (2003) is using “nomadic” here ironically, as it refers to her own mobility as a traveler in Tsengel, Bayan Olgii Aimag.

photo album, *Moving with the Seasons*, also hints at nomadic themes.<sup>5</sup> Myadar (2011) summarizes the consequences of these assumptions for travelers and their readers, stating that they promise readers “something traditional, something disappearing, something different” (336) as well as a way to step out of modern history, “serv[ing] the audience as an imaginary escape from the perceived assaults of modernity” (336). Already, it is obvious that “pure nomadism” overlaps Tavares and Brosseau’s (2006) “travelers’ frontier,” and these imaginative geographies fix travel narratives based upon nostalgia, a story arc that, according to Lisle (2006), allows travelers to return to an imagined past—one of empire and colonization—that predates interethnic conflict (214–18).

Stewart’s *In the Empire of Genghis Khan* (2002) demonstrates a strong adherence to the exceptionalist framework of Mongolia as a place of pure nomadism. Stewart narrates his experiences traveling on horseback through western Mongolia in 1997, a period of intense economic crisis in Mongolia and social change in rural areas, in which urban Mongolians returned to the pastoral economy temporarily (Sneath 2006). Stewart (2002), however, is not aware of these local or recent histories; he explains their return instead in ahistorical, essentializing terms: urban Mongolians were inherently drawn to the “countryside and the nomadic ideal” (232). For Stewart, Mongolia is an exceptional space of nomadism: “In Mongolia, nomads still proudly migrate with their flocks, their tents and their horses but to the rest of the world they have the archaic appeal of Amazonian tribes with their blowpipes or Lapps chasing after reindeer” (67). Stewart’s exaggeration of Mongolian pastoralism and nomadism is intensified by the fact that he links his trip to the thirteenth-century traveler, William of Rubruck. Stewart collapses time and simplifies history, using Orientalizing tropes to place post-socialist Mongolia back into the medieval era: “This is Asia’s secret [...] a vast medieval world of nomads, slumbering in the heart of the continent, traversed by winds and clouds and caravans of camels, apparently undisturbed since 1200” (88). In this single quotation, Stewart densely packs the images: Mongolia as a mystery (“secret”), as sleeping (“slumbering”), as distant, as determined by the climate, as historically static, and as anachronistic.

Beyond his use of Orientalizing tropes, Stewart’s (2002) adherence to these assumptions about pure Mongolian nomadism also leads to simple

5 Carter (2013) is aware of the debates regarding whether Mongolians are to be categorized as “nomads” or as “semi-nomadic.” She bases her usage of “nomad” on how her Mongolian informants talked about themselves; Myadar (2021, 22), on the other hand, claims that Mongolians do not use “nomad” to describe pastoralist herders.

mistakes. For example, when explaining why a Mongolian entertainer impersonated the sounds of animals rather than well-known celebrities, he tells his readers that because “most Mongolians do not have televisions, there are no familiar national figures to impersonate” (119). This explanation coincides with the framework of pure nomadism, yet it does not accurately describe Mongolians’ consumption of television and their shared culture of civic figures and popular entertainers and athletes; nor, for that matter, does it explore other reasons why Mongolians may be hesitant to imitate others publicly.

Finally, to show how Western assumptions about Mongolian nomadism can persist into the second decade of the twenty-first century, Tim Cope’s (2013) *On the Trail of Genghis Khan* imagines Mongolian landscapes as boundless and limitless, not determined by human interventions or policies but by nature:

I was struck by their world: unscarred by roads, towns, and cities, it was a place where even homes left impermanent marks on the land. Free of fences and private land ownership, the natural lay of the earth was unhindered, defined only by mountains, rivers, deserts, and the natural ebb and flow of the seasons. (7–8)

Like Stewart (2002), Cope (2013) depicts Mongolia as out of time historically, claiming that “the nomadic people had a connection to the land I had never dreamed existed in modern times” (8). Cope’s framework leads him to a repetitive trope of collapsing time and relating twenty-first-century rural Mongolia to the thirteenth century or earlier: “the unwritten law since the earliest records on the steppe” (32), “since time immemorial” (41–42), “a tradition unbroken for at least a millennium” (59), and “a scene that had played out through the ages” (84), among other possibilities.<sup>6</sup>

### **Cosmopolitan Vision, Cosmopolitan Privilege**

As Lisle (2006) and others have argued, contemporary travelers have attempted to take on a more reflective, ethical, and cosmopolitan worldview,

6 Cope (2013) shows his indebtedness to the framework of pure nomadism by describing the “Wolf Totem,” in which there are sacred connections between Mongolians and wolves, yet he does so as ethnographic fact, not telling his readers that these assumptions come from Jiang Rong’s (2009) *Wolf Totem*.

using humor and poking fun at themselves. These strategies, according to Youngs (2013) and Peter Hulme (2002), may illuminate the workings of these imaginative geographies and the travelers' "cosmopolitan privilege" (Huggan 2009, 4), their awareness of the asymmetries between their social roles and those of their Mongolian interlocutors, their freedom of movement, and the unequal distribution of power and mobility throughout the world. The recent history of contemporary travel writing consists of many travelers who equate adventure travel with an individualistic ethics, such as Colin Angus (2003) who contrasts "river running" as a more "alive and engaged" form of travel (xiii) as opposed to that of comfortable and mass "tourist bus excursions" (xiii). Similarly, travelers like Benedict Allen (1998), Cope (2013), and Waugh (2003) articulate an ethical stance through solo traveling, which makes travel purer and more difficult (Waugh 2003, 190). Solo traveling challenges their "cosmopolitan privilege," making these travelers "vulnerable" and more open to and dependent on the Mongolians they meet.<sup>7</sup>

Lisle (2006), however, is skeptical of the contemporary ethos of these travelers, whom she believes desire to pull their readers back to an earlier period of heroic, colonial travel. These travelers reconstruct the past, depicting worlds in which social and cultural identities were, supposedly, easier to ascertain and navigate (204, 207). Moreover, these writers claim to possess a moral superiority, which distinguishes them from mere tourists who, traveling in the comfort of tour busses, don't interact with Mongolia and cultivate experiences as authentically as they do. These attempts to distinguish travelers from tourists based upon the arduous challenges of travel and their ability to appreciate their experiences are based on the same cultural logic of the traveler-tourist binary that James Buzard (1993, 38, 46) explores in nineteenth-century English travel. Although several of these contemporary travelers attempt to challenge the dominant imaginative geographies that were described in the previous two sections, their scorn for mass tourists who fail to craft an authentic experience is apparent. For instance, as Bassam Tarazi (2017) approaches Ulaanbaatar, he scornfully observes tourists in busses, going so far as claiming that their presence "tainted" his "metaphorical victory" (326–27), his ability to withstand his arduous car journey from London. Tarazi mocks the tourists and their quest for authenticity: "Mammoth coach buses charged towards us taking up three-quarters of the slim road, emerging from Ulaanbaatar to provide tourists with a chance to see the 'real' Mongolia" (326); these are "powder-puff

7 Allen's (1998) quest to portray himself as a solo traveler in western Mongolia explains why he erased almost all traces of the BBC photographer who accompanied him for part of his trip.

pioneers” and “plastic explorers” who will “go home and tell their friends that they knew the wilderness” (326). Other travelers mock the pretensions of *Lonely Planet* travelers (Pridmore 2017; Stewart 2002), and Larry Frolick (2004), like Roland Strasser’s (1930) depiction of wealthy Western women traveling to Ulaanbaatar in the 1920s (see chapter 3), makes a misogynist comment about two female Australian “pink tourists” and, while cataloguing their expensive trekking gear, asks, “What had they paid for this authentic experience of theirs?” (Frolick 2004, 318). Frolick’s point is clear: an authentic travel experience is one that cannot be purchased and consumed; it is gained through an arduous trial and the appropriate ethical stance and reflective, observational moves.

Another example of a traveler who hopes to reflect on his “cosmopolitan privilege” is André Tolmé (2006), whose quixotic travel narrative depicts him driving a golf ball across most of Mongolia. Tolmé presents himself as an ethical traveler who holds liberal, individualist, and somewhat vague principles. He claims he is “pursing a dream” as well as developing his “awareness,” his sensitivity towards the “interconnections of natural forces” and his “responsibility”—all of which he is doing with a “humble, questioning voice” (224–25). Portraying himself as a typical contemporary traveler, Tolmé is self-derogatory and aware that he is not a “heroic” traveler, contrasting himself negatively with an earlier heroic persona, Roy Andrews (106), and more hardy Mongolians (57). Tolmé also plays the “relativity game,” wondering what would happen to a Mongolian if they decided to travel across the United States while playing their national pastime. Yet, given the conceit of his travel narrative—that Mongolia in effect looks like a golf course—how seriously will his readers accept his cosmopolitan ethical stances and his moments of revealing his “cosmopolitan privilege”? In Tolmé’s case, his comparison of Mongolia with a golf course sets up an interesting collision of assumptions and images. On the one hand, he is relying upon the Orientalizing discourse of the travelers’ frontier, in which Mongolia is projected as boundless, limitless, primordial, and authentic. On the other hand, he is importing a highly colonizing image and practice, that of the golf course and golfing, in which the “authentic” space of Mongolia is now playfully reconfigured as a space for elite Westerners. The fact that an unrelated documentary, *The Longest Hole: Golfing across Mongolia* (2019), repeats this conceit indicates the power of this imaginative geography and the rather unironic ways in which travelers reimagine Mongolia as a place that is freely and uniquely open for their play and experience.

In what follows, I provide several examples of writers who reflect on their travel, the consequences of their travel, and their interactions with

Mongolians. At least partially, this awareness over their cosmopolitan privilege enables them to resist the dominant imaginative geographies and represent contemporary Mongolian identities in more diverse and subtle ways. Unlike Lisle (2006), I do not hope for travel narratives that are driven by monological political commitments. As I hope to indicate, if only briefly, these travel texts possess a range of colonizing and cosmopolitan visions. I am more interested, therefore, in exploring the complexity of these travel texts and ascertaining their ethical potentials, even if, like Tolmé's narrative, they end up being compromised by colonizing assumptions.

First, I earlier indicated Sexton's (2013) indebtedness to the travelers' frontier in her ahistorical depiction of Mongolia and her use of Mongolia for the self-help, recuperative purposes of Westerners. In a chilling scene in which she recounts an attack against her Mongolian host-mother in an Ulaanbaatar residential block, though, Sexton clearly reflects on her cosmopolitan privilege and the violent consequences of her presence:

I'd allowed myself to arrive at the comfortable conclusion that *I belonged* here, that an affable grin was all it would take to undo the disparity in our situations. [...] And in the end, really, wasn't this just a game for me? Couldn't I go back to New York, to Wall Street, to a life of preposterous excess? [...] They'd notice the disparity in our circumstances. (75)

By using the term "disparity," Sexton acknowledges her cosmopolitan privilege, a moment of reflection in which she shows awareness of the economic asymmetry that separates her from the Mongolians around her. She also has the privilege of mobility and can think of her experience in Mongolia in terms of a "game."

In a more subtle reflective moment, Sexton (2013) depicts a scene in which she is pitching stories for covering the 2006 World Cup to her Mongolian director, who unsurprisingly vetoes the idea of "Nomads [...] watching the World Cup" (132). The director, of course, is aware of the colonizing assumptions about the story, one that participates in the discourses of the travelers' frontier and pure nomadism. This story is framed as a surprise, indicating that the audience will assume that herders will have no knowledge of a global event like the World Cup and, moreover, that they will have no access to television sets. The director responds, "Mongolia is about more than nomads watching television" (132). Sexton is correct in that these stories about nomadic pastoralists watching television are a staple of contemporary travel writing. Allen (1998), for example, cannot fathom that he heard about the death of Princess Diane in the Gobi



Desert, a peripheral place that he felt was sealed off from the global and Western world. Allen writes, “I am living in an age when even the inner Gobi is owned by the outside world” (196; see also Cope 2013, 58; Man 1997; Stewart 2002). Sexton (2013) is forced to consider her own clichéd thinking about Mongolians. Yet, Sexton also includes her counterarguments, which she did not vocalize to her director. For one, Sexton defends her commonsensical assumptions about nomads by questioning the extent to which elite Mongolians can control how they are represented: “In my mind, no matter what image Mongolians wanted to portray to the outside world, they would be hard-pressed to change their own facts” (133). In this case, by rendering her assumptions about nomads, television, and the World Cup as “facts,” Sexton hopes to appear pragmatic—and, at the same time, she shifts away from a cosmopolitan vision. Sexton becomes even more pragmatic by insisting that her audience—non-Mongolian, English-speaking expatriates—arrived for “the steppe and its nomads.” In short, she was meeting their expectations and colonial vision, which constructed Mongolia through the travelers’ frontier and pure nomadism discourses.

Bodio’s (2003) negotiations with a *Men’s Journal* photographer reveal the colonizing assumptions that frame the process of taking and editing photographs, allowing Bodio to reflect on the global impact of visual images, the representation of Mongolians and Kazakhs, and ideas about authenticity. Aware of the “dominance of photography” (105), Bodio showcases these discussions about depicting Kazakhs and the practice of eagle hunting realistically or idealistically—that is, the ways in which the images would meet the *Men’s Journal* audiences’ expectations. For example, should the Kazakh eagle hunters be photographed wearing their baseball caps or their traditional Kazakh hats? (87). In another scene, the photographer balks at the idea of photographing an eagle on a tractor tire, although Bodio admires the juxtaposition of these symbols, the “tireless magic of pragmatic, still-romantic Central Asia” (112). In another scene, Bodio reflects on the cleaning of bird droppings from a rock in preparation for a photograph, recognizing the fact that readers will expect these types of images and claiming that the photographer “was probably right about the editors of glossy magazines and their consumers, fellow armchair romantics” (131). Bodio’s concerns resurface in the second decade of the twenty-first century. A *Men’s Journal* photographer, Asher Svidensky, depicts dramatic scenes of a Kazakh eagle hunter, wearing traditional Kazakh clothing, surrounded by the Mongolian landscape, and poised in action (Strege 2019). In this case, these beautiful, dramatic, and highly idealized images also illuminate social

change: the eagle hunter is a young woman, the focus of a documentary, *The Eagle Huntress*, which came out in 2016.

Several other travelers dispute the central figure of the Mongolian nomad and question the symbolic role that the countryside and rural pastoralism play in representing Mongolia. In moves that rarely occurred in previous travel eras,<sup>8</sup> these travelers delink Mongolians from nomadism, pastoralism, and rural landscapes, allowing them to complicate the range of possible Mongolian identities. As early as 1992, Tim Severin (2003) worries about whether his urban and college-educated Mongolian counterparts can ride horseback for long period of time and sustain the rigors of camping. Similarly, Frolick (2004) discovers that his urban Mongolian guide and interpreter, who is heading off for a university in London, knows nothing about cultural etiquette in a Buddhist monastery. In a reversal of these identity formations, Allen (1998) observes the clumsy attempts of his young rural guide to perform an urban identity when he makes it to Ulaanbaatar, a scene that suggests the possibilities of young rural and urban Mongolians playing around with identities.

Warmbrunn (2001) depicts herself learning to observe Mongolian identity in more subtle ways. She arrives in Mongolia as a naïve traveler with a romantic version of an authentic “Mongolian heartland,” nomadic herders, “unmapped landscapes,” and “uncompromising, boundless space” (9). In short, Warmbrunn holds a strong view of the dominant imaginative geographies that frame Mongolia. However, when Warmbrunn arrives in a small town in Khövsgöl Aimag, she quickly begins to perceive the subtle codes of social class, which are connected to the Soviet past, to ideas about language, professional position, education, cleanliness, and a European-focused identity. Warmbrunn first spends the night with Gehrlay, a young rural Mongolian woman who does not speak English nor Russian and who does not possess a postsecondary education. The following day, the teachers at the local school quickly separate her from Gehrlay and compel Warmbrunn to stay in the school dormitory in “the kind of room that foreigners liked” (60):

The teachers’ contempt [of Gehrlay] was palpable. It seemed absurd in the tiny village, but Gehrlay was intimidated by the prim, educated young women, and they were disdainful of her. They wanted to get me away from her. How much as prestige for themselves, how much because

8 One exception is René MacColl (1963), who lampoons Romantic depictions of Mongolian pastoralism.

they considered her below me (or assumed that I thought that), how much because they truly believed that I would be happier alone in the stark, cold room with a dozen kids' faces pressed against the curtainless windowpane staring at me, I couldn't tell. (59)

Equivalent to Waugh's (2003) nuanced observations in Bayan Ölgii of how Mongolians and Tuvans regarded the Kazakhs, and how her allegiances to these groups were interpreted through these cultural animosities, Warmbrunn (2001) demonstrates a relatively rare understanding of Mongolian identity that extends beyond nomadic pastoralism and rural-urban dichotomies. In another moment of reflection, Warmbrunn exposes the "cosmopolitan privilege" of Westerners who hope to travel freely yet desire that non-Europeans remain unchanged by globalism and time. Warmbrunn writes,

These children's world was about to be dramatically different from the world of generations of their ancestors, and we were entreating them not to lose touch with the precious ancient values of their culture. It is, of course, one of the great hypocrisies of the western traveler, wanting the people we visit in remote lands to remain charming, simple, exotic, and untouched by the information, possessions, and comforts that we take for granted and are unlikely to relinquish for more than the briefest forays into more austere lands. (44)

Stephen Donovan (2006) places these "hypocrisies of the western traveler" in terms of imperial history, in which travelers, colonial administrators, and missionaries imposed their cultural expectations on non-Europeans (49–50); in the contemporary era, one marked by the cosmopolitan vision, Western tourists hope to consume an experience interacting with non-Europeans who remain "exotic" and distant. Finally, Warmbrunn (2001) realizes that her conceptions of recent history were wrong, concluding in fact, that Mongolians possess active histories. In the small village, Warmbrunn (2001) had assumed that "things had always been the way they were now"; having arrived in the fall of 1993, she was unaware that Mongolians in this community had recently taken for granted electricity and the availability of flour and sugar (114). History, in other words, is not static; moreover, historical change does not imply an endless progression towards a Western historical norm.

Other travelers have begun to question the use of rural pastoralism as an index for Mongolian authenticity and, in the process, re-evaluate Ulaanbaatar as a space for genuine Mongolian identity. Frolick (2004) depicts

the Mongolian countryside as a safe, almost sanitized space for tourists, unlike Ulaanbaatar, which is “an entirely different country from the honeyed Mongolia of sweet pastures and broomswept tourist *gers*” (324). Frolick flips over the urban/rural imaginative geographies about Mongolia; the countryside is safe for tourists not because it is more “authentic,” “real,” or “inherently Mongolian,” but because it is offering what Simon Pridmore (2017) calls a “pastiche to entertain tourists” (92–93). Tarazi’s (2017) description of his arrival in Ulaanbaatar as a member of the 2014 Mongol Rally may hint at a future depiction of Mongolia in which Ulaanbaatar is no longer envisioned as peripheral and mysterious—that is, it is no longer a part of the travelers’ frontier. As Tarazi approaches Ulaanbaatar, he lists objects that will make his readers feel like they are approaching home: “Familiar names and sights passed by our overstimulated gazes: Skyscrapers, Levi’s, McDonald’s, business suits, electronic stores, hospitals, taxis, and everyday life” (335).<sup>9</sup> Of course, Tarazi’s observations may be met with trepidation from other travelers and observers, who are worried about the effects of the homogenizing influences of global capitalism upon non-Western spaces and who, in other words, are still indebted to the travelers’ frontier. Tarazi, by listing multinational brands and modern institutions, overturns these imaginative geographies of Mongolia as being distant, peripheral, and the opposite of the West. Bodio (2003), similarly, depicts Mongolia as a global adventure tourism center (76), and he revels in the cultural complexities and collisions that make up Ulaanbaatar: “Ulan Bataar was Stalinist sculpture, Japanese sedans, e-mail, and expatriates. [...] It was medieval; it was science fiction” (82).

### Conclusion: Mongolian Agency

Huggan (2009) explores the asymmetrical power relations that exist between privileged, Western travelers and the non-Western people they depict. Huggan, theorizing travel under the conditions of global capitalism, wants his readers to become more aware of the politics and ethics of travel that occurs in an “unevenly developed global culture” (15), where certain people have the privilege to travel freely—Huggan’s “cosmopolitans” (3)—whereas others, such as Huggan’s “refugees,” have less control over their mobility. Contemporary travel, operating under the conditions of global capitalism, reveals the contradiction of privileged cosmopolitans who herald the ethical

9 There are no McDonald’s franchises in Mongolia as of 2020, yet there may have been aspirational McDonald’s marketing in 2014 when Tarazi (2017) entered Ulaanbaatar.

possibilities of travel and make non-Westerners more visible yet who, perhaps without seeing the irony, despair at the homogenization and loss of local cultures caused by mass tourism (12–13).

Huggan (2009) also analyzes the agency that non-Westerners possess as they realize how they are being depicted by travelers and consumed by distant Western audiences. In terms of Mongolia, Tavares and Brosseau (2006) go so far as to argue that the imaginative geography of the travelers' frontier is "imposed on Mongolia." They provide a cause: Mongolia has been "denied genuine interlocution partly as a result of having been consign[ed] to a static, unchanging past" (313). In short, Mongolians have not had a voice and have had little power over how they have been represented in travel writing because of the colonizing assumptions of the travelers' frontier.

Though not addressing Mongolian travel, Huggan (2009) restores a degree of agency to the non-Western people whose lives have been transformed by global tourism. Huggan writes,

Tourism, in this context, acts as a catalyst for the transformation, not the dissolution, of locality; and for the strategic (re)indigenization of a global modernity no longer masterminded or monopolized—if it ever was—by the West. What this suggests is that it is far too simplistic to see tourism as a product of hegemonic Western supply-and-demand models, and non-Western peoples as happy/hapless consumers of imposed Western goods. (13)

In short, theories of contemporary travel must recognize the ways in which non-Westerners encounter mass tourism, adapt to global flows, shape their cultures, and represent themselves to the global world. Referring specifically to tourism and globalism, Huggan (2009) suggests that we need to be cautious about how we characterize the agency of those in non-Western countries. Instead of considering globalism as an imposition, Huggan (2009) allows for more agency in local, non-Western communities, which can adapt and use global tourism for its own benefits.

Huggan's (2009) intervention provides an opportunity to consider the productive possibilities for global travel, travel writing, and Mongolian agency. Mass tourism and travel writing are an important part of identity building and the nation-building process. In 1995, there were 108,000 visitors to Mongolia, and the tourist industry accounted for 2.3% of the economy. By 2019, 637,000 visitors arrived, representing 4.3% of the economy ("Tourism" n.d.); 65% of the visitors came from three countries: China, Russia, and South Korea (Amicus Mongolia Travel Company

n.d.). According to John Urry (2002), becoming a tourist destination is an important component of Mongolian elites' attempts to fix a new national identity and enter the "global order" (143). In addition to importing Western modernity and the symbols of globalism, elite Mongolians have been creating and re-creating these dominant imaginative geographies—and doing so for their own purposes. As they craft a new postcolonial, post-socialist national identity, elite Mongolians index the symbols of Mongolianness, which, according to Myadar (2011; 2021, 39), emerge from the myth of "pure nomadism" and from such nation-building symbols as Chinggis Khan, the *ger*, the horse, and the Mongolian language. Myadar (2011) argues, moreover, that these myths and these cultural markers have taken on a new significance in the twenty-first century; in other words, as Mongolians find their own lives penetrated by free-market globalism and urban identities, these rhetorical performances of nationhood have become more important: "Ironically, as real nomadism disappears, nomadism has symbolically taken on greater cultural significance and a more central role in how Mongolians define themselves—independent, free-spirited, and resilient" (356).

Despite the fact that I have defined these post-socialist identity moves as "constructed" and "rhetorical," these descriptors do not discount the fact that these cultural markers are deeply significant, personal, and emotional. David Sneath's (2018) earlier challenges to a stable, ahistorical notion of Mongolian national identity, which separate Mongolian ethnic identity from the land, and, moreover, Myadar's (2021) cleaving of Mongolian identity from nomadism can be regarded as painful and emotional interventions. In fact, Myadar (2021) relates a personal anecdote when a Mongolian academic claims that she is taking something quite important—nomadism—away from Mongolians. As I have written elsewhere, Mongolians have a great deal at stake in these conversations and they may feel understandably anxious because of these global waves, including Mongolians leaving the countryside for opportunities in Ulaanbaatar and the *aimag* centers and Mongolians pursuing jobs and educational opportunities in China, South Korea, Japan, the United States, and Europe, among other destinations. Many Mongolians are now a part of an extensive Mongolian diaspora, sharing their travel and immigration experiences on Facebook and Clubhouse, and providing heritage cultural and language instruction to their children in North America and Western Europe. Many Mongolians, therefore, may have a social investment in such essentializing, Orientalizing, and Romantic ideas about Mongolia, Mongolian landscapes, and their own identities.

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## 6 Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* and the Myth of Mongolian Pastoralism<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This chapter challenges the conventional interpretations of Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (*Lang tuteng*) as an important ecocritical text that illuminates a cultural harmony between Han Chinese urban students and rural Inner Mongolian herders during the Cultural Revolution. Though acknowledging the environmental themes of *Wolf Totem*, this chapter redefines the novel as travel writing, an interpretive strategy that enables readers to see Jiang Rong's rhetorical moves and isolates three asymmetrical relationships—hybridity, cultural reciprocity, and gender. Examining *Wolf Totem* as travel writing also places this text within the larger history of travel writing set in northern China and Mongolia, a discourse that has contributed tenacious and possibly dangerous tropes about Han Chinese and Mongolians over the past 160 years.

**Keywords:** anti-conquest, asymmetry, cultural reciprocity, hybridity, masculinity, world literature

In 2004, Jiang Rong (pseudonym of Lü Jiamin) published *Wolf Totem* (*Lang tuteng*) in China, avoiding the intervention of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (i.e., the Ministry of Propaganda) despite his previous involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen protest, his criticisms of the ethnic policies of the government, and his depiction of self-loathing Han Chinese (Mishra 2008; Varsava 2011, 284). Stimulated by nascent Internet- and social-media-driven marketing in China in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Lovell 2012, 9–10), *Wolf Totem* became a national bestseller,

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 6 was adapted with permission from “Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*, Travel Writing, and the Myth of Mongolian Pastoralism,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2021), 161–91, copyright 2021 *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*.

selling over a million copies in its first year in addition to six million more black market copies (French 2005) and reaching many more online readers (Li 2018, ix). It was adapted into a China Radio International production (He 2014, 784), and a section of the novel was excerpted for young readers and entitled *Little Wolf* (Henningsen 2010, 137; Li 2018, 37). In fact, according to Lena Henningsen (2010, 140), *Wolf Totem* inaugurated the use of the “wolf” as a marketing and branding device in China for many self-help and fictional texts. Its success, however, did not go unnoticed by the Chinese government, which authorized policies to limit the use of authorial anonymity for new publications (Henningsen 2010, 140).

Beyond its local and global Chinese readership, *Wolf Totem* has become a world literature text, circulated far beyond its original literary, publishing, and reading contexts. It has been translated into more than thirty languages, and in 2007 Jiang Rong won the inaugural—and now defunct—Man Asian Literary Prize for the English translation by Howard Goldblatt, which was also notable for the fact that the Penguin Group purchased the international translation rights for \$100,000 (Yi 2015). A movie based on *Wolf Totem*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, came out in 2015 and has grossed to date \$125 million internationally (*Wolf Totem* 2015). As a world literature text, *Wolf Totem* circulates representations about Han Chinese and Mongolian identities to distant, diverse global and Anglophone audiences. Accordingly, I examine *Wolf Totem* in translation as a text of world literature and not in the context of Chinese literary history. In fact, due to the Penguin editors’ decisions to shorten the novel and, presumably, meet the expectations of North American and British readers, the English translation does not include a lengthy final section, “Excavation by Reasoning—Lecture and Dialogue on *Wolf Totem*” (Li 2018, 37), Jiang Rong’s direct appeal to his readers. In addition to this deleted section, the English translation does not contain the epigraphs that introduce each of the thirty-five chapters (Choy 2009). The English translation is a different text—an adaptation for an Anglophone audience, one that has been reluctant to read translated Chinese literature in the past (Lovell 2010, 201).

After a brief synopsis of *Wolf Totem*, I outline the two major conversations that have shaped the critical response to the novel, one that emphasizes its ecological motivations and one that reveals anxieties about Han Chinese national identity. I then argue for a new contribution to the scholarly conversations about *Wolf Totem*: an analysis of the novel from the perspectives of travel writing. This interpretive perspective allows readers to view the relationships of the urban Han Chinese students with the pastoral Mongolian herders in the novel as cultural collisions between the center (Beijing) and the periphery (Inner Mongolia). Although *Wolf Totem* offers the possibility

of intercultural understanding and Han and Mongolian ethnic harmony and intermixing, the travel writing perspectives undermine these social messages, producing three “asymmetries” that describe Mongolians in monolithic and heavily idealized, romanticized, and essentialized ways. In the concluding section, I return to the considerations of *Wolf Totem* as world literature and expand on the rhetorical consequences for twenty-first-century Anglophone and global readers.

### **Environmental and Nationalist Conversations**

The narrative of *Wolf Totem* stretches from 1967, near the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, to the early 2000s, when the environmental and social effects of Chinese economic expansion on Inner Mongolia became more visible. Chen Zhen, the sympathetic main narrator, and his fellow Beijing students travel to the Olonbulag grasslands in Inner Mongolia to participate in the Mongolian pastoral economy and its cultural lifestyle. Although readers are not told the extent to which this exile was imposed on the students, Jiang Rong (2009) hints that their parents were considered “black-gang capitalist roaders,” making the students politically suspect: “They shared similar circumstances, ideology, and disgust for the radical and ignorant Red Guards; and so, in the early winter of 1967, they said good-bye to the clamor of Beijing and traveled to the grassland in search of a peaceful life” (20). Chen becomes fascinated by “grasslands logic,” Mongolian environmental and cultural beliefs and practices. He identifies with this pastoral worldview, re-evaluating and repudiating the agrarian logic of his own Han identity and Han chauvinism. Chen’s identification with his Mongolian hosts and their beliefs is shaped through his obsession with Mongolian wolves, which are depicted as the enemies of the pastoral Mongolians, as environmental forces that maintain ecological balance, and as sacred beings that play an important role in the Mongolian spiritual worldview. Chen captures and rears a wolf cub, actions that emphasize his role both as an anthropologist and as a folk scientist. Jiang Rong uses Chen’s pseudo-scientific observations of the wolf as it matures as an allegory to explore the larger conflict of pastoral and agrarian worldviews; by invoking the role of science, Jiang Rong also alludes to the official importance placed on science for the “educated youth” during the Cultural Revolution (Schmalzer 2015). Through Chen, as he travels back to Inner Mongolia in the 1990s, we witness the environmental degradation and desertification of the grasslands because of overgrazing, which Mongolian and Chinese

communist leaders encourage to satisfy the meat consumption demands of distant Han Chinese (2009, 233). At the conclusion of *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong depicts the Mongolian grasslands—and consequently, the entire Mongolian ethnic group and pastoral way of life—as on the verge of disappearance.

Unsurprisingly, given the main character's obsession with wolves, critics have attempted to interpret Jiang Rong's use of the "wolf" as a literary device, classifying *Wolf Totem* as an environmental novel (Dollar 2009; He 2014; Varsava 2011), as a national allegory (Li 2018), or as an exploration of ethnic conflict (Xu 2011) or accord (Pan 2006). Henningsen (2010, 128) provides a useful list of possible approaches, genres, and Chinese literary periods with which to understand *Wolf Totem*, including reading it as ethnography, as *Bildungsroman*, as trauma, as "roots-seeking literature," or as another example of a Cultural Revolution novel.

The classification of *Wolf Totem* as an environmental novel requires the least amount of interpretation and justification. These critics have accepted the literary device of the "wolf" at face value; it becomes a metonym for a cluster of environmental issues, including Mongolian pastoral philosophy, environmental sustainability and diversity, the deleterious effects of agriculture and Han Chinese migration, and short-sighted Chinese Communist Party land policies. Taking for granted its sustained argument about the environment, these critics have linked the novel's themes to such Western environmental concepts as "ecological holism" (Meng and Omar 2011), critiques of anthropocentrism, and ecocriticism (Dollar 2009; He 2009, 398). Based on its ecocritical potential, Chengzhou He (2009) endorses the significance of *Wolf Totem* in the future: "It is thus estimated that it will remain to be one of the most influential literary works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that have shaped and will continue to shape our attitudes toward animals and nature as well as the ecological system as a whole" (410). One social offshoot of these ecocritical ideas is that, according to several scholars, *Wolf Totem* provides an opportunity to explore intercultural understanding among Han Chinese and Mongolians (Henningsen 2010, 128; Pan 2006, 233).

As a symbol of Chinese nationalism, the "wolf" takes on a completely different set of meanings and values related to masculinity, national strength, colonialism, and capitalism. Jiang Rong (2009, 319) cites Lu Xun's description of Chinese people as sheep during the period of Japanese invasion (He 2009) and shows his awareness of the discourses surrounding the physical and moral weakness of Chinese people and Chinese masculinity (Louie 2014). The wolf—as a symbol of Mongolianness and pastoralism—indexes the values of independence, freedom, stubbornness, vitality, courage, risk-taking, and militarism (Jiang 2009, 218–19, 303–4). Chen and the Beijing students,

instead, talk of “something lacking” (304) in their racial character because of the influence of Confucianism and agriculture, which have “weakened the people’s nature” (304). Paradoxically enough, the environmental and political messages ascribed to the “wolf” conjoin in the blunt social Darwinism that Jiang Rong offers: the pastoral practices of Mongolians and the habits of wolves can guide the “weak dispositions” of the Chinese “in desperate need of a transfusion of the vigorous, unrestrained blood” (218). This political “transfusion” is social Darwinist precisely because the Mongolian pasture is conceived of as an unregulated and unbounded space, outside of the bureaucracy of Confucianism and the Chinese Communist Party: it is a space dedicated to the constant struggle for survival.

For the purposes of this book, I shift the conversation dramatically, encouraging readers to examine *Wolf Totem* as travel writing, a strategy that allows me to move beyond descriptions of the environmental messages and political symbols of the “wolf totem” and to challenge the text, Jiang Rong’s motives, and his descriptions of Mongolians and Inner Mongolian landscapes. Although I am more than happy to accept He’s (2009) endorsement of the text as an important example of Chinese ecocriticism, readers should nonetheless reflect on the ways in which Jiang Rong idealizes and essentializes Mongolian culture and identity, conceals the asymmetric nature of Mongolian and Han Chinese interrelationships, and perpetuates possibly dangerous tropes about Mongolians and Han Chinese.

Although I justify the categorizing of *Wolf Totem* as travel literature in the following section, allow me here to emphasize the reason for considering the theoretical approach of travel writing that I have focused on throughout this book: travel writing best captures the movement of the urban Han Chinese Beijing college students—representatives of the dominant social and cultural group—into the pastoral Mongolian periphery. In short, by emphasizing movement, a travel-writing approach allows us to isolate the ideologies that are present in the relationships between Han Chinese and Mongolians and examine the ways in which these groups are represented and the ways in which the travelers’ assumptions and worldviews dominate these representations. As a travel writer, Jiang Rong shapes, simplifies, frames, idealizes, and polarizes, among other rhetorical strategies, to describe and make claims about Mongolians and Han Chinese, his own perspectives, and the ways in which the social actors in the novel interact with each other. What Jiang Rong and other travel writers do has ideological consequences. As we have seen in the ethnographic strategies of Victorian British travelers, the ideologies underwritten by language scenes, and the contemporary representations of Mongolia and Mongolians, these discourses become preconceived notions,

“natural” ways of seeing the world by travelers that are resilient—and dangerously so: they become the unarguable, commonsensical conceptualizations of an area or a group of people (Youngs 2013, 12). In this case, as I explore in far greater depth below, Jiang Rong fixes Mongolianness by essentializing it in terms of purity, primitiveness, and authentic masculinity.

### Reading *Wolf Totem* as Travel Literature

Categorizing *Wolf Totem* as travel literature requires a brief justification. Indeed, Jiang Rong does not present the novel as a travel narrative, and it fails to meet Tim Youngs’s (2013, 3) definition of travel writing as a first-person account of travelers who are appealing to the credibility generated from reporting “real,” eyewitness accounts. Although I hope to avoid the fallacy of substituting the narrator of the novel with the author, Jiang Rong consciously plays with rhetorical notions of credibility and the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. Comparable to Chen, Jiang Rong spent eleven years in Inner Mongolia, where he worked as a folklorist, collecting “idioms” and folktales (Flood 2007). Like his narrator, Jiang Rong was partly motivated to travel and stay in Inner Mongolia as a way to protect his book collection, several titles of which were outlawed according to the political standards of the Cultural Revolution. Jiang Rong invites readers to identify him with the narrator when Chen, after returning to the Inner Mongolian grasslands after twenty years, burns a copy of a book that he has written about his experiences as a sacred offering; tellingly, this book is entitled *Wolf Totem*. Notwithstanding these similarities, I do not delve into the autobiographical potential of *Wolf Totem*. Rather, as travel literature, which has certainly been fictionalized, *Wolf Totem* focuses readers on Chen as a stock metropolitan traveler, who displays several of the strategies of Mary Louise Pratt’s (2008) “anti-conquest.” He becomes an observer and student of Mongolian cultural beliefs and practices, attempting to erase his Han chauvinism and the destructive consequences of this ideology. In what remains of this section, I summarize the key ways Jiang Rong incorporates travel elements in *Wolf Totem*, relying on several of Pratt’s concepts that expose the rhetorical qualities of the contacts between metropolitan travelers and indigenous interlocutors and, consequently, become genre conventions in travel narratives.

First, Chen is depicted in ways that are consistent with Pratt’s (2008) strategies of “anti-conquest,” in which travelers write themselves out of colonial and imperial discourses, severing their complicity with these

ideological and material impulses of conquest. Chen is the perpetual observer, who uses anthropological and pseudo-scientific methods to show his sympathy toward Mongolians, learn more about the environment and Mongolian practices, and, as Pratt (2008) would argue, distance himself from the history of Han chauvinism in Inner Mongolia.

*Wolf Totem* consists of several scenes of Chen as a passive observer. The novel opens, for example, with him looking through a telescope and waiting for a wolf attack on a herd of gazelles (Jiang 2009, 28); while watching and waiting, Chen recalls a more dramatic experience of observation, when in his first year in Olonbulag, he shined his flashlight on his female Mongolian host and her child defending their sheep against a wolf that had made its way into their camp (9–11). More to the point, the novel reaches its dramatic conflict because of Chen's observations of a wild wolf cub in a domestic setting. In these scenes, Chen observes the wolf in the role of the pseudo-scientific researcher. One final example is a scene in which Chen, taking up the role of the anthropologist, secretly follows a group of Mongolian mourners to witness the outcome of a sky burial, in which a Mongolian corpse is exposed to the elements. In this scene, Chen becomes aware of the problem with this observer role: he "had no heart to loiter at that sacred place, fearful of agitating the soul of the deceased and of desecrating the sacred beliefs of the grassland people" (64). Chen realizes that his "curiosity and interests"—that is, his role as the traveler, the metropolitan, and the detached and objective non-Mongolian—were conflicting with and influencing the Mongolians' belief systems.

Second, *Wolf Totem* does not include an initial "arrival scene" (Pratt 2008, 81), those moments saturated with ideological meaning for Pratt, in which the differences between the metropolitan travelers and the indigenous interlocutors are magnified and framed, producing "contact zones," those travel discourses that show "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (7). Instead, Jiang Rong (2009) delays the "arrival scene" until halfway through the novel, when Chen and two Mongolian leaders travel to a pristine grassland to decide on a new summer pasture for the collective's herd. Chen once again takes on the well-established role of the traveler who captures the landscape by observing it; in this case, he observes the final Mongolian Eden:

Chen laid eyes on virgin grassland, possibly the last of its kind in all of China, and breathtakingly beautiful. Spread out before him was a dark green basin, dozens of square miles, with layers of mountain peaks to the east, all the way north to the Great Xing'an range. (240–41)



This “promontory description” (202), which lasts for five paragraphs, includes a swan lake, “which Chen Zhen never dreamed of seeing” (241). It closes with the recognition of the “primitive beauty” of this grasslands Eden and the nostalgic or “sentimental environmental” perspective (Varsava 2011) of loss: this Eden was doomed to vanish. Jiang Rong (2009) depicts Chen’s thoughts: “Once men and horses come, he was thinking, the primitive beauty of this place will quickly be lost, and no Chinese will lay his eyes on such natural, pristine beauty again” (241). In this case, as an outside traveler, Chen is privileged to be both the first observer of this new grasslands and is doomed, at the same time, to be the last. What is important to remember in terms of the genre conventions of travel narratives is the fact that these arrival scenes, promontory descriptions, and sentimental reflections are all mediated through the controlling gaze of metropolitan travelers; the land is ultimately meant for them (Spurr 1993, 25–27).

Finally, the genre conventions of the travel narrative typically expect the traveler to return to the metropolis (Kerridge 1999, 166), in this case Beijing, where Chen and his colleagues return to their urban Han Chinese identities and become successful professionals. Yet, readers are told, they are unable to shake off their personal identifications with Inner Mongolia (Jiang 2009, 506). Consequently, in the epilogue of *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong provides readers with a return narrative. Approximately twenty years after they left Inner Mongolia, Chen and Yang Ke, another Beijing student who identified strongly with the Mongolians, return to the Olonbulag grasslands. This time, in the reentry narrative for the two older, middle-class professionals, Jiang Rong provides an “arrival scene” yet an anti-sentimental one: “[T]hey felt as if they’d entered a battlefield; cement posts and wire fences were all over the once vast and lush Olonbulag, and the Jeep had to travel down passages created by chain-like fences” (509). Their first Mongolian contact, in a scene that will be discussed later, is with a teenager who rides a motorcycle, wears a baseball cap, and speaks Chinese. Jiang Rong ends the novel with Chen back in Beijing once again, looking out the window as he watches a sandstorm, the visible manifestation of the desertification of the Inner Mongolian grasslands. The authorial voice haunts the last paragraph: “Chen looked off to the north with a sense of desolation. The wolves had receded into legend, and the grassland was a distant memory. A nomadic herder society was now extinct” (524). Jiang Rong ends with the ultimate travelers’ trope—the disappearance of the culture that they have documented, the reality of which, ironically, can only be captured in the travel narratives themselves.

### Travel Writing and *Wolf Totem*: Three Asymmetries

Despite the fact that Yihong Pan (2006) does not consider the “Sent-Down Youth” literature (*zhìqīng wénxué*) of the Cultural Revolution in terms of travel writing, she is sensitive to their intercultural and ideological potential. In Inner Mongolia, the “Sent-Down Youth” texts document one of many waves of Han Chinese migration to the northern periphery. According to Pan, the “Sent-Down Youth” texts reveal chauvinist Han Chinese assumptions about Mongolians and other ethnic groups (230, 233) and at the same time demonstrate the ways in which urban Han Chinese students, resisting these assumptions and the policies of the Chinese Communist Party, identify strongly with Mongolian people, lifestyles, and landscapes (235). Ma Bo’s memoir, *Blood Red Sunset* (1995), for example, shows Han Chinese urban students zealously applying the Chinese Communist Party’s ideas about “class struggle” against the family of a poor Mongolian herd owner (14–15). Eventually, Ma Bo respects and identifies with several Mongolians and criticizes, similar to Jiang Rong, official agricultural and scientific policies that had “create[d] unpardonable crimes against the land” (Ma 1995, 352–53; see also Schmalzer 2015, 166–67). When classifying *Wolf Totem* as a “Sent-Down Youth” novel, Pan (2006) emphasizes its anti-Han chauvinist potential, declaring that “Jiang Rong’s aim was to write a novel from a Mongolian perspective, acting as the voice of the Mongols” (237). Pan overturns the center/peripheral binary that dominates descriptions about Han Chinese and Mongolians: “This novel contrasts Han and Mongolian cultures, the Han being agricultural, Confucian, conservative, submissive and soft as sheep, under an authoritarian power symbolized by a dragon totem; and the Mongols being pastoral, nomadic, mythical, spiritual, full of valour and vigour and love of freedom, and unyielding, unified under the wolf totem” (237). In other words, Pan acknowledges Jiang Rong’s attempt to center his Han readers under Mongolian values and attributes—the wolf totem, pastoralism, nomadism, freedom, vitality—and reject traditional Chinese values—the dragon totem, agrarianism, sedentarism, and authoritarianism.

Given the previous discussions about travel writing in this book, I maintain in the following three subsections that Jiang Rong has not adopted a “Mongolian perspective” but has maintained one of a metropolitan Han Chinese traveler, using anti-colonial and anti-conquest strategies (Pratt 2008) to represent Mongolian pastoralism. His strategies to project an ideal social and cultural reciprocity and harmony between Mongolians and Han Chinese are undermined by the ideological consequences of travel writing, the three asymmetries of hybridity, cultural reciprocity, and gender. In

short, the cultural reciprocity and harmony projected by Jiang Rong are made untenable by the logic of travel writing, in which urban Han Chinese travelers have opportunities to shift their identity, crossover from Han Chinese to Mongolian culture, and make gender distinctions that are not available or possible for their Mongolian hosts.

*Asymmetric Hybridity.* Jiang Rong, through his depictions of outsider—impure or inauthentic—Mongolians and urban Han Chinese who identify with Mongolian norms and cultural beliefs, demonstrates a simplistic, two-way theory of hybridity: a dangerous hybridity, in which Mongolians merge with Chinese or other groups and undermine their Mongolian identity, and a positive hybridity, one that is accessible only to the Beijing college students who identify closely with Mongolians. The consequences of this asymmetric hybridity are a static, monolithic, and essentialist definition of Mongolianness. Jiang Rong designates the Olonbulag Mongolians in *Wolf Totem*, in particular, Bilgee, the elder Mongolian and natural leader and teacher, as the only desirable possibility of Mongolian identity.

In *Wolf Totem*, examples of dangerous Mongolian hybridity are indexed by language, social class, and immigrant status, or by urban or agrarian backgrounds. The antagonists of the novel are Chinese-speaking Mongolians, the lower social class migrant Mongolians, for example, who are bilingual and speak with a “northeastern-accented, Mongolian-influenced Chinese” (Jiang 2009, 343). An immigrant Manchurian Mongolian, Dorji, is the most prolific of the wolf hunters, making him a threat to the traditional values and practices of the local Mongolians (467). Similarly, Bao Shungui, the political leader of Olonbulag, comes from an agrarian Mongolian community and, like Dorji, no longer venerates the (fictionalized) wolf totem belief system and does not conduct sky burials or give shamanist offerings. Jiang Rong explicitly identifies the “lower level” Mongolian migrants as “enemies of the Mongolian grassland” (374); they dress the same as the Chinese (351) and are involved in unsustainable hunting practices that are counter to traditional pastoral values. In the epilogue, Jiang Rong depicts an extended example of dangerous hybridity in the shape of a Mongolian teenager whom Chen and Yang first meet when they return to the Olonbulag pasture after twenty years. At first assuming the person approaching them is on horseback, they realize it is a Mongolian teenager on a motorcycle:

The rider was a Mongol teenager wearing a jacket-like shirt and a baseball cap. The motorcycle screeched to a stop by the Jeep. Chen was shocked to see a small-caliber rifle slung over the youth's shoulder and a medium-sized hawk tied to the seat, dripping blood. (511)

Yang greets him in Mongolian, but the teenager shows little interest in the travelers, paying attention instead to the car they are driving and responding in “Chinese with a Shandong accent.” The teenager holds new social and cultural aspirations: he possesses the consumer aspirations of the Han middle-class, speaks Chinese, and has little connection to the local pasture. He wears cheap, mass-produced clothes that no longer represent his ethnic identity; even his hunting practices and prey do not follow the Mongolian traditions of that area.

As Jiang Rong strongly suggests, this asymmetric form of hybridity is especially dangerous because of the harm caused to the pastoral environment by migrant Mongolians who have been heavily influenced by the Chinese and who import firecrackers, high-powered rifles, poisons, and other non-traditional methods to decimate the wolf population and control the pasture (153, 454). In other words, Mongolians are participating in their own destruction, the same conclusion reached by official Chinese Communist Party discourses arguing that traditional Mongolian practices devastated pasturelands (Williams 2002, 31–32).

By contrast, Chen and several other Beijing students represent a positive, ideal hybridity, one not accessible to Mongolians. This ideal form of hybridity is important for travel writers: when they demonstrate a deep commitment to and identification with their hosts' culture and social practices, these urban travelers gain credibility and cosmopolitan status. What is important, in other words, is for the metropolitan travelers to take on these hybrid forms—language, clothing, attitudes, and habits, among others—as long as they are destined to return to metropolitan centers. Jiang Rong's (2009) fictionalized travel narrative shows that the Beijing students experience a merging of Han Chinese and Mongolian identities. Yang becomes a “brawny son of the grassland” with “none of the bookish manners he'd brought with him” (32–33). Zhang, the most successful of the horse herders among the Chinese students, witnesses the “typical daredevil, death-defying Mongol spirit” of a hunter on horseback chasing after a wolf (225) and follows suit, becoming at least for a moment a Mongolian trusting his fate to the shamanist Tengger god. Chen, because of his fascination with Mongolian cultural and social beliefs, especially those surrounding the veneration of the wolf totem, finds his identity as an urban Han intellectual blurring; at one moment, Chen discovers that he is losing his “Han Chinese” stance of detached, rational argumentation; instead, he counters Chinese chauvinism in far more emotional and violent ways (197). The narrator explicitly tells us the outcome of Chen's hybrid transformation: he “was not a journalist or tourist: he enjoyed the proud status of a nomadic shepherd” (431).

To summarize, whereas the Han Chinese Beijing students can try on new, non-urban and non-Han identities, the unintended consequence of Jiang Rong's deep identification with Mongolians is that they, in turn, are forced to remain within a monolithic, unchanging traditional Mongolian pastoral identity. What is even more troubling is the fact that this identity is a highly romantic and constructed one—an exaggerated version of Mongolian pastoralism for the purposes of the novel. As we saw in the previous chapter, what Orhon Myadar (2011) argues about the “nomadic” identity of northern (Khalkha) Mongolians and their “unbounded” landscapes is undoubtedly true for Inner Mongolians as well. It is a powerful, deeply rooted social construction, in which images of nomadic herders and Mongolian landscapes “perpetuate the romantic, if medieval, portrayal of Mongolia in order to serve the need of outsiders for an imagined Other and the need of Mongolians for a cultural demarcation and social bond” (336). The point that Myadar is making—and one that is consistent with the main argument of this chapter—is that these ideas about Mongolian identity are highly rhetorical and are used to support additional ideas about authenticity and ethnic purity. Myadar is highly skeptical of whether this Mongolian identity based on pastoral nomadism and open landscapes is useful to describe Mongolians at all (339).

Like Myadar (2011), several researchers have questioned this romantic and ahistorical identification of Inner Mongolians with rural pastoralism and a pure ethnic identity. In Inner Mongolia, Han Chinese people have outnumbered Mongolians since at least the first decade of the twentieth century (Bulag 2004, 86; Williams 2002, 28) and have dominated the population of Inner Mongolia since 1947 (Bulag 2004, 87). Uradyn Bulag (2004, 109) openly acknowledges the fact that the most sustainable Mongolian communities in China are those of Eastern Mongolians who practice agriculture and live in small villages. Wurlig Borchigud (1995), furthermore, documents the identity conflicts between Mongolians from cities and those from pastoral areas, in which the former may consider the speaking of Mongolian as “backwards” (291), whereas the latter may consider themselves at once more ethnically authentic and more stigmatized (290). Jiang Rong, deeply invested in the romantic portrayal of Mongolians as pastoral herders, would reject these alternative forms of identity as inauthentic, despite the fact that these are the forms that many Mongolians follow.

*Asymmetric Cultural Reciprocity.* Mongolian illiteracy is an overlooked motif in *Wolf Totem*. The novel claims that Mongolian illiteracy, its “cultural backwardness” (Jiang 2009, 97) or “its backwardness in written culture” (377), has prevented Mongolians from speaking for themselves, representing

themselves historically, or promoting their contributions in terms of military strategizing, values, and environmental knowledge. In a dialogue between the two most sympathetic Beijing student characters, Chen and Zhang, illiteracy serves as one cause of the inevitable disappearance of Mongolian pastoralism in Inner Mongolia: “It’s a shame the wolf totem is a spiritual system with a scant written record. The fatal weakness of the grassland race is its backwardness in written culture” (377). In the *wen-wu* dyad that Kam Louie (2014, 22–23) argues best represents Chinese masculinity, the Mongolians are devoid of *wen*—denoting literature, elite educational institutions, and bureaucracies; as we will see in the following subsection, they possess a surfeit of *wu* masculinity, that is, raw physical force and military values.

The ideal relationship between Chen and the Mongolian elder, Bilgee, showcases this asymmetric cultural reciprocity, in which the Mongolian oral contributions are undercut by Han attitudes towards literacy and the primacy of writing. In Bilgee’s pastoral home, described as a “safe and intimate refuge” (Jiang 2009, 20), Chen shares his books, especially “those dealing with Mongol history, in Chinese and in English” (20). In return, Bilgee shares oral knowledge of Mongolian stories. He suggests the asymmetric nature of his contribution when he shows awareness of the power of writing: “Chinese write their books to advocate Chinese causes. The Mongols suffer because they can’t write books. If you [Chen] could turn into a Mongol and write books for us, that would be wonderful” (46). In other words, the resources of literacy are only available for the Han Chinese, not for Mongolians. As shown with the previous asymmetry, a Han-to-Mongolian hybrid identity is (almost) possible, which, in this case, would be desirable because the Han identity indexes literacy and written culture; in short, the Han Chinese students can act as cross-cultural mediators, a role that Jiang Rong does not allow for the Mongolian characters. Importantly, Jiang Rong underwrites the Han-Mongolian identity binary with literacy-orality; literacy indexes “civilization,” whereas illiteracy indexes “primitivism,” the quality of an authentic Mongolian pastoral identity that attracts travel writers like Jiang Rong in the first place (Henningsen 2010, 126).

Akin to the monolithic, overly romanticized and timeless construction of Mongolian pastoral identity explored in the previous subsection, Jiang Rong (2009) simplifies Mongolian culture to that of its oral form, with the single exception of the thirteenth-century epic, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (97). Jiang Rong is unwilling to imagine other literate and intellectual forms of Mongolian culture. In the most extreme case, he ignores the 400-year tradition of Mongolian Buddhist literacy (in Mongolian and Tibetan) and

other secular literary traditions and authorities in Inner Mongolia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Bawden 2003). He renders invisible contemporaneous Mongolian political movements for autonomy and national representation—the messages of which would have been orchestrated in both Mongolian and Chinese. Finally, he ignores the fact that instruction in Mongolian and the status of the Mongolian script have been sites of contestation for several decades (Borchigud 1995; Davidson 2020). The suppression of these autonomous and national movements by the Chinese Communist Party made Inner Mongolia an early violent flashpoint in the Cultural Revolution: from 1967 to 1969, over 20,000 Mongolians were killed and 300,000 injured in these attacks (Bulag 2004, 93; Hyer and Heaton 1968). Given Jiang Rong's goals to portray the possibilities of Mongolian-Han social harmony, it is not surprising that he erases this violent history from *Wolf Totem*.

*Asymmetric Masculinity.* A final asymmetry—in which Mongolians and their landscapes are intensely masculinized by the *wen-wu* logic of Chen and the Beijing students—leads to consequences similar to the previous two asymmetries: Mongolians are idealized as a singular, raw, pure, and authentic identity, grounded in an oral culture and highly masculine values and practices. Jiang Rong overlays the Mongolian grasslands with the *wen-wu* dyad, in which the former term denotes “literary” and other pursuits of civilization that enable social harmony (Louie 2003, 4–5) and the latter term denotes military values and “controlled force” (Louie 2003, 5–6). Importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the *wen-wu* dyad is an internal, emic concept, meaningful only for Han Chinese men; moreover, it is a concept that distinguishes them from non-Han Chinese, like the Mongolians, who are defined as uncivilized, animalistic “barbarians” who lack *wen* (Louie 2002, 10). It is for these reasons that the masculine logic of *Wolf Totem* is asymmetric. Equivalent to Louie's (2003, 7; 2014, 26) discussions about how different masculine ideals have collided with the *wen-wu* dyad due to European colonization or Japanese imperialism, the Beijing urban students become anxious over the weakness of their bodies and their inability to fit into the pastoral economy, reminiscent of the fears of Chinese men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Chinese were depicted as the “sick men of East Asia” (2003, 9) when confronted with imperialist Japanese representations of virile manhood.

For Jiang Rong (2009), the grasslands of Inner Mongolia are a pure, masculine or *wu*-centered paradise or Eden (246), where, according to Chen and Yang, the Mongolian herders possess “the most extensive primitivism and freedom anywhere” (34). The grasslands shape this masculine logic.

Mongolians, for example, follow the authority of a natural Mongolian male leader (56), comparable to the ways in which wolves follow the military orders of “alpha males” (4). Positions of status are ranked accordingly to the logic of masculinity: hunters are accorded the most prestige, horse herders are ranked second, and herders of other livestock are ranked last. Feats of physical prowess, such as drinking and wrestling, are emphasized (53). Furthermore, Jiang Rong’s masculinizing of the grasslands explains the almost complete erasure of women in *Wolf Totem*. Gasmai, the daughter-in-law of Bilgee, is the representative of all authentic Mongolian women, showing such “masculine” qualities as bravery, strength, and independence. Chen compares her with Mulan, the historical female warrior, and views her as “the picture of a prehistoric woman—brave, strong, and beautiful” (12); in this passage, Jiang Rong not only repeats a ubiquitous trope projecting the sexual fantasies of travelers on to images of “primitiveness” (Spurr 1993, 172), he shows how a Mongolian woman could be more masculine than a Chinese man.

Conversely, Jiang Rong (2009) characterizes the Han Chinese as having lost the “virility of their nomadic ancestors” (23) and, similarly, due to Confucianism and agrarianism, as possessing a weakened “people’s nature” and “race’s character” (304). As Jiang Rong links Mongolians to wolves and, in other places, stallions, the Beijing students express their self-loathing by consistently describing the Chinese as cowardly and as acting “like sheep” (23, 173–74, 218, 319). A Mongolian teases the Beijing students for their squeamishness over killing a litter of wolf cubs: “[Y]ou Han Chinese have no guts. [...] You hate wolves, but you can’t even bring yourself to kill a cub. How do you expect to fight a war?” (170). In another section, a Mongolian comments on how urbanites—that is, the Han Chinese—hold a different aesthetic appreciation of the pasture: whereas “inspection teams and poets from the cities like the smell of spring flowers on the grassland,” Mongolians like him prefer the “spring stench” (231). Cities, moreover, offer a threat, representing a new source of Han immigration and transforming Mongolians into Mongolian-Chinese urbanites who no longer have an emotional attachment to the grasslands.

### **The Myth of Mongolian Pastoralism**

The three asymmetries reveal the benevolent and anti-conquest motives of Jiang Rong as a travel writer, who depicts Mongolians and Mongolian pastoralism in reverential terms. Described in opposition to Han Chinese, they are timeless, static, authentic, pure, monolithic, primitive, brave,



illiterate, and intensely masculine. In short, Jiang Rong repeats the same strategies that travel writers have used to depict Mongolians throughout the history of travel writing about Mongolia. Yet, the asymmetries show the cracks and contradictions in Jiang Rong's attempt to depict cultural harmony between Mongolians and Han Chinese. As discussed earlier, Jiang Rong has limited Mongolians to only one viable cultural identity—a traditional, oral-based one that may not adequately address the lives of most Mongolians; accordingly, in Jiang Rong's terms, they are unable to express themselves and define their history in ways that are legible and meaningful to Han Chinese and other non-Mongolians. Additionally, Jiang Rong has erased other Mongolian institutions, in particular, those of Mongolian Buddhism and literary culture. In contrast to Jiang Rong's efforts, however, the demonstrations in Inner Mongolia at the beginning of the Fall 2020 school year, in which Mongolians publicly protested new language educational policies that restricted access to native Mongolian language learning (Davidson 2020), show that these people obviously possess rich linguistic resources to criticize the central Chinese government and use global social media and journalism networks.

From his perspective as a travel writer, Jiang Rong creates a myth out of the metaphysical world of Inner Mongolia—the “wolf totem.” As Guo Xuebo, the ethnic Mongolian writer of *The Desert Wolf*, an earlier example of a “wolf” novel, reminds us, the “wolf totem” does not exist (Zhou 2015). What Jiang Rong has done is pick and choose elements of a Mongolian origins story from the *Secret History of the Mongols*, in which a wolf is depicted as the masculine progenitor of Mongolians, and elements of Mongolian folk beliefs, such as the role of wolves as omens, to create a metaphysical belief system. What Guo Xuebo objects to is the cultural appropriation by a Han Chinese author who invents a fictional belief system and focuses on what audiences accept as commonsensical and natural about Mongolians. According to Guo Xuebo, who is responding to the film adaptation and only obliquely to the novel, “we reserve the legal right to safeguard the history of our ancestors and our ethnic culture” (qtd. in Zhou 2015). Jiang Rong's appropriation is an extreme case: he not only invents a belief system for the Inner Mongolians, he then asks his readers at the conclusion of *Wolf Totem* to imagine the disappearance of this group and their belief system.

To state it more directly, if we as readers ignore the asymmetries—these contradictions regarding how Mongolians are represented as compared with Han Chinese—we may ignore the fact that Jiang Rong's portrayal of Mongolian pastoralism is a myth, one with the dangerous implication of implying that the Mongolian ethnic group and culture in Inner Mongolia has

completely disappeared because of the fact that no other alternatives exist for Mongolians besides the mythical, monolithic, and highly constructed version that Jiang Rong portrays. Jiang Rong is in good company: as we have seen in other chapters, these pronouncements of inevitable decline and disappearance have been repeated in the past 160 years of travel writing in Mongolia. In other words, if Mongolians read *Wolf Totem* and the travel books written about them and their culture, they would have been repeatedly told about their imminent and inevitable disappearance.

### Conclusion: *Wolf Totem* as World Literature

In the period of the late Qing and the early Republic, Chinese intellectuals saw the role of world literature as a way to integrate China into the Western world (Lovell 2010, 197) and to illuminate Chinese culture and national identity (Tsu 2010, 294); in the first decade of the Republic of China, another role of world literature was to align Chinese intellectuals with writers from oppressed nations or cultures (Tsu 2010, 297). *Wolf Totem*, as a world literature text, responds to these earlier conversations, yet in different ways. As we bear in mind David Damrosch's (2003, 4) definition of world literature, in which a text moves beyond its initial socio-cultural contexts, marketplaces, and literary system, *Wolf Totem* circulates globally during a period of tremendous Chinese economic expansion and development. Furthermore, for new global audiences, *Wolf Totem* circulates in different and emerging historical contexts, which may lead to surprising and possibly unintended receptions of the novel.

Defining these new global audiences, however, may not be an easy task. In an interview conducted in 2007 after the publication of the English translation of *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong speaks directly to his new Anglophone audience, which he considers a "Western" or European one:

I do feel the Western spirit of individuality is possibly declining a little bit. So the sheep-like mentality is becoming a little more prevalent in the West. I believe Western individualism is on the decline. If you look at it socially and economically, the West is still growing, but in terms of psyche, people are taking a bit of a step backwards. And if this trend of decline does continue, Western Europe's economic power will definitely decline. (Flood 2007)

For this particular Anglophone audience, Jiang Rong returns to several of the nationalist motifs that appear in *Wolf Totem*, exporting the myth of

Mongolian pastoral “individuality”—which had earlier stimulated Western capitalism (Jiang 2009, 303)—and making a claim about the waning power of Europe and the West. Like the Beijing students he writes about, these Western audiences require that infusion of the mythical “wolf” values. Yet, how confident can we be in Jiang Rong’s assumptions about his Anglophone readers? The English translation of *Wolf Totem* has had disappointing sales figures in the United States and Great Britain (McDougall 2014, 56), adding to the anxiety that Chinese elites feel regarding the lack of recognition of Chinese writers in the global literary marketplace and their inability to be successful in Great Britain and North America (Blanchard 2009; McDougall 2014). These anxieties over the lack of global recognition of Chinese literature are similar to the debates in the 1980s and 1990s about why China did not have a Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature at the time (Larson and Kraus 1989; Lovell 2010). Furthermore, the movie version of *Wolf Totem* has only made a minuscule \$210,000 in the United States, a tiny fraction of its worldwide sales (*Wolf Totem* 2015). In fact, the English translation of *Wolf Totem* has been more popular with Anglophone audiences in the Asia Pacific region (Basu 2011).

Notwithstanding the difficulty of defining these global and Anglophone audiences, they as well as Chinese readers may take up the environmental and nationalist themes of *Wolf Totem* in unintended and surprising ways as the text continues to circulate through emerging social, cultural, economic, and historical contexts. One possibility is that readers may form new associations with the symbol of the “wolf.” For instance, after the North American restrictions placed in 2018 on the Chinese multinational digital communications corporation, Huawei, the “wolf” can now symbolize the highly competitive “wolf culture” of Chinese multinationals (Zhong 2018). Bearing in mind Jiang Rong’s emphasis on the decline of “Western individualism” in the quotation above, it is not too farfetched to read *Wolf Totem* as a paean to capitalist values amplified by his highly essentialized depiction of Mongolian pastoralism. The South Korean author, Jeon Sungtae (2017), though he does so ironically, pairs capitalism and ideas about Mongolian primitiveness in his short story collection, *Wolves*. He portrays contemporary Mongolia as an “overseas retreat” for Korean corporations (13) hoping to instill the “nomadic people’s migratory lifestyle” into contemporary business management practices (15).

Another example of how global audiences may receive *Wolf Totem* within emerging historical contexts is if they were to reconceive of the role of Chinese world literature in a period of Chinese expansion (McDougall 2014). In this case, instead of showing surprise, as Pankaj Mishra (2008)

does when he states that “the Chinese censors missed this indictment of Han imperialism”—Jiang Rong’s criticism of Han domination over Chinese ethnic groups—readers may assume that *Wolf Totem* represents a “soft power” equivalent to Chinese expansion and nationalism. In other words, *Wolf Totem* has become a successful global Chinese brand, one, at least unofficially, sanctioned by the Chinese Communist Party. The fact that the novel tracks the movements of characters from Beijing to the periphery invokes the idealized historical concept of the Silk Roads and foreshadows Xi Jinping’s “One Belt, One Road” policy, initiated in 2013, ten years after the initial publication of *Wolf Totem*. The Silk Roads is an important marketing brand for China because it recalls multiethnic and multinational social and economic networks in Central Asia linking China with Europe. In other words, what is important is how this new form of Silk Roads political and economic branding focuses on the interrelationships between the Chinese center and the periphery and, therefore, between Han and ethnic minority identities. According to Bruce Humes (2018), these central-peripheral interrelationships manifest themselves in the official sponsorship of the writing of ethnic minority writers and the promotion of their access to literary markets, translation resources, and distribution networks outside of China. Yet, this sponsorship also assumes some political control by the Chinese Communist Party. Humes (2014) reports, for example, that ethnic minority Chinese writers have been asked to attend “study sessions” to, presumably, make their literary messages more consistent with the official representation of China internally and globally.

As a world literature text, *Wolf Totem* foreshadows the official Silk Roads branding by presenting a relatively harmonious depiction of multiethnic relationships in China, in particular, when the interactions in the novel are juxtaposed against international concerns over the persecution and mass arrest of Uyghur intellectuals, Mongolian and Tibetan activists, and others. Although it is unfair to say that Jiang Rong ignores the role of the Chinese Communist Party in the environmental degradation of Inner Mongolia, he does avoid portraying direct conflicts between the Olonbulag Mongolians and the Han Chinese; instead, the conflicts mainly occur between local Mongolians and migrant Mongolians, the latter who represent dangerous, asymmetric forms of hybridity. As the exploration of the travel writing asymmetries in this chapter has attempted to show, these ideal relationships between curious and committed Han Chinese students and active and vigorous Mongolian pastoralists are unfortunately undermined by Jiang Rong’s mythical construction of Mongolian pastoralism and the fictionalized disappearance of the Mongolians themselves.

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# Conclusion

## Abstract

Raising awareness about travel writing in Mongolia can encourage travel writing specialists to complicate their assumptions about Eurocentric perspectives on travel. Mongolia challenges theories about travel writing because it is a difficult place to define culturally and politically and because it does not share a history of European colonization. European and North American travelers have emphasized or muted the historical complexity of Mongolian colonialism for their own rhetorical purposes. For researchers in Mongolian Studies, travel writing contributes an ideal source for imaginative geographies that persist into the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** colonialism, imaginative geographies, imperialism, Mongolian Studies

At its simplest, one consistent argument running throughout *Travel Writing in Mongolia and Northern China* is that Western travel writing has for the most part gotten Mongolia and Mongolians wrong. Travelers' ideas about Mongolia have been shaped by powerful Orientalizing discourses, ways of framing Mongolian identities and their cultural practices in terms of primitivism, parochialism, anti-intellectualism, anti-modernism, masculinity, nomadism, and pastoralism. Moreover, as chapter 6 indicated, these Orientalizing discourses are not limited to Western travelers. Though Stephen Kotkin (1999) argues that Chinese intellectuals in the nineteenth century did not have the same colonizing "impetus" and the need to construct the "Asiatic 'other'" (5), Jiang Rong (2009) has created a mythical role for Inner Mongolians as the vanishing "other" to focus twenty-first-century anxieties about Chinese imperialism, identity, and masculinity. Jiang Rong's ideas about Mongolia are analogous to Frans Larson's (1930) depictions of the Mongolian Eden; they both depict masculine and raw, primitive landscapes that produce exceptional, though parochial and anti-intellectual, people.



Into the third decade of the twenty-first century, travelers and readers may continue to simplify the complexity of Mongolian national and social identities, overlooking the fact that Mongolians perform many alternatives to the identity of “nomadic herder” and that they can pass seamlessly from urban to rural identities; furthermore, Mongolians can experiment with and adapt features of their histories—in particular, the authoritative figure of Chinggis Khan—and aspects of traditional pastoralism. As members of an interconnected diaspora throughout Asia, Europe, and North America, Mongolians delighted in seeing two large Mongolian flags prominently displayed in the background of the 2022 World Cup finals, a visual reminder that Mongolians are a part of the global, cosmopolitan world. Mongolians are not hopelessly parochial and isolated but have been interconnected with the worlds beyond their borders through a constant exchange of labor, languages and scripts, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, political ideologies, products, and technologies.

Although I am skeptical about the ability of future travelers to recognize Mongolian social complexity and change and to reflect upon the persistent imaginative geographies, chapter 5 is more hopeful, suggesting that twenty-first-century travelers are becoming more adept at questioning their assumptions about Mongolians and perceiving Mongolia—or, at least Ulaanbaatar—as a global, diverse, and cosmopolitan space. A powerful narrative that has not been discussed to this point, Ariel Levy’s (2013) “Thanksgiving in Mongolia,” provides an opportunity to hint at such non-Orientalizing possibilities. Levy, traveling to Mongolia while pregnant, writes for an intimate audience of American readers, and her narrative acknowledges several of their expectations. Levy tells us that she is traveling to the “edge of the earth,” that she is proud of being “the kind of woman who’d go to the Gobi Desert pregnant,” and, when she meets an environmental activist in traditional Mongolian clothing, she can’t resist the Orientalizing strategy of juxtaposing Chinggis Khan against a prop of global, middle-class consumerism: “It felt like having a latte with Genghis Khan.” The title of her essay also uses this juxtaposition strategy, tantalizing readers with a connection between their home (“Thanksgiving”) and a distant destination (“Mongolia”). Yet, importantly, Levy does not depict Mongolia as a pastoral Eden or as a space for spiritual growth or individual development—or, on the other hand, as a space of violence, anti-modernism, and primitivism. As Levy experiences tragic complications with her pregnancy, she travels through cosmopolitan Ulaanbaatar—the Blue Sky Hotel, French and Japanese restaurants, and a gay bar that she likens to a place in Brooklyn. Levy’s memoir allows little opportunity to invoke Orientalizing strategies and categories. The few

Mongolians she meets acknowledge her discomfort and her bravery for traveling a long distance while pregnant, yet they are not stock pastoral and parochial characters. The landscapes of Mongolia are the background to Levy's personal tragedy—nothing more than that.

It is the complexity of Mongolia and the fact that it does not quite fit in the typical geographical categories or alternative ways of examining travel writing (e.g., see Thompson 2016; Forsdick, Kinsley, and Walchester 2019) that make Mongolia a significant contributor to the work of travel writing specialists. The eras of Mongolian travel force us to reflect on the theories and histories that assume a European perspective. The history of Mongolian travel reverses the logic of European centrality, as medieval travelers, including John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, departed from “peripheral” Europe to arrive at the “center” of the Mongol Empire, Kharkhorum. In addition to this historiographical shift, Gita Steiner-Khamsi and Ines Stolpe (2006) argue, in the context of global literacy and education, that the significance of Mongolia lies in its complexity and definitional ambiguity. Though easy to place geographically, Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe contend that Mongolia is more difficult to place “politically, economically, and culturally” (11). Depending upon the historical period, Mongolia can be placed in the center of its own “world-system” or somewhere on the periphery (24). Moreover, according to the needs and perspectives of researchers, political administrators, and their sponsoring organizations, Mongolia may be grouped together with China, as a part of East Asia with the Koreas and Japan, as a part of Central Asian, or as a Eurasian country strongly influenced by Russia. Franck Billé (2014) shows how these multiple and overlapping ways of contending with post-socialist national Mongolian identity influence Mongolians' self-identification. According to Billé, Mongolians project themselves culturally toward Europe and distance themselves linguistically and symbolically from their Asian neighbors.

The fact that Mongolia was not dominated by a European colonial power before the socialist period makes another contribution to our understanding of travel writing. The complexity of Mongolian colonialism reminds us to pay more attention to how travelers emphasize, ignore, or otherwise refer to themes about imperialism. As Nicola Di Cosmo (1998) indicates, Qing colonialism in Mongolia was complicated by the fact that Inner Mongolian groups were more directly assimilated into the empire (293), whereas in Northern Mongolia the shift from an indirect, economic-based imperialism to direct colonial rule did not occur until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, immediately before the Xinhai Revolution and Mongolian independence (289). Larson (1930) exploits this complexity, downplaying

the power of Qing administration (220) and claiming that such claims about Mongolian colonialism reflect the dominance of Chinese historiography, not their imperial control. For Larson, this position on Mongolian colonial history is a rhetorical choice. His timeless, ahistorical, and static Edenic Mongolia rejects a colonial past.

For British travelers, traveling in Qing Mongolia allows them an opportunity to make claims about imperialism and articulate sympathy towards Mongolian colonial subjects. Harry de Windt (1889), for example, angrily observes a Chinese caravan leader ignoring a dying Mongolian worker; de Windt's anti-colonial impulse is muted, though, when he supplies another reason for his wrath: this Chinese elite had not shown sufficient interest and respect given that a European—a "white man"—was attempting to communicate with him (258). British travelers' persistent laments over the gradual encroachment of Chinese agriculturalists on the grasslands north of the Great Wall demonstrate another attempt to identify with the Mongolians and to criticize the historical process of colonialism. Later travelers, moreover, comment on informal or economic imperialism, essentializing the differences between Mongolians and Han Chinese people based upon their attitudes toward money (e.g., Andrews 1921, 258–59; Lattimore 1928, 54–55) and using anti-Semitic allusions to portray the avarice of Chinese merchants (e.g., see Haslund 1934, 37, 202; Holgate Lattimore 1934, 100). In addition to these Western examples, Byambyn Rinchen and Tsendiin Damdinsüren, the two Mongolian travelers we considered in chapter 4, identify the negative consequences of British and American neo-colonialism yet complicate and temper their positions towards Soviet imperialism.

Finally, if we shift the focus to the contributions travel writing can make for Mongolian Studies, Orhon Myadar's (2021) deconstruction of the nomadic herder persisting at the core of Mongolian national identity demonstrates one key role for travel writing: it is an ideal field for encountering such Orientalizing discourses, imaginative geographies, and other ideological assumptions that make claims about Mongolia and Mongolians appear natural and commonsensical and, therefore, resistant to change. Despite this important role for travel writing, the message of this book is that researchers need to remain vigilant of the ways that travelers frame their observations, create their own authority as writers, mediate their experiences, and represent Mongolians. In other words, researchers need to resist applying a "correspondence theory" to travel writing.

Besides their attention to the rhetorical goals, decisions, and strategies of travelers, Mongolian Studies specialists need to be wary of the perspectives of Western travelers, who are predominantly male, white, and middle class.

This gender, ethnic, and social homogeneity—a concern for travel writing in general—may make it difficult for travelers and their readers to understand Mongolia in alternative and more complicated ways. These Orientalizing discourses and imaginative geographies cling tenaciously to our understanding of Mongolia, and it may be worthwhile for future researchers to explore the connections between travel writing and Mongolian Studies and whether these imaginative geographies are embedded in the field. Considering the future of travel writing in and about Mongolia, we need to track these myths, acknowledge their emotional undertones, and examine the degree to which they are valuable for Mongolian Studies and for Mongolians themselves.

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