

Tokhtogo's Mission Impossible: Russia, China, and the Quasi-independence of Hulunbeir

SÖREN URBANSKY

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany

s.urbansky@lmu.de

ABSTRACT

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Qing court sought to incorporate and homogenise its imperial periphery. This shift towards firmer control of its Mongolian borderlands with neighbouring Russia elicited anti-imperial sentiments among the indigenous population. Complexities arose when the Russian government sought to utilise native separatist movements for the promotion of its own political ends: more precisely, to create a loyal autochthonous buffer at the poorly defended border. The article examines resistance by the nomadic borderlanders against the sovereignty claims of the state, arguing that the rejection of the state provoked a surge of both local and national identity formation along the border. It analyses nomads' reactions to the Manchu court's imperial policies, Russian exploitation of indigenous dissatisfaction, and the question of whether the native borderlanders, in the early twentieth century, gained independence or were subjugated by different means.

Keywords: Russia, China, Mongolia, Hulunbeir, independence, c. 1900–1915

INTRODUCTION

With Russia's annexation of the Amur and Ussuri territories in the 1850s, the Qing court no longer perceived its northern imperial periphery as a remote territory but as an object of development.¹ China's Manchu rulers subsequently shifted from ban to encouragement of Han-Chinese colonisation to Mongolia. Small groups of Chinese farmers, usually originating from famine-stricken regions south of the Great Wall, had long transgressed into the fringes

of the Mongolian steppes and grasslands. Migration accelerated, particularly in Inner Mongolia, so that by the late nineteenth century Chinese peasants far outnumbered the natives. Another element of the Qing court's reaction towards Russia's expansionism was a policy change in the 1900s that entailed the extension of its 'New Policies' (新政) up to the outermost regions with the ultimate goal of transforming the relatively autonomous Mongolian bannerlands into regular Chinese provinces.² As a result, the nomads began to resist the Han immigration and state reforms of the Chinese. As the imperial periphery came under pressure from both Beijing and St Petersburg, it became a buffer between two empires with strained relations, and so ceased to be a backwater at the imperial margins.

What follows is a discussion of several lenses onto this development: nomads' reactions to Beijing's policies, Russian exploitation of indigenous dissatisfaction, and the question of whether the borderlanders, in the early twentieth century, gained independence or were subjugated by different means. This article takes a micro-level approach by portraying one native individual in his struggle for independence and by focusing geographically on one region: Hulunbeir – today's northeastern tip of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in China. While previous scholarship has acknowledged that Russia's active role in the Mongolian independence movement of the 1910s was a proxy means of pursuing its own imperial agenda (Tang 1959: 293–358; Paine 1996: 272–313), it is still unclear to what extent the Russian state, along similar lines, exploited the dissatisfaction of the indigenous people prior to the downfall of the Qing regime. I will argue here that, long before Mongols in Khalkha and Hulunbeir declared independence from Beijing, St Petersburg pursued an active role in supporting the secessionist movement of the indigenous population living at the margins of the Russian and the Chinese empires. The Mongols were well aware that Russia's policy was by no means altruistic, but a reflection of vested imperial interests. Faced with the choice between a great evil and a lesser one, however, they opted for Russian support. As soon as St Petersburg had achieved the objective of reducing China's influence in the borderlands, it no longer supported the native insurgents.

AN IMPERIAL PUPPET ON STANDBY: THE CAREER OF THE INSURGENT
TOKHTOGO

Insurrections by nomads were not a new phenomenon in Mongolia, but had occurred constantly since the mid nineteenth century. However, with the implementation of the 'New Policies' and the official opening of Inner Mongolian pasture lands for cultivation in 1902, the scale changed. Now massive revolts against aggressive Chinese colonisation took place in most of the Inner Mongolian leagues (Lan 1996: 74–7). The obstruction of land surveys, for instance, or the plunder of Chinese local governments, the murder of officials, and other forms of violent opposition fielded by the Mongolian rebels generally provoked military campaigns in response (Lan 1999: 49–50).

With this new wave of active opposition to Beijing's reforms, the still easily penetrable Sino-Russian state border began to play a crucial role. Those who challenged the reforms openly could seek assistance from across the border or take refuge in the neighbouring country. Some Mongolian partisan biographies manage to convey a broad picture of the advantage of *de facto* uncontrolled state borders, the anger against Han colonisation, the 'New Policies' reforms, and Russia's collaboration in the struggle for independence. Self-testimonies of nomads, however, hardly ever appear in imperial archives, as few of the partisans were able to write, and their scant written testimonies were hardly ever recorded in the archival files. Tokhtogo,³ interrogated in the summer of 1910 by the Governor of Transbaikalia, was one of the resisters against Han rule. He spoke Chinese and Mongolian, but was illiterate. His translator, however, wrote down his life story as a unique account. Perhaps as a result, his biography reads like a glorification of an uncivilised hero from the steppe.

Tokhtogo was born in 1862 as hereditary son of the prince (*taiji*) of the south wing of Gorlos banner, far away from Hulunbeir and the border to Russia. That banner formed part of Jirim league (哲里木盟, also referred to as Jirem) in Jilin province, one of the regions transgressed by the newly built Chinese Eastern Railroad.⁴ Han immigration in this banner had begun before the official opening and taxation of bannerland in 1902.⁵ Tokhtogo was appalled by the Han colonisation of the Jirim league, the ubiquity of unscrupulous behaviour towards the Mongols on the part of the Chinese, the lack of protection against random robbery, and the absence of initiative among the Mongol nobility to resolve these problems.

Tokhtogo resorted to open resistance when Han-Chinese troops advanced northwards into Jirim in 1900. Under the camouflage provided by the Boxer Uprising,⁶ the Han invaders grabbed land, seized Mongol livestock and abducted women and girls. In response, Tokhtogo

took up weapons. With support from a group of 10 native elders whose families had all suffered from the invasion and massacre, he met the invaders in battle. None of the aggressors returned alive.

Tokhtogo's career as a rebel during the following decade reads almost like a fairy tale. Leading groups of 10 to 60 armed men, never larger, he resisted imperial advance. He fought Chinese soldiers and farmers, captured Chinese colonisation officials and destroyed their bureaus. In order to survive, his militia robbed Chinese traders and distributed some of the loot to the poor. In 1907, with the prince's approval, Tokhtogo murdered a group of five Japanese topographers. They had been surveying territories in his native Southern Gorlos banner to ready them for colonisation by Chinese government. Afterwards the Japanese government joined Chinese authorities in chasing the Mongol rebel. To avoid being captured, he went underground; three of his sons and some of his partisan fellows joined him. The murder of the Japanese earned Tokhtogo fame and wide support among the indigenous people. On occasion, he would suddenly surface at different places in Khalkha, Hulunbeir, the Greater Xingan range and in the Nenjiang river valley, as if the banner lands were still 'empty space'. The Chinese genuinely feared the insurgent and his rebel force, who were said to have claimed more than 1200 killed or wounded between 1907 and 1910 – most of them Chinese soldiers (Tokhtogo 1910: 215–17 – see historical supplement, this volume; RGVIA, Voennyi Gubernator Zabaikal'skoi oblasti 6.6.1911; LOC, Lattimore (undated): 7–8).⁷

Naturally, the Russian government followed the developments across the border, and the Minister of War and other key political leaders sensed Tokhtogo's potential role in the inter-imperial struggle for control. In the spring of 1909, the head of the Transamur Border Guards⁸ surmised that Tokhtogo might be useful for Russian espionage, nomadic partisan organisation and subversive political action in Hulunbeir against the Chinese government:

Tokhtogo's popularity among the Mongols and Solons [...] determines the political significance of having him at our disposal. In case of any complications in the Far East Tokhtogo can be of special value to us and may be used as a means [...] to extend our influence in the region north and south of the railroad from Manzhouli up to Zhalantun Station. (GACHO, Nachal'nik Zaamurskogo okruga otdel'nogo korpusa pogranichnoi strazhi 23.3.1909)

As early as 1908, Russian authorities in Harbin, the administrative centre of Russian Manchuria, had proposed granting asylum in Transbaikalia to Tokhtogo and his supporters. After lengthy debates among the Ministries of War and of Foreign Affairs, and almost two years of secret negotiations with Tokhtogo, the partisan agreed, accepting the precondition that Russia would grant him asylum only if he crossed the border without any open help. In the spring of 1910, Russian officials meticulously prepared the flight. His middleman received explicit instructions and documents from the Russian General Consul in Harbin, as Russian officials knew that China would try to hamper the escape. They identified a suitable place in Khalkha where the Mongol group could pass the border without notice (GACHO, Voennyi Gubernator Zabaikal'skoi oblasti 14.1.1910). In order to deceive Tokhtogo's Chinese persecutors, the Russian border commissioner of Kiakhta spread rumours among local Mongols that Tokhtogo was in hiding in a remote area of Mongolia, far from the Russian border (GACHO, Kiakhtinskii Pogranichnyi Komissar 31.3.1910).

In spite of these efforts, the conspiracy failed. In April 1910, about 80 Chinese soldiers from an Urga battalion attacked Tokhtogo and his comrades in Tsetsenkhan *aimak* of Khalkha region the night before they crossed the border. Tokhtogo's men killed 31 Chinese during the fight and took six hostages, executing them after interrogation. According to his own account, Tokhtogo lost just two men in action, one of them his son. In the end, Tokhtogo entered Russian territory with 47 male Mongolian comrades, weapons, and more than 200 horses. Yet the plan to hide the secret hideaway of the Mongolian rebel had failed (Tokhtogo 1910: 216 – see historical supplement, this volume; 'Uchenie Tokhtokho-Taizhi' / 'The teachings of chieftain Tokhtogo', *Zabaikal'skaia nov'* [*Transbaikal News*] 12.6.1910 (25.6.1910): 3–4).

A heated correspondence between Chinese and Russian diplomats and provincial authorities followed the coup. The Chinese imperial resident of Hulunbeir demanded that the Russians detain and deport the Mongolian insurrectionist (GACHO, Hulunbeir Amban 1910). But the Russian Military Governor of Transbaikalia refused to hold diplomatic negotiations with the Chinese imperial resident of Hulunbeir. Instead, he reiterated the position of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which classified the Mongol not as an ordinary criminal fugitive (who would have to be extradited) but rather as a political refugee (GACHO, Voennyi Gubernator Zabaikal'skoi oblasti 17.7.1910; RGIA, Upravliaiushchii Ministerstvom Inostrannykh Del 16.4.1910). In early June 1910, rumours circulated that in pursuing Tokhtogo about 1000 Chinese soldiers had passed Lake Dalai and approached Khalkha. In

addition, about 800 banner troops of Tsetsenkhan *aimak* were said to have been mobilised, supported by 100 Chinese soldiers from Urga for protection in the event of Tokhtogo's return ('V poiskakh Tokhtokho' / 'In search of Tokhtogo', *Zabaikal'skaia nov*', 3.6.1910 (16.6.1910): 3). At the same time, the Chinese were said to have sent spies to Transbaikalia to neutralise his escape to Russian territory. The Russian border commissioner of Kiakhta claimed to know the whereabouts of at least two Chinese spies who were in search of Tokhtogo. He described these 'tourists' to the Military Governor of Transbaikalia as people 'dressed in ragged Mongol garments; that is the usual Chinese way of espionage disguise in poverty, feigning an idiot' (GACHO, Kiakhtinskii Pogranichnyi Komissar 23.6.1910).

But in Russia, Tokhtogo and his men were relatively safe at last. After the flight, the everyday lives of the rebels underwent significant change. One of Tokhtogo's companions told a journalist writing for the Chita newspaper *Zabaikal'skaia nov*' in 1910:

For several years, we have attacked the Chinese in revenge for what they had done to us by plundering us and abducting our wives and children. We have never touched a single Mongol. The Chinese authorities have more than once attempted to detain us, and several times we were even surrounded by them, but we were able to escape and harm them. [...] We are accustomed to the harsh life. Our main chieftain Tokhtogo [*Tokhtokho-taizha*], [...] speaks to us every day and suggests behaving modestly and living at peace with the population, not offending or insulting anyone. In other words, he makes us forget our previous military life. We endorse his teachings and wholly subscribe to them. ('Uchenie Tokhtokho-Taizhi' / 'The teachings of chieftain Tokhtogo', *Zabaikal'skaia nov*' 12.6.1910 (29.6.1910): 3–4)

Thus, even before Khalha and Hulunbeir had declared independence, the Russian press celebrated the noble savage.

Despite the value of Tokhtogo and his refugees to the Russian government, the slow mills of Russian bureaucracy delayed aid to them. For more than a year, the men camped in yurts on a temporarily assigned spot in Western Transbaikalia, far away from Hulunbeir. Economic circumstances forced them to sell 50 of their 200 horses, undermining Tokhtogo's authority among his subordinates. Only in July 1911 were Tokhtogo and his followers naturalised as

Russians and given an allowance of 13,500 rubles. They were further assigned about 1635 hectares of land in the Aga Steppe, near the Hulunbeir border, where eventually they were assimilated into the indigenous Buriat Cossacks roaming the territory (GACHO, Voennyi Gubernator Zabaikal'skoi oblasti 5.12.1910 and RGVIA, Voennyi Gubernator Zabaikal'skoi oblasti 6.6.1911: 47; RGVIA, Voiskovoi shtab Zabaikal'skogo Kazach'ego voiska 7.6.1911; RGVIA, Ustroistvo July 1911). In the Aga Steppe, the pacified rebel became, almost, an ordinary herder again, a fighter only in waiting.

The rebel for an independent Mongol state had been courted and supported by the Russian authorities early on. In retrospect, his attempt to fight against Han-Chinese colonisation and the Qing 'New Policies' provided significant impetus for the indigenous population of Hulunbeir and its neighbouring territories to do the same. Therefore, Tokhtogo's story is emblematic of two themes: it showcases the resistance of the peripheral indigenous population to Chinese imperial policies; and at the same time, it reveals how the Russian empire attempted to spur on this insurgency in order to gain indirect control over Chinese borderland areas such as Hulunbeir. In sum, St Petersburg granted asylum to a negligible rebel, not out of altruism but from clear self-interest. As far as the indigenous insurgent was concerned, however, with respect to conflicting notions of territory and border, his allegiance was still to the ethnic community rather than the Russian empire. Tokhtogo thus embodies the type of 'detachable men' that were caught between two competing empires both regarding him as their subject. 'Detachable people' could fall victim to conflicting allegiances, one of which in Tokhtogo's case was his dependence on Russia as external power while the other was the link to his own group of followers.⁹

WHEN THE SUBALTERN SPEAKS UP: THE 1911 REVOLUTION AND THE REVOLT IN HULUNBEIR

In the latter half of 1911, more than a year after Tokhtogo and his men had escaped to Russia, the state of affairs in China proper gave the Mongols a new opportunity to revolt. The Xinhai Revolution broke out under the banner of a rising Han nationalism. It meant, indeed, the end of Manchu rule, but viewed from China's ethnic periphery it was also a unique opportunity for secession from the Heavenly Kingdom altogether.¹⁰ On the heels of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, Outer Mongolia declared independence on 1 December 1911. The leading

nobles declared Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu to be Holy Khan (*Bogd Khan*) of Mongolia. Bearing in mind the example of Inner Mongolia, Khalkhans knew exactly what Chinese colonial policy entailed: they had seen the Chinese Republic fall prey to the 'New Policies' and rally behind the Han colonisation sponsored by the late Qing government. By separating from China proper, they hoped to avoid their kinsmen's fate in Inner Mongolia (Lan 1996: 78–95).¹¹

Following the example of Outer Mongolia, the indigenous elites of Hulunbeir declared the region independent in January 1912, and called for unification with the newly created Khalkha empire. In addition, in some banners in Inner Mongolia where Chinese oppression had become intolerable, people rebelled and sought independence. Urga supported their cause and launched a general military campaign. Tokhtogo, however, who in the meantime had left his Russian refuge and hastened to Urga to take charge of the Holy Khan Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu's bodyguards, was not allowed to participate (LOC, Lattimore (undated): 8; Lan 1996: 234). Though revolt also broke out in Inner Mongolian bannerlands, these territories were already too closely interwoven with the Chinese provinces to furnish the secular or ecclesiastical leaders who would be able to unify the indigenous people for a common political cause. In the end, Chinese Republican forces succeeded in suppressing the secessionist tendencies in those banners.¹²

Through an extensive network of informants, the Russian authorities stayed well informed about major developments in this rebellion. The first general assembly of influential Hulunbeir tribal leaders was held in September 1911 – weeks before the Wuchang Uprising erupted on 10 October. The banner leaders protested against their disempowerment and requested the Chinese authorities to remove Chinese officials, to reintroduce autonomous regional administration, to pull out all Chinese troops, and to stop Han colonisation. During a second congress in November 1911, it was decided, in obedience to orders from Urga, to proceed with the formation of troops for the purpose of fomenting open rebellion. The first day of the revolt was scheduled for 2 (15) December 1911 (Baranov 1912: 55–6; Men'shikov 1917: 37–8; Woodhead 1914: 622; RGIA, Shtab 1912: 62–62 obl.; Meshcherskii 1920: 5–6).

The Chinese authorities refused to accommodate the September demands of the Barguts.¹³ The Mongols distrusted Sun Yat-sen and other Chinese revolutionaries, and instead focussed their hopes on Russia. Rumours circulated among the Mongols, indicting Chinese

revolutionaries for slaughtering Mongols, and suggesting that protection could be expected only from foreigners. Some Mongols in Hulunbeir even tried to adopt Russian citizenship. Corrupt Chinese authorities further fuelled anxieties among the local Mongol population. In Hailar, it was reported that the Head of Chinese administration had jailed many who were innocent of any crime, and that at night Chinese soldiers searched for Mongols to rob and beat. According to a secret Russian report, ‘arrests and prosecutions were carried out for the personal gain of the chief of prefecture, as he is willing to release arrested Hulunbeir Mongols for money’. More diplomatically, the Chinese administrator of Hulunbeir (*daotai*)¹⁴ tried to win the sympathies of the Mongol senior officials with a banquet. He hoped that they could, in turn, influence the population (RGIA, Shtab 1911: quotation 48 obl.).

The hopes of the Chinese administrator were in vain, however. The rebels had removed the Chinese sentry posts on the border to Russia, one by one, without significant opposition from the border guards. More and more armed banner men gathered in the vicinity of Hailar; by the Russian New Year, their numbers had swelled to more than 500. On 2 (15) January 1912, they encircled the Chinese administration and the barracks of the Chinese troops. The insurgents demanded the departure of all Chinese administrative officials and soldiers from the territory of Hulunbeir. On the night before the attack, the Chinese administrator and his administration had taken refuge in the Russian-controlled railroad concession. Chinese soldiers made their way to the Russian concession within the city and agreed to a proposal by the Russian consulate to surrender their weapons. Thus, in the morning, without a single shot being fired, Hailar came under control of the Mongols. Public order remained perfectly intact: there were no reports filed about looting or violence against the remaining Chinese. Chinese traders opened their shops as they did every day. The non-violent takeover did not last for long, however. One week after assuming control, the new regime presided over a number of searches in residences throughout the city. The new masters discovered uniforms, weapons, ammunition, and 196 young Chinese men in civilian dress hiding in private houses. The men were arrested, handed over to the Russian authorities and deported the same day on trains towards Harbin. Thus did the Russians support the Mongols in their quest to cleanse the region of Chinese forces (RGIA, Shtab 7.1.1912 and 11.1.1912; ‘Mongoly v Khailare’ / ‘Mongols in Hailar’, *Dumy Zabaikal’ia* [*Transbaikal Thoughts*], 12.1.1912 (25.1.1912): 2).

Negotiations were still ongoing between Chinese officials sent from Heilongjiang’s provincial capital, Qiqihar, and the rebels on the matter of Hulunbeir’s future status when several

hundred Mongolian soldiers began marching westward, approaching the Russian-controlled railroad town of Manzhouli on the border. Since it was almost entirely inhabited by Russians and Chinese and was located inside the Russian-controlled belt of alienation (*polosa otchuzhdeniia*),¹⁵ the Mongols cared little about who controlled it. Their prime concern was with the Chinese military detachment stationed at the nearby garrison of Lubinfu, about 2 km south of Manzhouli. Officially, only about 150 Chinese soldiers were stationed at Lubinfu, but in the wake of the rebellion the garrison had been fortified. Commander Zhang, its head, averred that he expected to engage in battle with the Mongols. Though confident he would win, he was also a realist, willing to withdraw his soldiers in case of defeat; he expected the rebellion to be brief and regular Chinese military to reach the region soon.¹⁶

But these security measures proved ineffective, and Zhang's assurance misguided. On 20 January (2 February) 1912, Mongols captured and looted the Chinese garrison. They dismantled the buildings, sold the plunder and set parts of the town on fire. According to Russian intelligence, Erwin Baron von Seckendorff, a German reserve officer in charge of the Chinese Customs House at Manzhouli, agitated among the Chinese in a successful bid to persuade them to resist the Mongols rather than surrender Lubinfu (RGIA, Shtab 19.1.1912; 'Mongoly u st. Man'chzhuriia i v Khailare' / 'Mongols near Manzhouli Station and in Hailar', *Dumy Zabaikal'ia* 29.1.1912 (11.2.1912): 2). American sources confirm that the German baron had directed the fire of Chinese troops against the Mongol attack. After their defeat, the Chinese soldiers and authority officials were made to march to the railroad station, and then transported to Qiqihar. The customs commissioner Baron von Seckendorff, in turn, remained in charge of the Customs House at Manzhouli (NARA, Maynard 8.2.1912: 69).

OPAQUE ENTANGLEMENTS: RUSSIA'S ROLE IN THE REVOLT

Weeks before the Chinese defeat at Lubinfu, the Russian government was well aware of the looming insurrection. It reacted swiftly. As early as late 1911, St Petersburg increased its troop presence east of Lake Baikal. Two divisions were deployed at various railroad stations in Transbaikalia to protect Russian interests in North Manchuria and to regain full control over the Chinese Eastern Railroad line. About 3000 railroad carriages were being held in reserve at Manzhouli, fitted to accommodate 40 soldiers each, so as to transport up to 120,000 men at very short notice (NARA, Maynard 24.11.1911: 40 and 19.12.1911: 47).

Whereas the occupation of Hailar had been carried out without direct Russian military assistance,¹⁷ Chinese and Russians held different views about the extent of Russian support to the Mongols in Manzhouli two weeks later. Several possible motives drove Russian action in Manzhouli: the wish to maintain a buffer between thinly populated borderlands in Siberia and the increasing Han-populated areas, to forestall a strong Chinese military presence in Outer Mongolia and Hulunbeir and to preserve a homogenous indigenous region free of significant foreign elements in Mongolia, enabling Russia to reap the benefits of economic development without competition. According to instructions from St Petersburg, Russia would remain strictly neutral in the event of hostilities between the Chinese and Hulunbeir banner people (Tang 1959: 83). Yet there are good reasons to believe that the Russian government or some Russian military leaders did, in fact, openly intervene on the side of the Hulunbeir Mongols.

Though Hulunbeir was far removed from the seedbeds of revolution and of secondary concern to international observers, several foreigners were witness to these events. Doctor P.M. Jee was one of them. The San Francisco-born Chinese was employed by the Chinese Government as medical officer in charge of the Imperial Chinese Hospital at Manzhouli. Jee feared the Mongols looked upon him as a Chinese official and not as a US citizen. He requested that the American Consul, Lester Maynard, in Harbin protect him and his family, all of whom resided in Manzhouli's Russian railroad concession (NARA, Jee 7.2.1912: 240; NARA, Maynard 9.2.1912: 19). Jee was in charge of the Red Cross Hospital Service and so became an eyewitness of the Manzhouli clashes. He wrote to the American Consul:

[n]o one here can fail to see that the Russians are using the Mongols as tools to gain their object. The latter admitted in the beginning that they could not fight the Chinese and did not care for Manzhouli. Many of the Russians claim that their government is not responsible for what is going on here, but that a certain [Martynov], the General Commander in Harbin, has brought all the last two weeks' happenings. (NARA, Jee 12.2.1912: 263)

The American doctor sent a long list of further evidence to the US Consul, painting a scene in which Mongols followed Russian instructions, firing from Russian-controlled railroad territory, waiting there in reserve, and finally returning weapons to the Russians after the fighting. Jee also claimed that at least 20 scouts from the 15th Siberian regiment assisted in

the fighting (NARA, Jee 12.2.1912: 1–3). The US Consul supported this version of events, in which Lieutenant General Evgenii Martynov acted independently, and contrary to the instructions from St Petersburg or at least without its consent, in favour of assisting the Mongols (NARA, Maynard 7.2.1912: 68; 8.2.1912: 69; 15.2.1912: 71).

Martynov took a different view of the hostilities. During the two years he had served as head of the guards of the Chinese Eastern Railroad (i.e. the Transamur Border Guards), he became a proponent for Russian annexation of Manchuria as soon as political conditions would allow it. Later, Martynov would make the case for such a coup in a thin, self-published brochure. To him the Mongolian independence movement was an ideal opportunity for the Russians to move ‘the Russian border, as a strategic marker, to the [Greater] Xingan mountains’ (Martynov 1914: quotation: 82). According to Martynov’s own account, he ordered all Russian officers to remain neutral but combat-ready, which led – he proclaimed – to the ‘great result’ that the well-armed Chinese troops in Hailar and Manzhouli were defeated by the Mongol fighters without offering much resistance, so that there were only two Mongol casualties. Kaplinskii, a Russian officer from the 15th Siberian sniper regiment, also fell, ‘as he wished to observe the fight from a short distance, and by his own initiative [...] dressed in a Mongol uniform and was killed while he mingled with the Mongols’ (Martynov 1914: 80–93, quotation: 81–2).

Yet another picture was painted by the Russian press. According to an eyewitness correspondent of the newspaper *Man’chzhurskaia gazeta* (*Manchurian Newspaper*), some Mongol fighters accidentally entered Russian railroad territory during the fighting. To von Seckendorff, the commander of the Chinese regiment, this mistake offered a welcome opportunity to lodge a protest against Russian interference. During the battle a few Mongols were taken prisoner by the Chinese. Von Seckendorff’s adversary Kaplinskii and a few of his fellow soldiers accidentally found themselves in the line of fire between Mongols and Chinese (‘St. Man’chzhuriia’ / ‘Manzhouli Station’, *Man’chzhurskaia gazeta*, 11.2.1912 (24.2.1912): 3). Another witness, a reporter for *Dumy Zabaikal’ia*, saw Kaplinskii’s role quite differently. In his view, the latter was to deliver a message from the Russian authorities to the Chinese garrison with a warning not to expand military operations into the Chinese Eastern Railroad zone of alienation. According to his account, Kaplinskii was shot as he mounted his horse, holding a white flag in his hand (‘Mongoly u st. Man’chzhuriia i v Khailare’ /

‘Mongols near Manzhouli Station and in Hailar’, *Dumy Zabaikal’ia*, 29.1.1912 (11.2.1912): 2).

In contrast to the Russian accounts, however, it was of minor consequence to Chinese officials whether a high-ranking Russian officer had acted independently or was acting on orders from the capital. To them the immediate outcome was, necessarily, the same. The newly appointed acting military and diplomatic Chinese administrator of Hulunbeir, Jing, who succeeded the expelled administrator Huang Shifu (黃仕福), had arrived for negotiations with the Mongols at the Chinese garrison of Lubinfu early on the morning of 2 February 1912. However, the Mongols refused to recognise his authority, and the scheduled negotiations did not take place. The Chinese administrator of Hulunbeir also became an eyewitness to the unfolding events, ultimately endorsing Dr Jee’s version. According to his testimony, Russians started attacking the Chinese garrison from the north and Mongols from the east at six o’clock in the morning. Twenty Mongolian soldiers and one Russian officer died. Thus ‘the Russians, in assisting the Mongolians, have openly violated their neutrality’ (NARA, Hailar daotai 1912: 235). Although the Chinese were able to hold the garrison at first, it fell two days later, after a superior force of Mongol soldiers had arrived from Hailar.¹⁸

While the various accounts of the strike against the Lubinfu garrison near Manzhouli, of Chinese, Russian, US-American and German provenance, vary in detail, they do agree that Russian assistance seems to have played a decisive role in the secession of Hulunbeir from China. This interference was certainly in line with Russian interest at the time: the ousting of Chinese troops from its state border and its Manchurian railroad concession enabled Russia to secure the imperial periphery and exploit the economic benefits to be extracted from northeast China at lower risk and cost.

Weeks of uncertainty followed the expulsion of Chinese civil and military corps. Suspicious of the peace, the Mongols remained on guard and stationed 250 soldiers in the Lubinfu garrison. Above Manzhouli’s Chinese Maritime Customs office waved the flag of the Republic of China; on the roof of the residence of the Chinese delegate, however, the Imperial Dragon still flapped (‘Zhizn pos. Man’chzhuriia’ / ‘Life in Manzhouli’, *Dumy Zabaikal’ia*, 23.2.1912 (7.3.1912): 2). After the hostilities in Hailar and Manzhouli, the Mongols delivered their claims in a letter to the Hulunbeir administrator:

We are determined not to recognise the Republic and not to submit to the oppression of the Chinese officials. We respectfully advise both of you gentlemen to promptly prepare and depart with your subordinate officials for your homes, and enjoy peace. All other people engaged in trade and other occupations will be left absolutely unmolested; on the contrary, they will be extended special protection. [...] If you oppose us by opening fire, we will be obliged to fight. Our righteous army of Hulunbeir respects the principles of humanity, and will not murder the Chinese. (NARA, Mongols 1912: 250)

However, despite such promises, anti-Chinese violence erupted in Hulunbeir shortly after the capture of Hailar. Conditions became alarming, and Chinese officials warned the population that, if they supported the Mongols, their property would be confiscated as soon as the city was retaken by Republican forces. False rumours of Chinese reinforcements marching towards Hailar fuelled the already-tense atmosphere (NARA, Maynard 25.1.1912: 62). On 8 (21) April 1912, Mongolian soldiers, mostly Solons, looted Chinese shops and eateries in Old Hailar and arrested hundreds of Chinese. ‘According to recent rumours’, the *Dumy Zabaikal’ia* correspondent informed his readers, ‘the Mongols expelled all the Chinese out of the old city, driving them off to the belt of alienation, leaving only the merchants untouched’ (‘Mongoly v Khailare’ / ‘Mongols in Hailar’, *Dumy Zabaikal’ia*, 3.4.1912 (16.4.1912): 2). The US consul in Harbin reported that

[...] the principal buildings being entirely destroyed by fire, and the Chinese population, being subjected to great suffering and sustaining heavy losses [...] were in a panic, and tried to escape from the town, yet 600 Chinese were captured by the Mongols who apparently intended to hold them for ransom. The authorities were helpless, and looting continued. The only things being saved were articles that the owners managed to take to the Russian part of the town.

Observers debated whether the total anarchy had been prompted by political or patriotic reasons, or whether a mutiny sparked by Mongolian soldiers who had not been paid set off the riots. In any case, the morning after the riots, Russian authorities pressured the Mongolian administration to restore order (NARA, Maynard 13.4.1912: 90).

Thus, while Russia had been reluctant to get involved too closely in Inner Mongolia for fear of Japanese reaction, the tsarist empire was willing to become involved in Hulunbeir.¹⁹

Backed by the Russian military, the Mongols had succeeded in taking control of the borderland. At first glance, the imperial borderland had been restored to independence. For the nomads still roaming the region, however, the future was less certain than ever.

DEPENDENT INDEPENDENCE: HULUNBEIR FROM 1912 TO 1915

After the Mongols declared independence and expelled Chinese officials and military, the status of Hulunbeir became a hotly debated issue among Russian politicians and commentators.²⁰ In a speech to the Duma on 26 April 1912, three months after Hulunbeir became independent, Sergei Sazonov, Russian Foreign Minister, declared himself opposed to land annexation on Russia's periphery because it did not pose significant military risk to the empire:

I cannot perceive any reasons why the annexation of Northern Mongolia [Khalkha and Hulunbeir – author] should be useful to us. Our interests require only that, as Mongolia lies on our frontier, no strong military power should be established there. Owing to the proximity of the Mongols, our Siberian frontier is better guarded than if we were to construct fortresses with large garrisons.
(NARA, Sazonov 1912: 8)

Sazonov pointed to the differences between Inner and Outer Mongolia and cautioned that attempts to unite them were hardly likely to be a political success. He was even sceptical about an independent national existence for Outer Mongolia. The Minister saw Russia's role as that of an intermediary between China and Mongolia, stressing that Russia must strive to have a seat at any negotiation table brokering an agreement between the two. He named three principal conditions to guide future relations between China and Outer Mongolia. First, he asserted, no Chinese administration was to be introduced; second, no Chinese troops were to be deployed in the region; and, third, Chinese colonists must be denied access to the region (NARA, Sazonov 1912: 1–10).

The Russian Foreign Minister agreed that the restoration of Chinese sovereignty in Hulunbeir would be acceptable, as long as Russian economic interests were respected and Hulunbeir remained self-administered by locals (Tang 1959: 84–6). It did not suit Russian interests to unite Hulunbeir with Outer Mongolia. The two treaty ports of Manzhouli and Hailar were subjected to scrupulous surveillance by the international community, foreclosing the possibility of a complete annexation of the area.²¹ At the same time, the guarded Russian railroad concession in the area secured Russian claims sufficiently, and when in the future China was to assert its ‘interest in the railway, this would have confirmed Chinese connections with Outer Mongolia just when Russia was anxious to emphasize the lack of any such connections’ (Lattimore 1969: 119). Though Russia had supported Tokhtogo prior to the end of Qing dynasty and the declaration of independence in Urga and Hailar, he was now no longer needed to support the Russian position in Hulunbeir. For the time being, China’s position was too weak to pose a threat to Russia’s security and influence in the region.

Since St Petersburg obviously did not support the idea of a Pan-Mongolian empire, it treated Hulunbeir’s indigenous leaders lukewarmly and advised them to compromise with the Chinese authorities. These negotiations came to nothing, however, since Urga warmly received the pledge of the Hulunbeir leaders to be made a protectorate of the independent region of Khalkha. In May 1912, Shengfu (勝福), a member of the Dagur gentry who had been a leading figure in the Hulunbeir rebellion, was installed at Hailar as the Urga Khutukhtu’s viceroy and imperial resident (*amban*)²² (Woodhead 1914: 622). Shengfu’s appointment followed a long tradition by which Dagurs generally were more educated than members of other banners, and thus tended to dominate the tribal affairs in Hulunbeir by monopolising official appointments (Lattimore 1969: 167–8).

By acknowledging China’s command over Outer Mongolia while negotiating with the Mongols, Russia played a double game. In Hulunbeir this strategy raised delicate questions. On the one hand, St Petersburg recognised that Hulunbeir joined the autonomous Khalkha; on the other, the Chinese customs house remained open in Manzhouli (Mongoliia 1913: 15).

In China, the retention of Mongolia and other frontiers as dependencies was disputed during the early years of the Republic.²³ At no point was Hulunbeir’s independence stable and secure. By May 1912, the Heilongjiang provincial assembly (省議會) was discussing two

burning questions: namely, how to prevent foreign interference in Hulunbeir and how to convince the indigenous tribes of the district to submit to rule by the Republic of China. That same month, the Heilongjiang provincial government circulated leaflets in Hulunbeir aiming to win the hearts of the Mongols. The handbill, printed in Mongolian, promised equality among all ethnic groups in the Republic of China, as well as respect for their rights to autonomy. It warned the people not to await support from Russia, as this would mean a violation of international law and was therefore unlikely to happen. In the next paragraph, however, the friendly tone turned frosty:

You cannot rely on your armed forces, for its strength does not exceed 1,000 men and thus is not able to resist the [Heilongjiang] government forces. Your soldiers are untrained and only a small minority of them is more or less able to handle guns. Such a quantity and quality of your soldiers is not enough to mess with Qiqihar military forces, of which three percent would be enough to definitely defeat you.

The leaflet concluded with a call for a peaceful resolution to the various gambits for independence, and the promise that the handover in January 1912 would have no repercussions (RGIA, Shtab 15.5.1912: quotation on 111).

Nevertheless, a punitive expedition carried out by a Chinese regiment against Tokhtogo's native Jirim league in the autumn of 1912 roused concerns among the Mongols in Hulunbeir. Local Mongol officials in Hailar feared that the expedition augured an attempt by Chinese troops to cross the Xingan mountains and retake Hulunbeir. However, Song Xiaolian, the new Governor of Heilongjiang province – the former Chinese administrator of Hulunbeir and as such an extreme advocate of sinicization – decided against the military option, for the time being. Song seconded his delegates' request to negotiate with Mongols in Hailar and to work towards reunification with China ('Ugroza Barge' / 'Barga under threat', *Kharbinskii vestnik* [*Harbin Herald*] 10.10.1912 (23.10.1912): 2).

But a Russo-Chinese agreement signed on 5 November 1913 represented a defeat for the Chinese government. Russia recognised Chinese control over the entirety of Inner Mongolia, while China acknowledged the *fait accompli* of Outer Mongolian autonomy. Independent

Mongolia was thus reduced to Outer Mongolia. Hulunbeir was not mentioned at all in the agreement (Paine 1996: 295–8; Woodhead 1914: 633–5).

High politics between Beijing and St Petersburg on the matter of Mongolian independence proved to be a burden for the indigenous borderlanders, causing particular anxiety in Hailar. The disappointment following Russian rejection of support for Hulunbeir autonomy and the subsequent pact in November worried representatives of Hulunbeir's indigenous elite and divided its people into two camps, along banner lines. The 'Old Bargut' (Solons, Chipchin and Dagurs) swallowed the Russo-Chinese agreement while the 'New Bargut' (Buriat) banners still agitated for unification with Outer Mongolia.²⁴ Some even threatened to emigrate to Khalkha, on the chance that Hulunbeir would be incorporated back into China. In late February 1914, the imperial resident Shengfu had reached a preliminary agreement with diplomatic representatives from Heilongjiang province. First, the people of Hulunbeir were to become Chinese subjects again. Second, Hulunbeir was to be declared a special autonomous district outside the Chinese provincial administration, under the direct control of the Chinese central government. Third, military requirements were to be met with a local militia body, so that the region might be free of any Chinese troops (RGIA, Shtab 25.11.1913 and 22.3.1914).

During a congress in spring 1914, the schism between the 'Old Bargut' banners on the one side and 'New Bargut' banners on the other broke wide open. Officials from all 17 banners gathered for 11 days in Hailar under the presidency of imperial resident Shengfu. The 'New Bargut' openly accused the Dagurs of accepting bribes and gifts from the Chinese. Dagurs (belonging to the 'Old Bargut'), for their part, tried to delay the close of the conference. They still waited for the approval of the preliminary agreement by the Chinese central government in Beijing and the Heilongjiang provincial government in Qiqihar. At one point, a Dagur regimental commander raised his voice to address the assembly. He took a gloomy tone, speaking for many in expressing his deep frustration with Russian perfidy, and proposing instead a Chinese solution:

When we struggled for autonomy with weapons in our hands, we were convinced to unite with independent Khalkha, and the Russian government pledged to fully support us. Now it has become evident that the Russian government has broken its promises, putting us in a difficult position. If we do not take our fate in our hands now, our enemies will wipe us out. [...]

Wouldn't it be better to accept Chinese authority right away instead of resisting and shedding our blood in vain?

With a military force of fewer than 3000 poorly trained and inadequately equipped soldiers, no one was really in the mood for fighting. Nonetheless the gathering ended without a satisfactory resolution (RGIA, Shtab 20.4.1914: quotation on 155-155 obl.; 'Khailar' / 'Hailar', *Zabaikal'skaia nov*', 19.4.1914 (2.5.1914): 3).

THE CALL FOR INDEPENDENCE SLOWLY FADES: THE STATUS OF HULUNBEIR AFTER 1915

Russia's policy towards Mongolia following independence had been realistic and prudent, reflecting the different lights in which imperial officials saw Outer Mongolia and Hulunbeir. For Outer Mongolia, policymakers in St Petersburg sought to preserve some degree of administrative autonomy, to prevent Chinese military deployment and colonisation, and to obtain special economic interests and rights for Russia. The ultimate goal in the long run was to exclude Outer Mongolia from China's sphere of interest, thereby creating a buffer state.

According to this policy, Outer Mongolia was granted a quasi-independent status in which it remained under both Chinese control and Russian protection, a decision born of international pressures at a tripartite conference of Russia, China and Mongolia in Kiakhta on 7 June 1915.²⁵ To Russian observers, the politically immature princes at Urga were mere puppets in a 'Great Game' between Japan, Russia and China. Russia's main concern had been the creation of a buffer state to prevent China from building up military forces at the border. A unified Mongol empire was not needed for this purpose, and would, moreover, have provoked a conflict with Japan over interest spheres. 'Mongolian nationalism', *Vestnik Azii* [*Herald of Asia*] concluded, 'had unfortunately clashed with stronger forces' (Mongoliia 1915: 112).

Indeed, when the 'Hulunbeir question' was settled several months later, Russian and Chinese negotiators paid little attention to the needs and requests of Hulunbeir's indigenous representatives. The final arrangement dictated that the region's independence from China would be weaker than Outer Mongolia's quasi-autonomy. The agreement settling Hulunbeir, ratified by the Republic of China and the Russian empire on 6 November 1915 in Beijing,

adopted nearly all of the original Russian proposals, the ones Sazonov had initially doubted the Chinese would accept. Hulunbeir was declared a special district, directly subject to the central government in Beijing. The pre-reform administrative structure was restored: the Mongol banner vice commander-in-chief of the Hulunbeir garrison (*fudutong*)²⁶ would enjoy the rank of provincial governor and was to be appointed via presidential decree. Collective ownership of land was granted to bannermen. In times of peace military presence would be limited to a standing local militia, although in cases of insurgency the Chinese government would maintain the right to dispatch its own troops after giving notice to the Russian government. (But since Russia controlled the main passage to Hulunbeir – the Chinese Eastern Railroad – hidden military advance seemed unlikely.) All taxes and duties, except customs, would continue to flow into the coffers of the local government.

With this agreement, Russia assumed the role of mediator between Hulunbeir and China in return for additional privileges, as the declaration salvaged Russian economic interests in Hulunbeir. It was a grave defeat for Chinese diplomacy. Between 1915 and 1920, the region remained *de facto* under the joint control of Russia and China (Lan 1996: 218–23; Tang 1959: 87–90).²⁷ The agreement also marked a serious setback for the indigenous struggle for self-rule. Just as the Russian authorities had forgotten about Tokhtogo as soon as he had lost his possible strategic value for them, the voices of Hulunbeir's indigenous inhabitants had been heard only insofar as they served imperial needs.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that, despite the settlement excluding Hulunbeir from autonomous Outer Mongolia, the fight for independence from Chinese rule continued there after 1915. Probably the most prominent figure in that struggle was Babuzhaba.²⁸ Born in 1875, he had been paramount in the revolt of the Kharachins, a sub-ethnic group in eastern Inner Mongolia. Babuzhaba's freedom struggles gained more attention from contemporaries and historians than had those led by Tokhtogo, who had lived in Outer Mongolia since 1911, where he took to opium and, after his arrest by the Bolsheviks, died in 1922 (LOC, Lattimore (undated): 8). Certainly, Babuzhaba became the more prominent figure because he did not give peace to Hulunbeir or to its contiguous neighbours, Inner Mongolia and Khalkha, after the annulment of independence.²⁹ In 1917, remnants of Babuzhaba's troops surfaced again; but in this last campaign, his reputation would be reduced to that of an ordinary robber. In May 1917, after the Kharachin bandits had chased Shengfu and other loathed Dagurs out of their homesteads around Hailar, where they had largely stuck to two villages, they entered the native section of

the city. There they looted all Chinese stores, the administrative offices and private properties of the Mongol *fudutong* and the premises of the Dagur oligarchy. Until soldiers from the Russian garrison checked the Kharachins in September 1917, the natives of Hulunbeir once again self-administered the region, this time under a regime of terror. In January of 1918, the Chinese President Yuan Shikai assured monetary compensation to its victims. After months of violence, the Dagurs returned to Hailar (Meshcherskii 1920: 7–12; ‘Khailar 12 maia’ / ‘Hailar, May 12th’, *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 25.5.1917 (7.6.1917): 3; Cui 2000: 204–17).

Not until the Russian Civil War did Russia’s imperial position weaken along the Chinese border. On 28 June 1920, when Russia no longer could guarantee indigenous self-rule, the 1915 treaty spelling out terms of governance over Hulunbeir was revoked, and a Chinese presidential mandate finally rescinded the region’s autonomy for good. It again reverted to the supervisory control of the administration of Heilongjiang province. The provincial government of Heilongjiang acted wisely, authorising the *yamen* of the Mongol *fudutong* to continue administering the local affairs of the banner population in the Hulunbeir district. The Mongols thus retained a distinctive structure of local government (Kormazov 1928: 59–62; Baranov 1926: 23–6).

During the 1920s, many people in Hulunbeir and other Mongol lands still belonging to Republican China retained aspirations for greater independence. The rallying cries emanating from that region were echoed by leaders in the newly created Mongolian People’s Republic. Though the Bolsheviks maintained the fiction that Outer Mongolia, after its foundation in 1924, was an independent state, it in fact became the first communist satellite of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, Ulanbataar’s ultimate goal, soon abandoned, of regaining Inner Mongolia and Hulunbeir, and thereby uniting a pan-Mongolian state, must be interpreted within this new political framework.³⁰

In contrast to independence efforts during the late Qing years, when indigenous leaders sought aid from St Petersburg, the independence movement in Hulunbeir of the 1920s was thus strongly influenced by ideological ties to Moscow. The Hulunbeir Mongols planned their revolt fully expecting to receive Moscow’s secret assistance. Precisely because of its presumption of ideological contiguousness, the rebellion was doomed to fail when Moscow ultimately refused to support it (Atwood 2002: vol. 2, 844–853, 861–887). It would be the last flickering of an indigenous resistance in the Hulunbeir borderlands to gain even a modicum of

support from the Soviet Union, to be understood by the latter as a blow against Chinese rule. In the assessment of Owen Lattimore, in his time a leading scholar of Inner Asia, by the late 1920s the 'more or less unreal and romantic nationalism' of Inner Mongolia was in decline:

The question is no longer one of degrees of autonomy or nominal independence within rival Russian, Japanese and Chinese spheres of influence. On the economic side there is only the question of the presence or absence of colonial exploitation; on the political side, the degree of social revolution or counterrevolution. (Lattimore 1936: 405)

Developments in Inner and Outer Mongolia over the ensuing decades support Lattimore's view. Following the Japanese occupation of the eastern and central parts of Inner Mongolia in the early and mid 1930s, the majority of the Mongol population fell under Japanese rule. That moment saw a movement for independence and unification blossom again for a few years, as the Japanese reckoned that Mongol nationalism could act as a counterweight to any possible Han-Chinese domination. Japan also created a Mongol Xingan province within its satellite state of Manchukuo, which would become an enclave granted considerable autonomy. Self-rule came at the cost, however, of the absorption of Mongol ambitions into the objectives of the Japanese empire.³¹

CONCLUSION

During the early twentieth century, the Chinese frontier areas suffered from a complex political amalgam of Chinese claims, Russian and Soviet ambitions and the hopes of indigenous leaders. The Manchu court had opted to implement 'New Policies' in the imperial periphery for the sake of national defence, in other words adopting new mechanisms of direct control and the encouragement of Han-Chinese colonisation. The Mongolian bannerlands, the last frontier area still under the old system, and an intermediate zone between the Chinese and the Russian empires for centuries, were in effect gradually transformed into units similar to typical Chinese provinces.

Indigenous borderlanders responded with a movement towards independence. Motivations for secession were multilayered, ranging from socio-economic relief to political liberation, and

from personal interests to the restoration of historical glory. Biographies of ‘detached people’ like Tokhtogo reflect many elements of this concatenation. Though the movement was not a result of Russian instigation, the tsarist empire, in contrast to the Chinese, perceived the local populace in the border areas as potential allies in its attempt to expand its informal spheres of interest beyond the state border. Hoping to use Tokhtogo as a puppet who would extend the influence beyond its borders, the tsarist regime granted him asylum in Transbaikalia. After the Qing empire had collapsed, however, China was weakened and would no longer pose a threat to Russia’s position in the imperial borderlands. By supporting and instructing the local insurgents in Hulunbeir, Russia had succeeded in strengthening its position at the border and along the Chinese Eastern Railroad. Russia did not need indigenous leaders like Tokhtogo any longer and the government in St Petersburg was not willing to support the idea of an independent Mongolian state that would include Hulunbeir. Thus ultimately, the pan-Mongolian project to unite all tribes within a Greater Mongolian State – which the American Mongolist Robert A. Rupen once interpreted as the most powerful indigenous idea in Inner Asia in the twentieth century (Rupen 1956: 388–92) – was not strong enough to compete with the imperial agendas of St Petersburg/Moscow, Tokyo and Beijing.

NOTES

¹ The territories, totalling about 729,000 sq. km, were annexed on the basis of two highly advantageous border treaties, those of Aigun and Beijing, concluded in 1858 and 1860 (Paine 1996: 28–106 *passim*).

² Also referred to as ‘New Administration’. This set of radical initiatives (including military modernisation, reorganisation of the central bureaucracy and centralisation of power, promotion of modern education, investment in infrastructure), collectively known as the ‘New Policy’ reforms, was nothing less than an attempted revolution from above. The reform period (1901–1911) marked a watershed in the transformation of the Chinese state into something recognisably modern. On the Qing official reform programme, see e.g. Ichiko (1980: 375–415). For the comparison of the ‘success’ of the ‘New Policy’ in Inner Mongolia and its failure in Outer Mongolia, see e.g. Lan (1999: 42–9).

³ Different spellings occur in the sources: Tokhtogo, Toktokho, Tokhtokho, Toghtakhu.

⁴ In the wake of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Russia had signed an agreement with China, the terms of which provided for the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railroad.

This line was the last link of the Trans-Siberian Railroad and provided a shortcut to the Russian Far East, from Chita across Hulunbeir and northern Manchuria via Harbin to Vladivostok. Diplomatic matters, as well as the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railroad, are discussed by e.g. Ablova (2005: 48–53); Paine (1996: 178–94); and Urbansky (2008: 38–41).

⁵ For the opening of bannerland in Jirim league, see Baranov (1919: 42–3); and Lan (1996: 72–3).

⁶ For the impact of the Boxer Uprising in the region, see Orlov (1901: 3–35).

⁷ Another version of the story about Tokhtogo was told to the Russian woman Kornakova who lived with her family in Mongolia near the Russian border. Her informants were Mongol visitors. According to this account, the death toll was lower, with Tokhtogo and his comrades killing more than 100 Chinese soldiers, shopkeepers and officials (Kornakova 1913: 25–7).

⁸ Officially called Transamur District Special Corps of Border Guards (*Zaamurskii okrug otdel'nogo korpusa pogranichnoi strazhi*). These Russian troops guarded the Chinese Eastern Railroad concession.

⁹ Describing the Mongol aristocrat Okin, Humphrey discusses the concept of 'detachable men' in this volume.

¹⁰ On the relation between the Chinese revolution of 1911 and Mongolian independence, see Lan (1996: 106–7); on anti-Manchuism and the 1911 revolution in Northeast China, Shao (2011: 68–88).

¹¹ Russia's role in the independence of Outer Mongolia is discussed in Paine (1996: 287–95).

¹² For answers to the question of why Inner Mongolian banners never proclaimed independence or attempts to become independent failed, see Lan (1999: 52–3; 1996: 152–64).

¹³ Barguts are one of the largest Mongol-speaking ethnic groups in Hulunbeir. They constituted the majority of the Mongol Banner troops there, although other Mongol-speaking groups (Ölöts, Buriats, Dagurs) and the Manchu-Tungusik population (Solons, Evenkis and Orochons) were also affiliated with Barga banners. Thus, Barga means not only ethnic belonging to Barga Mongols, but also banner and administrative affiliation. For more on complicated ethnic composition in Hulunbeir, see Atwood (2005).

¹⁴ In June 1908, the Manchu court reformed the administrative structure of Hulunbeir in order to integrate it within the Chinese provincial system (*sheng*). The office of the Imperial Resident (*amban*), who also held the military rank of banner vice commander-in-chief of the Hulunbeir garrison (*fudutong*), was abolished. A new Han-Chinese official of the rank of *daotai*, delegated by the Governor of Helongjiang province to manage prefectural

administration in Hulunbeir, took on his duties as the Head of Hulunbeir. In addition to this there was a special administration for Chinese population within the provincial system represented by the *daoyin*.

¹⁵ On the Chinese Eastern Railroad zone of alienation in general, see Wolff (1999: 28).

¹⁶ Officially, only 150 to 200 cavalry soldiers were stationed at Lubinfu. Observers, however, estimated the number at 500 men (NARA, Maynard 2.2.1912: 66; RGIA, Shtab 11.1.1912; ‘Mongoly v Khailare’ / ‘Mongols in Hailar’, *Dumy Zabaikal’ia*, 12.1.1912 (25.1.1912): 2). Other Russian observers estimated the number of Chinese soldiers to be 400 and the number of Mongol troops at 900 (RGIA, Russo-Asiatic Bank 1912: 6–7).

¹⁷ Peter Tang speaks of a ‘strong Russian assistance’ in seizing both Hailar and Manzhouli without supporting this claim with substantial proof (Tang 1959: 83).

¹⁸ The customs commissioner Baron von Seckendorff reported that the Mongols withdrew from the neighbourhood after they had dismantled some of the buildings at Lubinfu and sold the loot (NARA, Maynard 15.2.1912: 71).

¹⁹ Japan and Russia concluded several agreements between 1907 and 1916 solidifying spheres of interest in the territories of the Chinese empire. In 1907, Tokyo and St Petersburg signed a secret treaty splitting Mongolia and Manchuria into, respectively, a northern Russian and a southern Japanese sphere of interest. In 1912, Russia was granted all of Outer Mongolia and Hulunbeir (Paine 1996: 272–6). For the entire agreement text, see Woodhead (1914: 630–33).

²⁰ The same holds true for candid discussions on the possible future status of Outer Mongolia, e.g. Denisov (1913: 124–31) and Baranov (1919: 43–6).

²¹ Located on Chinese territory but within the extra-territorial zone of the railroad, Manzhouli and parts of Hailar were under *de facto* Russian control. Russian authority, however, was undermined after the Russo-Japanese War, when both places became treaty ports, i.e. places bound by treaty to be open to foreign trade. Foreign residents thus enjoyed privileges of extraterritoriality just as they did in other treaty ports in China.

²² According to the pre-reform administrative structure in which a local (and not a Han-Chinese governor, *daotai*) acted as imperial resident (*amban*). See note 14 for explanation.

²³ The critical question of China’s borders, i.e. whether the ethnic frontiers should be allowed to decide their own fate, was widely debated among scholars in Republican China. The position of the Chinese state, however, was a minority viewpoint, as many feared that the loss of the frontier territories would threaten the Chinese core by increasing its vulnerability to the Great Powers (Esherick 2006: 233–8, 243–8).

²⁴ Solons, Barga-Chipchin and Dagurs were referred to as ‘Old Bargut’ as they had been relocated to Hulunbeir to start patrolling the border with Russia. The others were called ‘New Bargut’, since they arrived in Hulunbeir only after 1735.

²⁵ According to the eleventh article of the treaty, Hulunbeir remained outside the scope of autonomous Outer Mongolia. On the outcomes of this conference, see Lan (1996: 209–18); Nakami (1999: 75–6); Paine (1996: 298–305).

²⁶ See note 14 for explanation.

²⁷ The entire agreement is published in *Hulunbei’er gaiyao* (1930: 59–63).

²⁸ Also referred to as Babuujab.

²⁹ On the resistance of Babuzhaba in the years 1902 to 1917, see Lan (1996: 239–49) and Cui (2000: 205–13).

³⁰ The status of Outer Mongolia was not yet fixed. With the Russian Revolution and the turmoil of Civil War, Bogd Khan lost the backing of St Petersburg. Outer Mongolia was then occupied by Chinese troops in 1919. What followed was a period of disorder and confusion, fuelled by the echoes of the civil war in Russia. On 25 November 1924, the Mongolian People’s Republic was founded. It became the first communist country outside the Soviet Union (Elleman 1993: 539–63; Paine 1996: 314–42).

³¹ The most detailed account of the history of the revolutionary movement in Inner Mongolia during the 1920s, drawing on Mongolian archives but largely understating the international framework of China, the Soviet Union and Japan, is the two-volume work by Atwood (2002). For the independence movement in Inner Mongolia during the late 1920s to mid 1930s and its relations with Moscow and Nanjing, see Bulag (2006: 268–71, 279–87).

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RGVIA: Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Military-Historical Archive), Moscow, Russia

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