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Oirat Oral Histories of Natural and Social Changes in Ejene Banner, Inner Mongolia

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Oirat Oral Histories of Natural and Social Changes in Ejene Banner, Inner Mongolia

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The purpose of this report is to reveal the natural and social changes of Ejene Banner using life stories. These life stories can teach us about the abundant ecological resources of Ejene Banner. Plants are especially important to the inhabitants of Ejene Banner for grazing animals, as feed for livestock, and for human use. The people therefore have abundant knowledge of various plants and their uses. This knowledge ranges from plants that have been overabundant in the past to those that have deteriorated or disappeared due to water shortages. Ejene Banner's social changes are that of the Cultural Revolution. The background, process, and results of this persecution are described in detail here.

Key words: life stories, plants, Cultural Revolution, Inner Mongolia

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to reveal the natural and social changes of Ejene Banner using life stories. The life histories we use here are from “*An oral history of mothers in the Ejene Oasis, Inner Mongolia*,” which was edited and published by us and Sarengerile as RIHN China Study Series No. 2 in 2011.¹⁾ The book includes Mongolian, English and Japanese text.²⁾ The English (Konagaya, Sarengerile and Kodama eds. 2011: 125–236), was translated from Japanese text, which in turn had been translated from Mongolian text. This is a collection of the life stories of 17 women obtained through interviews conducted between 2002 and 2005, mostly at the Ejene Banner of the Alashaa *aimag* in Inner Mongolia, China. All of the women had lived in the area being studied for over 50 years, and the oldest was Ms. Dulmantsoo, born in 1921. When the first interview was conducted in 2004, she was 83 years old. Accordingly, the period described in these life stories covers almost the entire 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Many Mongols living in this area are Torgud, one of the Oirat groups and Khalkh, the majority group lived in Mongolia.

This article begins with a geographical overview of Ejene Banner. The oral histories teach us about the abundant ecological resources of Ejene Banner. Plants are often mentioned in regard to the natural environment because plants are important for grazing animals, as feed for livestock, and for human use. The women therefore discuss at length various kinds and uses of plants, also describing many once-abundant plants that are now disappearing and speaking of the reasons for these changes. To provide social changes, we first discuss the diversity of peoples’ hometowns and the background of Khalkh people in Ejene Banner. Next, we describe actual events of the Cultural Revolution and how they affected our informants, who frequently referred to the Cultural Revolution as the hardest time in their lives. In fact, most could not talk about their lives without mentioning this crucial period (Konagaya, Sarengerile and Kodama eds. 2011: i). Lastly, we discuss the importance of oral history.

2. Geographic Location and Outline of Ejene Banner

Ejene Banner is located in the western part of Inner Mongolia, in the gravel desert called *govi* in Mongolian. It is about 1,300 kilometers from Beijing. With a mere 39 mm of rain per year, it is in the most arid district of China; however, because it is also in a relatively low-lying area, it benefits from the Heihe, China’s second largest inland river. Formed by snowfall and rainfall in the 4,000-km-tall Qilian Mountains, the Heihe River enriches the Hexi Corridor and flows into Ejene Banner, forming a rich riparian forest there. This oasis has always been a point of importance for north-south traffic (Momiya 1999: 41), and its geographic importance remains unchanged to this day. It is also important militarily: the Special Service Agency of the Kwantung Army was there in 1930s (Hagiwara 1976), and there is now a rocket-launching base in Ejene Banner and a missile base nearby (EQBW 1998: 655–660). Ejene Banner is currently in an important position for border trade with Mongolia and acts as a window for importing mining resources (Kodama 2011).

The total area of Ejene Banner is 114,604 km², which is equivalent to one-third of the area of Japan. With a population of only 16,694 in 2003, however, its population density is

0.15 people per square km. Mongolian pastoralists have made a livelihood in the oasis (Konagaya 2004). It was not until 1956 that agriculture began there (EQBW 1998: 243–244). Farming is possible only along the river, because agriculture requires irrigation using both river water and groundwater (Kodama 2005).

3. Natural Changes: Plants

3.1 Plants

As many as 57 kinds of plants grow in Ejene Banner (Konagaya, Sarengerile and Kodama eds. 2011: 347–349; Table 1). Although 3 of those mentioned remain unidentified scientifically, of the remaining 54, the largest number—16—fell into the group Chenopodiaceae. Next most well represented was the group Compositae, with 7 kinds of plants; there followed Gramineae with 5, Leguminosae with 4, Zygophyllaceae and Lialiaceae with 3 each, Salicaceae and Moraceae with 2 each, and finally Rosaceae, Elaeagnaceae, Cynomoriaceae, Lythraceae, Ericaceae, Rutaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Tamaricaceae, Orobanchaceae, Commelinaceae, Ephedraceae, and Cyperaceae, with 1 kind of plant in each.

The *toorai* (poplar) is one of the most famous plants in Ejene Banner. In fact, there are many place names derived from its name. Saikhan-toorai, the name of a village, means “beautiful poplars”; Būdūün-toorai means “thick poplar” (Ms. Dulamjav 224), and Nairin-toorai means “poplars for a banquet” (Ms. Tsermaa 216). According to Ms. Dulamjav (224), when she lived in Būdūüntoorai, her family enshrined the thick poplar. The tree was so thick that they could not span it even by joining the hands of three persons.

Lake names such as Olst, Khulst, and Khöl Jigd are also derived from plant names (Ms. Yüm 127). Lake Olst means “lake with *ols*” (hemp), where *gerlig ols* (wild hemp) grows. Lake Khulst means “lake with *khuls*” (reeds), and Lake Khöl Jigd means “lake with *jigd* in the traces of river.”

3.2 Uses of Plants

Plants have two main uses: grazing and feeding animals on the one hand, and human uses on the other. Humans use plants for food, medicine, everyday necessities, and fuel.

(1) Grazing and feed

Plants form pastureland and provide feed and hay for livestock. For that reason, every woman understands well where and when certain plants grow and which parts of them each kind of livestock eats. Ms. Kanda (148) explained:

Livestock did not eat young leaves of *ümkhii övs*. Livestock ate the leaves in the winter after they turned yellow in the fall. Sheep and goats loved to eat them; however, camels did not. Livestock also ate a lot of *sukhai* (tamarisk) leaves. Sheep and goats ate *kharon buyaa*.

Camels ate *zag*, *tsekhireg*, *but butargana* (Ms. Jojo Bor 157), *üürgest khamkhag*, and *usun khamkhag* (Ms. Dolgartsoo 219). Reeds are used for hay, which was given mainly to small livestock such as goats and sheep (Ms. Kanda 148). Feed includes the fruit and leaves of *jigd*, which people collect for that purpose. The leaves of *toorai* are also important feed for

Table 1 List of Plant Names¹⁾

Mongolian name	plants family names	scientific name ²⁾	distribution of plants
asmag	? ³⁾	?	?
bar shavag	Compositae	<i>Tripolium vulgare</i> Nees	annual herb
böörölzgene	Rosaceae	<i>Rubus</i> spp L.	shrub or herb
botgon tavag	Zygophyllaceae	<i>Zygophyllum Rosovii</i> Bunge	perennial herb
burgas	Salicaceae	<i>Salix cheilophila</i> Schneid.	shrub or subarbor
but	?	?	?
but butargana	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salsola passerina</i> Bunge	subshrub
chatsargan	Elaeagnaceae	<i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i> L.	shrub or arbor
goyoo/sozong	Cynomoriaceae	<i>Cynomorium songaricum</i> Rupr.	perennial parasitic herb
jerlig ols	Moraceae	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L.f. <i>rudelalis</i> (Janisch.) Chu	annual herb
jigd	Lythraceae	<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i> L.	shrub or subshrub
khamkhag	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salsola collina</i> Pall.	annual herb
khar khers	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Suaeda salsa</i> (L.) Pall.	annual herb
kharalt	Ericaceae	<i>Rhododendron lutescens</i> Franche.	shrub
kharmag	Zygophyllaceae	<i>Nitraria sibirica</i> Pall.	shrub
khers	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salicornia europaea</i> L.	annual herb
khiyag/khag	Gramineae	<i>Leymus chinensis</i> (Trin.) Tzvel.	perennial herb
khömüül	Lialiaceae	<i>Allium mongolicum</i> Regel	perennial herb
khonin sharalj	Compositae	<i>Artemisia anethifolia</i> Web. ex Stechm.	annual/biennial herb
khonkh övs	Leguminosae	<i>Sphaerophysa salsula</i> (Pall.) DC.	perennial herb
khoron buyaa	Leguminosae	<i>Sophora alopecuroides</i> L.	perennial herb
khoshi khamkhag	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Corispermum declinatum</i> Steph.	annual psammophytes
khüj övs	Rutaceae	<i>Haplophyllum dauricum</i> (L.) Juss.	perennial herb
khuls	Gramineae	<i>Phragmites australis</i> (Cav.) Trin.	perennial herb
khuviskhan	Compositae	<i>Scorzonera muriculata</i> Chang	subshrub-like herb
lööli	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Chenopodium album</i> L.	annual herb
malgai zalaa övs	Euphorbiaceae	<i>Euphorbia humifusa</i> Willd.	annual herb
morin sharalj	Compositae	<i>Artemisia songarica</i> Schrenk	subshrub
ols	Moraceae	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L.	annual herb
shagshig	Gramineae	<i>Scolochloa festucacea</i> (Willd.) Link	perennial herb

shar budargana	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Kalidium gracile</i> Fenzl	subshrub
shar khütüreg	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salicornia europaea</i> L.	annual herb
shar modon durs	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Chenopodium serotinum</i> L.	annual herb
shar tsetseg	Lialiaceae	<i>Hemerocallis citrina</i> Baroni	perennial herb
sharalj	Compositae	<i>Artemisia</i> spp L.	perennial herb or subshrub
shikher buyaa	Leguminosae	<i>Glycyrrhiza uralensis</i> Fisch.	perennial herb
shikher övs	Leguminosae	<i>Glycyrrhiza uralensis</i> Fisch.	perennial herb
sukhai	Tamaricaceae	<i>Tamarix ramosissima</i> Ledeb.	shrub or subarbor
suli	Gramineae	<i>Psammochloa villosa</i> (Trin.) Bor.	perennial herb
taana	Lialiaceae	<i>Allium polyrrhizum</i> Turcz. ex Regel.	perennial herb
toorai	Salicaceae	<i>Populus euphratica</i> Oliv.	arbor
tsagaan but	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salsola arbuscula</i> Pall.	shrub
tsagaan goyoo	Orobanchaceae	<i>Cistanche deserticola</i> Ma	perennial parasitic herb
tsagaan khers	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Suaeda</i> spp Forsk.	annual herb, subshrub or shrub
tsekhireg	Zygophyllaceae	<i>Peganum harmala</i> L.	perennial herb
tsülkher	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Agriophyllum pungens</i> (Vahl) Link ex A. Dietr.	annual herb
tüngee	Gramineae	<i>Leymus secalinus</i> (Georgi) Tzvel.	perennial
üet ulaan	?	?	?
ümkhii övs	Compositae	<i>Artemisia hedinii</i> Ostenf. et Pauls.	annual herb
usun khamkhag	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salsola collina</i> Pall.	annual herb
üsñ övs	Commelinaceae	<i>Floscopa scandens</i> Lour.	perennial herb
üst navch	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salsola collina</i> Pall.	annual herb
üürgest khamkhag	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Salsola monopectera</i> Bunge	annual herb
zag	Chenopodiaceae	<i>Haloxylon ammodendron</i> (C.A.Mey.) Bunge	subarbor
zaraa olon	Compositae	<i>Echinops latifolius</i> Tausch.	perennial herb
zeergene	Ephedraceae	<i>Ephedra sinica</i> Stapf	herb-like shrub
zogs	Cyperaceae	<i>Scirpus triquetar</i> L.	perennial herb

1) References of plant names; Commissione redactorum florum IntramMongolica (1998), Ejinaqi-renmin-zhengfu (1998), Liu Yingxin et al. (2002), Qi Jinsuo and Haorilema et al. (2003) and Wendou et al. (1992)

2) The scientific name is identified by the reference of plant names and Sarangerel.

3) “?” is uncertain.

livestock. “In autumn, leaves of *toorai* fell down and covered the ground. Livestock animals stayed over winter eating them” (Ms. E Bor 232). Moreover, Ms. Malia (199) pointed out that the winter campsite was very warm because its dense *toorai* forest blocked the wind.

(2) Food

Plants are used not only as animal feed but also as food for humans. The plant most often mentioned in this regard was *jigd*, whose fruits are boiled and eaten. Also, they are boiled and dried, ground into flour, and mixed with *zamba* (Ms. Kanda 147). *Zamba* is the main breakfast, taken with tea, and it is made mainly from rye. *Jigd* can substitute for rye when necessary and was an emergency food in times of severe shortage (Ms. Kanda 147–148). *Üsn övs* was also an emergency food (Ms. Dulamjav 225). Other powdered foods include fruits of *tsülkher* (Ms. Mamukhai 174; Ms. Dolgartsoo 218), *shar khüüreg* (*khers*), seeds of *khoshi khamkhag* (Ms. Dolgartsoo 218), *khömüül* (Ms. Malia 202), and a fruit of *shar budargana* (Ms. Mamukhai 174). *Tsülkher* is eaten in two ways. In the first way, it is eaten as a grain by being roasted in a pan. In the second way, it is powdered and eaten like *zamba*. *Tsülkher* grows in sand. Powdered *shar khüüreg* is delicious when mixed with *tsagaan tos* (types of cultured butter) and later *airag* (fermented milk) or milk. Seeds of *Khoshi khamkhag* are also eaten after being washed, dried, roasted, powdered, and kneaded into *zamba* (Ms. Dolgartsoo 218). *Khömüül* is washed clean, extended and flattened, and hung by a string to dry for use as a seasoning for *baoz* and *banshi* (boiled gyoza) in winter (Ms. Malia 202). Buds of *sukhai*, *kharmag* (Ms. Bor 139), *taana*, *goyoo*, and *shikker buyaa* (Ms. Malia 202) are also used as food.

(3) Medicine

Knowledge of plant use includes medicinal uses as well. For example, Ms. E Bor (232) describes the medical plants in detail:

Tsagaan goyoo is a medical plant. A drug was made from *tsagaan* (white). The drug is said to be good for the stomach and intestines. Another medical plant was *shikker övs*. The drug is good for cough relieving and lungs. It is said that bad cough will be cured in one day by chewing *shikker övs* all day long (Ms. E Bor 232).

Tsagaan goyoo and *shikker övs* are also ingredients in traditional Chinese medicine. According to born-setter, Ms. Dolgartsoo (220), *zeergene*, *chatsargan*, *shar modon durs*, and *sukhai* are medical plants. For example, leaves of *sukhai* cure skin disease: it can either be imbibed to treat itching or its juice applied directly to the skin. In cases of abdominal dropsy, stiff shoulders, pain along the scapula, muscular pain, and so on, *sukhai* is burnt on the skin. There was also a plant named *malgai zalaä övs*. Its herbal medicine is effective in hemostasis or accelerating the healing of wounds. Those injured in a fall from a horse, by being bitten by a dog, or from stumbling apply the dried powder of this plant to the wounded part of the body and bandage it, and the bleeding will stop and the skin return to its normal condition. Another popular herb plant is *zaraa olon*, which is picked when in bloom and then dried and stored. This plant will cure injuries from stumbling or bone fracture and is effective in treating both skin and bone.

(4) Everyday Necessities

Plants provide everyday materials as well. Tall trees, *toorai*, shrubs, *sukhai*, and *burgus* are

used to make *ger* (yurt, felt tent) (Ms. Tamjid 179; Ms. Dolgartsoo 219). *Toorai* is used to make various furniture and tools, such as barrels for distilled spirits, milking, and milk fermentation; weights and molds for *aaruul* (types of cheese) making; and cradles. It is also used to make buckets for bringing water from a well to livestock (Ms. Tamjid 179). Because the *jigd* tree is hard and solid, containers made from it are tough and said to look nice (Ms. E Bor 232). Fences are made using *toorai* and *sukhai* to prevent livestock from escaping (Ms. Jojo Bor 156).

(5) Fuel

Although Mongolian traditional fuel is dung, *zag* is used for fuel in Ejene (Ms. E Bor 232), especially in the *govi* area. *Zag* tends to burn long, like coal, and hardly ever goes out. It is a good fuel with high calories, high quality, and relatively little ash (Ms. Jivzan 207).

3.3 Environmental Changes

Both plants and their uses are diverse in Ejene Banner. Many plants are described as having been abundant in the past. For example, “there were a lot of nutritious grasses, including *khuls*, *khiyag* (also known as *khag*), *üsn övs*, *shar tsetseg*, *shikher buyaa*, *ols*, *bar shavag*, *sharalj*, *sukhai*, *tsekhireg*, and *tsagaan but* (*böörölzgene*)” (Ms. Yüm 130). This description refers not only to the existence of these plants but also to their height and density. The life stories tell us how abundant they were, in concrete detail and in comparison to other times. Ms. Tsermaa (212) and Ms. Dulamjav (224) describe *toorai* as having been thick enough to hide a man riding a camel because *toorai* were dense in the surroundings of residential areas. According to Ms. Jojo Bor (157), *toorai* and *sukhai* grew as rapidly as if they were going to hit the sky, and she could barely see the roof of the yurt when she went through the bushes riding on a camel. They grew even taller and thicker in the fall, blocking the roads and making it impossible to follow the livestock even from a short distance. Ms. Jivzan (207) describes *toorai* as that “in the past, Ejene Banner was densely populated with trees of *toorai*, indeed. The forests were populated with trees so densely that cows and horses enter at all.” She refers to *jigd* and *sukhai* in the same way as she does *toorai*. The riverside was densely covered with *jigd* and *sukhai*—so much so that there was no place to step (Ms. Jivzan 203). Bushes also grew so densely on the riverside that a livestock animal could be hidden in them (Ms. Malia 201). Ms. Yüm (129) mentions Gurnai as a good winter pasture. There were *khuls* that grew so high that “we could not find the horses once they got into the bush.” These past abundant plants are often mentioned together with past rich water resources. For example:

Humans and livestock were never short of water and plants through the entire year, all four seasons (Ms. Jojo Bor 157, emphasis added).

I remember how rich my hometown was in grasses and water in the past (Ms. Mamukhai 174, emphasis added).

It had abundant grass and water. I have never experienced such a thing as drought when I was a child (Ms. Malia 199, emphasis added).

Bayanbogd used to be a splendid place with sufficient water and grass (Ms. Dulmajav 225, emphasis added).

All of these plants are described in the past tense, however, as they are seen as being nearly or entirely gone in the present. Ms. E Bor (232) points out that various splendid plants that were available in the past are becoming less and less common. For that reason, livestock grazing has become troublesome. Ms. Dolgartsoo (220) also mentions that medical plants have diminished. Moreover, because of the deterioration of plants, the livestock have started to eat plants that are not their favorite, for example, *ömkhii övs* (Ms. E Bor 228).

Abundant water resources, such as rivers and rainfall, are also described in the past tense. For example:

My hometown was originally rich in water. We had much rain and the three rivers were full of water it had much precipitation. We sometimes had a small drought in some years, but it started raining soon if we held an *ovoo* festival (Ms. E Bor 231).

The same as with the deterioration of the plants, there are severe shortages of water resources now. Ms. Dolgarjav (193) mentions that “in those days, we never ran short of water...The things were different from today.” Concretely, water shortages are manifested as being the disappearance of lakes and the lessening of rainfall.

When I was little, there was abundant water in lakes too. There were large lakes at the upstream of the Narinkhöl river. They were Lake Davst, Lake Gashuunnuur, and Lake Baga. It had never happened in the history that water of Lake Subnuur or Lake Gashuunnuur is dried up. We are suffering an unprecedented drought at present. . . . *Khuls* and *zogs* grew abundantly in lakes. The abundant water in lakes and rivers brought about much rainfall. Now that lake water has been dried up, rainfall has become rare. The situation has become quite different from that in my childhood (Ms. E Bor 228).

Water shortages affect not only lakes and rainfall but also groundwater. When asked “How abundant water was there when you were little?” Ms. Dulamjav (224) replies by describing the difficulties of digging a well:

Yes, there was abundant water! Rivers were full of water. Everyone used water by digging a well in front of their houses. Because water flowed underground, we did not have to dig a well as hard as exhausting. Today, we dig a well all the time. Groundwater has dried up so much that it does not come out easily (Ms. Dulamjav 224).

Severe shortages of water resources caused the disappearance of plants too, as Ms. Dolgartsoo (219) mentions that “today, grasses are about to be eradicated due to water shortage.” Ms. Jivzan (208) mentions also that the disappearance of plants is connected with the shortage of water resources.

The grassland started to be deteriorated approximately when I was in my thirties or forties (who born in 1928). The grass stopped growing chiefly due to the fall in precipitation and drought. Village elders attributed the cause for the drought to the dried up lake water. They explained that rain water is likely derived from evaporated lake water (Ms. Jivzan 208).

As a result, sand storms attack Ejene now.

We had no yellow sand unlike today no matter how strong wind blew. The wind was a green wind that only caused trees to make a sound (Ms. Malia 199).

Animals have gone away due to deterioration of water and grass with the change in the environment. Ms. Jivzan (203–204) tells us that there were fish, birds, wolves and *zeers* (Mongolian gazelle) in the past, but that these have almost entirely disappeared today. Ms. E Bor (228) also speaks of birds and fish, saying, “not many but some swans have sometimes been seen in lakes. There used to be many yellow ducks. . . . There were a lot of shellfish in lakes. There were a lot of fish as well.”

4. Social Changes: The Cultural Revolution

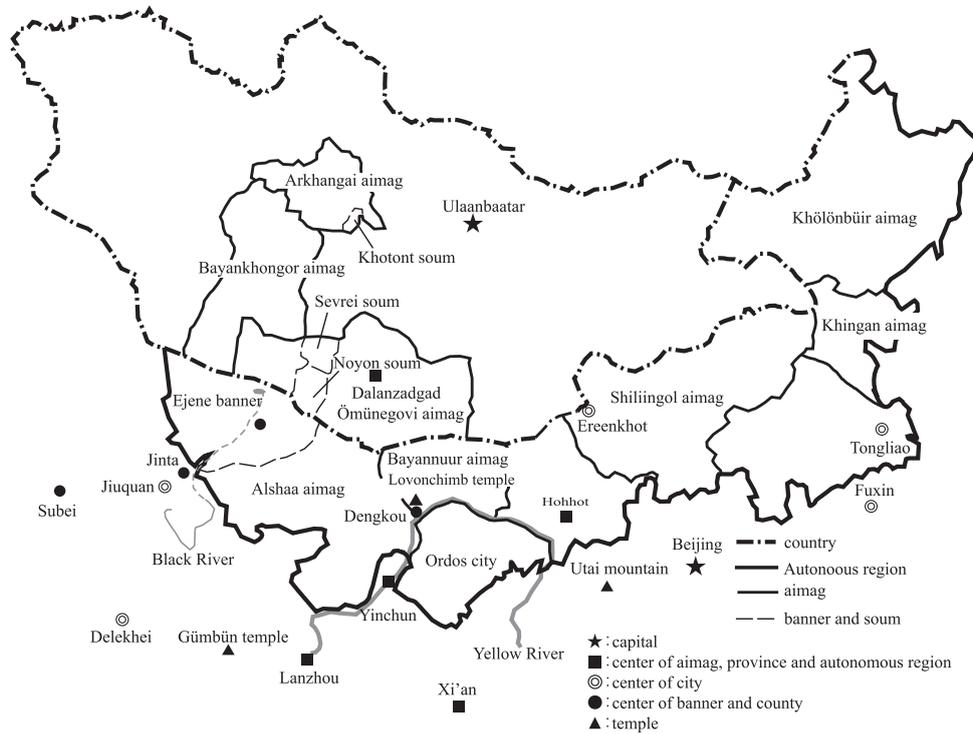
4.1 People of various origins and refugees of the Khalkhas

Map 1 shows the places mentioned in the life stories. These locations demonstrate the far-reaching nature of people’s movements between the Northeast region of Inner Mongolia, Mongolia, and Gūmbūn temple in Qinghai province. Even in modern history, it is said that people continue to move widely. The places mentioned fall into two broad categories: homelands and places to visit.

The homeland most mentioned is Mongolia. This is because the khalkhas fled to Ejene in order to avoid purges of lamas in the 1930s (Ms. Tamjid 177; Ms. Dulmantsoo 183). For example, when Ms. Dulmantsoo (185) is asked, “Why did your family relocate from Khalkha to here?” she replies:

We decided to fly because the People’s Revolution arose in Khalkha and started to suppress religions and massacre priests. My real father was a priest named Lovon Balduv. My family fled maybe because they were afraid of being associated with the Buddhism given that my real mother Lamjav and my adoptive mother Jigdel were sisters. My first elder brother Soronkher has once been a priest. He was trained as a young priest when he was little (Ms. Dulmantsoo 185).

Ms. Tamjid’s (177) father also fled to Ejene because his brother was a priest. According to the records of Hagiwara, who stayed in Ejene Banner in the 1930s as a member of the of Kwantung Army’s Special Service Agency, 80 of 217 households—over 30%—and 380 of 1,040 people were Khalkha. Of a total of 150 priests, 30 were Khalkha (Hagiwara 1976: 24). Ms. Malia’s (199) parents came over Ejene to escape from the revolution in Khalkha. Ms. Tamjid’s (177) mother and Ms. Dolgartsoo’s (217) mother also came from Mongolia for reasons the informants did not state. A grandfather on Ms. Jojo Bor’s (149) father’s side and a



Map 1 The places of Inner Mongolia and Mongolia mentioned in the life stories (Konagaya, Sarengerile and Kodama eds. 2011: 345)

grandfather on Ms. Jivzan's (204) father's side were Khalkha. Migration occurred for reasons other than the purges as well. Ms. Naran's (163) parents were Khalkha, and when her family came to Ejene temporarily, her grandmother adopted her to live with her in Ejene. Conversely, Ms. Tserennadmed (159–160) was from Alashaa *aimag*, and she had stayed in Mongolia for about 16 years. Regarding the eastern parts of Inner Mongolia, Ms. Dolgarjav's (189) father came from Tümed in 1929 when he was 19 years old. The family of Ms. Tsermaa (211) was attacked by Kazakhs in 1945, and she fled from Qinghai province to Ejene when she was 5 years old.

The place to visit most mentioned is also Mongolia. Since the border between Mongolia and China reopened, many people have traveled between Ejene and Mongolia in order to see relatives (e.g. Ms. Naran and Ms. Tamjid). Next is for pilgrimage. Pilgrimage destinations include Lovonchimb temple in Dengkou county of Bayannuur *aimag* and Gümbün temple.

4.2 Persecution under the Cultural Revolution

(1) The First Persecution

The most heart-wrenching parts of the life stories were about the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976); however, the persecution began before 1966. Ms. Dolgarjav's husband was first criticized in 1957 (Ms. Dolgarjav 194–196). In June of 1958, he was denounced as a “rightist”

and labeled a bad man. Then his salary was reduced by half and he was forced to perform physical labor. He was completely dismissed from his job in 1959 and returned home to engage in physical labor for the production team. He was chiefly involved in farm work. He was often called to endure criticism in public. He also had to report his ideas and discuss any progress or changes twice a year. He was sometimes beaten while being criticized. The persecution included self-criticism and violence even before the Cultural Revolution and continued until 1964, when a new political movement began. The situation became harder and harder each year. The Dolgarjavs were labeled “herd owners” (herdlord) in 1967 and, as a result, all of their property and livestock was confiscated. After reclassification in 1970, her husband’s charge remained serious. He remained charged with being a “rightist” and “ethnic separatist” for having supposedly attacked the top officials and promoted ethnic separation by once remarking, as a joke, “while the top officials smoke Daqianmen (a high-class brand of tobacco in those days), we commoners breathe only smoke.” As a result, he was arrested in March 1970 and taken to the “reform camp” (Tianzhu labor reform group) to undergo “thought reform.” In his five years there he went through many hardships, being forced to perform physical labor for the sake of “thought reform.” Ms. Dolgarjav (195) stated: “I could not look up at the sky on the same footing as others.” In 1975, he returned home but remained labeled as a rightist. One year later, in June of 1976, he worked for the production team still labeled as a criminal. He remained obliged to report twice a year for more than 20 years, from 1957 to 1978. In August of 1978, his charge was finally revoked.

(2) Labeling

As in these many cases, targets of the Cultural Revolution were labeled variously when persecuted (Table 2). The most common labels were “herd owner/wealthy herder.” These names refer to classes determined by the number of livestock (in this case, six) offered to establish the Peoples’ Communes in 1958. In descending order, these class names were: herd owner, wealthy herder, upper-middle-class herder, middle-class herder, lower-middle-class herder, and poor herder (Ms. Dulmantsoo 188). More than six mothers or their relatives were labeled “the People’s Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia” members and “reactionary gang” members. Five mothers or their relatives were labeled as “spy of the Mongolian People’s Republic/the Khalkhas” and a member of “the Torguud Party” and denounced. They were not limited to one label, either. For example, Ms. Kanda (143) was labeled a “national traitor,” “spy of the Mongolia People’s Republic,” “reactionary secretary of Erdenegerel chief of the banner,” “immoral woman,” and many other things. These labels meant that they were political criminals. All who received labels denounced. These charges were all trumped-up, as in the case of Ms. Dolgarjav (194–198).

(3) Targets and Background of Persecution

The main targets were cadres and the Khalkhas. Cadres range from the leader of the banner to the leader of the production team, which is the lowest administrative agency. Almost all of the upper cadres were aristocrats before 1949. Because aristocrats had a lot of livestock, most were labeled as herd owners or wealthy herders. For example, Nüdündelger was designated as a chief of the banner, together with Mr. Lkhavaanjav. He was the one of the six richest men in Ejene. Nüdündelger was also called Nüdün Meeren because his position was *meeren*, a government posts under the Qing Dynasty (Ms. Bor 139–140). He was later designated as the

Table 2 Labels in the life stories

herd owner/wealthy herder(s) rich herder wealthy herd owner	Ms. Bor 135, 138; Ms. Kanda 142 Ms. Tserennadmed 160 Ms. Dulmantsoo 187, 188 Ms. Dolgarjav 191, 192, 194, 195, 197, 198 Ms. Malia 200; Ms. Jivzan 205 Ms. Tsermaa 211; Ms. Avirmed 234
(a member of) the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia the dark party	Ms. Bor 137; Ms. Tserennadmed 160 Ms. Naran 168,169; Ms. Tamjid 177 Ms. Dulmantsoo 187; Ms. Jivzan 205 Ms. E Bor 229
reactionary gang a family of reactionary gang, being involved in a reactionary gang	Ms. Kanda 143, 144; Ms. Naran 168, 169 Ms. Malia 199, 200; Ms. Dulamjav 225 Ms. E Bor 229; Ms. Avirmed 234
a member of the Erdenegerel's reactionary gang	Ms. Jojo Bor 153
spy of the Mongolian People's Republic/the Khalkhas	Ms. Bor 137, 138; Ms. Kanda 143 Ms. Jojo Bor 154 Ms. Tserennadmed 160, 161 Ms. Dulmantsoo 187
(a member of) the Torguud Party	Ms. Jojo Bor 153; Ms. Naran 168; Ms. Tamjid 177; Ms. Dulmantsoo 187 Ms. Avirmed 234
national traitor/traitor	Ms. Kanda 143; Ms. E Bor 229
a member/soldier of the Kuomintang Party	Ms. Jivzan 205; Ms. Tsermaa 211
reactionary secretary of Erdenegerel chief of the banner	Ms. Kanda 143
an immoral woman	Ms. Kanda 143
rich herder of the Establishment	Ms. Tserennadmed 160
revisionist	Ms. Naran 168
capitalist roader	Ms. Tamjid 180
counterrevolution	Ms. Dulmantsoo 187
rightist	Ms. Dolgarjav 194–197
Ethnic separatist	Ms. Dolgarjav 195
power-holder	Ms. Dolgarjav 198
trying to desert to Mongolia	Ms. Malia 199
lackey of Ulaankhüü	Ms. E Bor 229

secretary of the Political Consultative Committee as well. He was criticized for being a “herd owner” as well as a “power-holder” and must have been denounced badly. He died at the center of the banner. His wife, Aunt Khulu, had a very hard time too (Ms. Dolgarjav 198). Moreover, according to Ms. Naran (168), the leaders of production teams were always accused of belonging to the Torguud Party. For example, because Ms. Tamjid’s husband had held a succession of such important posts as Head of the Producers’ Cooperatives and leader of the production team after the People’s Republic of China was established, he was labeled as a “capitalist roader” and, in 1967, caught, beaten, and imprisoned in the black house (jail)

after opposing the authorities (Ms. Tamjid 180).

The other main targets were people who had originated in the Khalkhas or were somehow related to them. This fact was due to the tense military relationship between China and the Mongolian People's Republic, since the latter half of the 1950s had brought about serious antagonism between China and the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR, now known as Mongolia) was a satellite country of the Soviet Union. Mongolia has a long border with Inner Mongolia, which led to serious antagonism between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. For that reason, Inner Mongolia was divided into three military parts in the 1970s, and Ejene Banner came to belong to Gansu Province. Ejene Banner has a military base³⁾ and a long border with Mongolia. As mentioned above, many people there are of Khalkha origin, and many others have parents, siblings, or other relatives in Mongolia. For these reasons, Ejene Banner experienced severe military tension, and many people there were suspected of having ties to Mongolia. People who originated in the Khalkhas were labeled as "members of the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia" or "revisionists" (Ms. Naran 168). "The party's activity aimed to unify Inner and Outer Mongolia."⁴⁾ Ms. Naran (168–169) was forced to make a false confession in order to escape from jail. This means that the government was afraid to unify Inner and Outer Mongolia. The persecution caused the Khalkha refugees to regret having fled from their hometowns to Ejene (Ms. Malia 199). Ms. Tserennadomed (160–161), who had stayed in Mongolia, was denounced starting in 1966, variously labeled as "a spy of the Khalkhas," "a member of the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia," "rich herder of the Establishment" and "herd owner." She was mainly accused of being "a spy of the Khalkhas." After she returned to Ejene, she wrote letters in Cyrillic to many people because she was capable of writing the Cyrillic alphabet. Elderly people who had relatives or friends in Khalkha asked her to write letters for them. They also asked her to read aloud the letters in Cyrillic that they received from Khalkha and had her write replies; however, once the Cultural Revolution began, all of her kindness resulted in tragedy: she was labeled as "a spy of the Khalkhas" and falsely accused. Ms. Bor's husband, also been suspected of having ties to the Khalkha, was accused of being a "Khalkha spy" and "member of the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia." The reason he was suspected of having Khalkha ties was that he and one other person had once gone hunting, unknowingly entered the Khalkhas' territory, and been arrested by border patrol. They had been detained for a couple of days and then came back home. This had happened around 1960 (Ms. Bor 137–138).

(4) Conditions during the Cultural Revolution

In concrete terms, the persecution of the Cultural Revolution involved reduced salary, confinement, violent criticism and punishment at public meetings, compulsory work, and displacement. During confinement, people could hardly see family or even talk. For example, Ms. Kanda (143) had to obey five rules: no talking to anyone, no looking anyone in the face, and others. She was under surveillance in the commune for eight months, and she was not allowed to see her family during that period.

At the people's commune, people became the working staffs. Their scores were registered according to labor, and the remuneration was allocated based on the scores. Family members of criminals could not get the remuneration enough to support their family members no matter how much they worked (Ms. Tamjid 180; Dolgarjav 195).

Many people died during the Cultural Revolution. Ms. Bor's foster mother (Kanda) died in 1969. Though she was said to have died suddenly while grazing animals outdoors, Ms. Bor thinks she must have died of suffering due to being labeled as a "rich herder," and "herd owner" (Ms. Bor 135). Ms. Kanda's aunt was said to have been detained for about a month, after which she was beaten to death and her body burned (Ms. Kanda 146). In another terrible case, two paralyzed older men died of starvation with no one to take care of them because their family was taken away (Ms. Mamukhai 173). Ms. Tamjid's father died in 1969, also because of the Cultural Revolution. He was labeled "a member of the Torguud Party", "a member of the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia", and so on, then beaten, criticized, and imprisoned. He became deathly ill in prison and died on the way to the hospital—on a donkey's back because he was unable to stand up on his own. He had been imprisoned in a dark cell for a long time with no sunshine or wind (Ms. Tamjid 177). Moreover, Ms. Dolgarjav's father was arrested as a "herd owner" in 1969 and denounced. She was told that her father was beaten to death one night. He was just 62 years old. Ms. Dolgarjav's mother too was also denounced in 1968. She was beaten badly, her foot fractured and her arm twisted. Afterward, her right foot pointed backward from the ankle down and the arm remained permanently bent. Forced to work by crawling, she eventually lost her ability to stand and later became bedridden. Her work, despite the fact that she had been unable to move one foot and one arm, had been removing the soil inside a dug hole. When she could no longer stand, she was forced to crawl inside the hole and work sitting there. When she finished her work, she returned home also crawling. She died in July of 1970 (Ms. Dolgarjav 197–198). Hard work and persecution hastened people's deaths (Ms. Avirmed 234).

Not all the deaths were murders. An average of two people a month committed suicide. Some killed themselves because they were unable to bear the violence. Others committed suicide out of fear (Ms. Jivzan 205–206). Ms. Jivzan (205–206) was pregnant in those days, but she was beaten so badly that the baby was aborted. Since then, she has been incapable of bearing children. Her beatings damaged her so badly that she now has a physical disability certificate.

Even livestock did not escape persecution. Animals were killed based on the belief that livestock reared by a "herd owner" were worthless. Ms. Dolgarjav's livestock were killed because the Ulaankhüü's slogan, "among others, the top priority shall be given to increasing the number of livestock," was criticized. The meat of the livestock killed was carried to the People's Liberation Army and to the center of the banner (Ms. Dolgarjav 194).

Labeled people were forced to work under bad conditions, and some were sent to concentration camps. Ms. Kanda (143) was denounced in 1966 and forced to go to the "May seventh cadre school" (institute for ideological remolding) in the spring of 1972. She was forced to work there every day. Ms. Tserennadomed (160) was forced to work at the same institute under surveillance in October of 1968. Ms. Dulamjav and her family were forced to engage in hard farm labor. Moreover, there were 61 Chinese youngsters called the Intellectuals in those days. When Chinese youngsters are offended, they would beat her and her family (Ms. Dulamjav 224–225).

Many of the persecuted people were forced to migrate to Subei county of Gansu province (Map 1). According to Ms. Bor (137), this measure aimed to keep them away from the

border. “As many as 70 people from more than a dozen of families, including Erdenegerel noyan and his son Döndüv Taij,⁵⁾ were sent to various places in Subei county. These people came back to Ejene in 1970s.

4.3 Compensation for their persecution

In the 1970s, the classifications were reappraised and charges were revoked. Ms. Bor (137–138) was cleared of a false charge in the latest year, 1979. She and her husband had started to be persecuted in 1966, and then they were sent to Subei county in 1969. They stayed in Subei for ten years. When they came back, they were finally politically rehabilitated in 1979. Persecution had caused her and her family to suffer for more than ten years. Next Ms. Dolgarjav’s husband was charged as a “rightist”; the charge was revoked in August of 1978. He and his family suffered for twenty years (Ms. Dolgarjav 194–196).

All was acquitted of criminal charges even for the people who died during the Cultural Revolution (Ms. Kanda 146). However, almost nothing was done for them except for regaining their honor. Only the top officials, who were denounced during the Cultural Revolution received any money back for their reduced salaries. “Rightists” could not get back compensation their reduced salaries (Ms. Dolgarjav 196). As to that compensation, only Ms. Dulmantsoo (187) mentioned that she was awarded any compensation. Ms. Jivzan (205–206) was disabled by being beaten during the Cultural Revolution. She has a physical disability certificate based on the testimony of the persecutor. In the past she had been paid 161 yuan a year by the government (1 yuan was approx. 0.16 USD, as of July, 2013) as a physical disability allowance. At present, she is paid 1,800 yuan each year. As for the punishment to the persecutor, that persecutor who testified to his own persecution today serves as a cadre of the Communist party. The persecutors were set free unpunished and still work as cadres. No one mentions the compensation or allowance except for the two, even though everyone lost their family or relatives from persecution during the Cultural Revolution, and they had experiences of suffering personally. Needless to say, no compensation was mentioned for those who died.

5. Conclusion

This report reconstructs the natural and social changes based on 17 mothers’ life stories because they were witnesses with firsthand experience of those changes. Plants and water resources are the focus of the natural changes, and the Cultural Revolution is the focus of the social changes. It helps to understand the severity of these changes by hearing their words and memories .

Natural changes focus on plants and their changes. In the past, plants grew thick and were used in various ways. However, these plants are disappearing now. Decreases in river water and rainfall have resulted in dried-up lakes and groundwater shortages, which in turn cause plant and animal life to deteriorate. The oral histories narrate these changes in detail and make concrete vivid comparisons to the past. The informants understand these natural changes not in isolation but as they relate to water shortages today and what they remember from the past. It could be said indeed that modern natural history is a narrative of the loss of abundant natural resources and the knowledge of them.

Social changes tell the history of suffering. It is said that the Cyrillic Mongolian text

edited and published by Konagaya and Chuluun (2009) was welcome in Mongolia because few people knew about the hard times the Mongols experienced during the Cultural Revolution, especially those people who originated in Mongolia. The suffering continued for twenty years in the longest period. These persecutions depended on trumped-up charges. Not a few Mongols were forced to die. Ms. Tamjid (180) mentions that she will never forget the people who beat them in those days, as no one ever forgets their suffering and their persecutors. The persecutions were hardly compensated even though those who were persecuted were eventually acquitted of the false criminal charges. Moreover, the persecutors were set free unpunished, and one ever received a position in the Communist Party. Thus Chinese government has never atoned for their persecution policies.

Life stories indeed help to create a deeper understanding of natural, social and cultural changes in Ejene Banner. However, five of these mothers have already passed away by 2007, and another five mothers died by 2013. It is important, even culturally urgent, to collect and make public materials and testimonies about their studies because too often they are never recorded in official documents for future generations.

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Notes

- 1) When the present report quotes the narratives, it notes the woman's name and the relevant page number in the book (e.g. Ms. Kanda 132).
- 2) The oral history is published in Japanese, Chinese, and Cyrillic Mongolian (Konagaya, Sarengerile and Kodama eds. 2007, 2008; Konagaya and Chuluun eds. 2009).
- 3) An establishment of the base was accompanied by the displacement in 1958 (EQBW 1998: 18–19).
- 4) Outer Mongolia is the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR), now known as Mongolia.
- 5) *Taij* was one of the dignities the Qing Dynasty gave to the Mongolian aristocrats.