

The Sedentarization and Gentrification in Post-Nomadic Districts¹

Abstract

This paper presents a preliminary study on migrant's adaptation in the post-nomadic settlements inside Mongolia's Ulaanbaatar and China's Nantun (Evenk Autonomous Banner or Ewenke Zizhiqi) using specific examples of education and housing. The research fields were selected in order to find urbanised areas with herders migrating to the city, and where such movement is numerous enough to establish districts or at least impact the urban culture. Therefore the context differs from the situations when fewer families enter a relatively large settlement and have to adjust to the found conditions. At first glance the recently urbanised areas might seem a provisional imitation of the city, as a result of the century-long development. The migrants define their culture-based settlement. The shared condition of the selected settlements is the status of a post-nomadic migration destination. Therefore there is an expectation of some shared similarities in city-life adaptation. Presenting such exemplary districts illustrates the interesting social dynamics in the post-nomadic cities. Among the similarities of the formation of the post-nomadic settings, we find some common mechanisms shaping social dynamics in migration, then community foundation. They arise even in the context of exceptionally diverse frameworks of state urban policies. We will also discuss gentrification processes in newly emerged districts and their impact on the cityscape.

Keywords: China, Mongolia, post-nomadism, urbanisation, national minorities, local communities, Inner Asia, education, gentrification

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Introduction

Settlements in Inner Asia have experienced various interactions with nomadic peoples, with the most recent decades bringing mass migrations from the pasturelands to the towns and cities. The movement from the rural areas seems a universal trend globally, but the specific local conditions matter. The sedenterised post-nomads maintain their characteristic ways of thinking on social structures (Szynkiewicz 1981; Atwood 2012; Humphrey, Sneath 1999: 15, 26–30) impacting collective identity (Bumochir 2020: 12) and ‘cultural practices of past eras’ (Bumochir 2020: 9), bring their concepts and have to operate in particular conditions of the town or city (Jankowiak 1993: 1–19).

The aim of this paper will be the presentation of migrants’ adaptation to city life in recently urbanised post-nomadic settlements in Mongolia’s Ulaanbaatar and Nantun in China’s Inner Mongolia. The context of research in these two cities is linked to the dynamics of migration. This two placed adaptation follows two paths: migrants have to adapt to the new conditions, but they also impact the newly urbanised areas. The herders in given places entering the cities were numerous enough to build their infrastructure in terms of dwelling, as well as communities. The settled areas are not only a ‘hard infrastructure’ but also ‘flesh and blood’. The gravity towards urban areas, particularly rapid after the economic transition in both states, resulted in the spontaneous creation of a world of their own in terms of communities and social life. These relations can play a role in supplying support when the state steps down in providing some services. Although the peoples are not mobile herders anymore, they have preserved the constructs of nomadic society in their minds and practices (Bumochir 2020: 122, 124). These bottom-up organisations replace or absorb formal institutions attributed to the state.

The background analysis focuses on differences and similarities in the context of diverging urban policies in Mongolia and China. The main distinctive feature in urban development arises from state policy concerning infrastructure, followed by the supply of public services. Few state-run investments in Mongolia’s areas of low development, have left little chance to boost economic growth. This is contrary to the PR of China, where GDP dynamics depend largely on state-run hard infrastructure investments. However, the important role of the public authority is later followed by the provision of public services. Its importance to the topic lies in its association with the advantages of urban life and therefore becomes a magnet for the rural residents to move. Whether newcomers eventually succeed in accessing them becomes a distinctive element of their status. In this paper, examples of education and housing have been provided.

Besides the consumption of public services, another challenge for the migrants is to improve their dwelling standards. Individual efforts have to face the state and market powers that shape the cityscape according to their concepts. An important aspect of the district’s transformation is their gentrification potential.

The hopes and expectations of migrants' approach towards 'city' are based on improving living conditions and prospects. They usually include access to public services, which I will analyse using the example of education. The ex-herders choose *gers* (Mongolian yurt-type dwelling) or single-story houses. For some of them, it will be temporary accommodation, but most face economic obstacles in upgrading their domiciles. In this paper, I will analyse a variety of coping strategies with issue when the needs were not met by the public authorities. It includes collective actors taking part in providing the substitute for state support.

The time frame for the described processes is the beginning of economic and political liberalisation, which was a decisive factor in mass movement to the cities. For the PRC this is 1979, while Mongolia – 1992. However, my research focuses on the comparison of unique changes Nantun and UB in the years 2007 and 2019, when it was possible to observe the emergence of results for the above mentioned natural disasters in the increased inflow to urban areas.

The research materials were collected during fieldwork in 2007 and – predominantly – in 2019, which include interviews and observations on the place. The scholarly sources particularly important for the research were from researchers of Inner Mongolia Academy of Sciences: Narenqimuge, Yi Song, De Hongying for the Chinese part, while for Mongolia, I refer to Ger Community Mapping Center. They are both based on fieldwork combined with quantitative and qualitative analysis. I also owe acknowledgments to the researchers of these two institutions for consultations. The fieldwork in Nantun would be even more limited without support from Inner Mongolia Normal University. Other sources include works of T. Rakowski, T. Tsetsenbileg, and B. Hillman. I would also thank many individuals, who shared their first-hand experience of social relations in their regions. For Mongolia, I am particularly grateful to Mr. Batdorj Gongor of Ger Community Mapping Centre, dr Altangul Bolat, Ms. Barun Ardak, and Kazakh community members in Nalaikh and Songino Khairkhan. For China, most of the friends and interviewers preferred to stay anonymous, so sadly I cannot thank them all individually. Without all of them hardly any part of this paper could have been written. However, I acknowledge, if there are any misconceptions, they are all on my part. I am also grateful to dr. Ivan Peshkov and Prof. Zbigniew Szymt for the comments on the first draft of this paper.

Demographic structure of the regions

The post-nomadic areas' population share the important presence of the Altaic peoples of three ethno-linguistic groups, e.g. Mongolic, Turkic and Tungus. Despite that, the demographic composition of these peoples in the local populations

can be diverse.² In Mongolia, almost 90% of inhabitants are Mongols, with the overwhelming majority being the Khalkha ethnic group,³ and a significant 5% Kazakh minority. Inner Mongolia's complexity in this aspect is significant, in which Nantun alone is inhabited by Mongols (Buryat and Bargut, Oirats of Ööld branch, Khorchins), Dagurs, Evenks of Solon branch and Chinese-speaking Han, Hui and Manchu groups (Zikmundová, Kapišovská, Khabtagaeva 2019: 22–44; Golik 2011: 105–117).

The fast-growing population of the cities might be a trend in many regions of the world, but the researched case seems to be exceptional in this aspect, as since the 90s the urban population in both places more than doubled. Ulaanbaatar, for the last two decades, has grown about 4% annually, with 630 thousand inhabitants in 2001 and 1 452 thousand in 2017 (Earth Observatory: website). The estimations for Nantun are problematic due to data accessibility and registers, including residents with hukou (Zhu, Lin, Lin, Chen 2013: 50). For the Hölön Buir as a whole, census data and official estimates reflect a drop of the population (City Population: website), while for the prefecture's capital – Hailar – estimates show 145 thousand in 1990, 254 thousand in 2000 and 327 thousand in 2010 (City Population: website) and forecasted 423 thousand in 2020 (Population: website). Nantun's urban development reflects the increasing trend, as the inhabited area in 12 years more than doubled, with denizens living in multi-story blocks instead of ground-floor 'hutongs'.⁴ The informants, including the civil servants, have confirmed this observation.

The pasture areas of Inner Asia on both sides of the borders are exposed to deterioration of economic conditions. The rural economy came under pressure from natural disasters, which became a particular factor in pulling herders away from their traditional occupation. In Mongolia, the accelerator of these dynamics is commonly known, a *zud*, from the years 1998–2002. The rural crisis in Hölön Buir seems to attract less awareness, while the region suffered from a decade of droughts (years 2009–2018 and previously in 2007). The result was that many rural families were not able to maintain their way of life, which resulted in inflow to urbanised areas. The newcomers have created their districts or have entered existing ones with settlers from the various period, which had relatively stable social

² Although I generally accept Rogers Brubaker's critical approach of concept of 'groupism', we need to remember, that in the PR of China there is a constant tension between the active state shaping *minzu* as 'aggregates' or 'conglomerates' of minority communities and of bottom-ups formations of ethnic identities (Szykiewicz 2012: 175–176; Gawlikowski 1983: 26–28; Gawlikowski 2018: 53–73; Cappelletti 2014: 86–93; Golik 2014a: 243–260; Golik 2020: website). Also in Republic of Mongolia the difference between Mongols and Kazahs can be traced historically, with contemporary many visible cultural attributes.

³ With some interesting extraneous for the Central Region minority groups like Buryats, Dariganga, Oirats (for Torghuts see: Rakowski 2019).

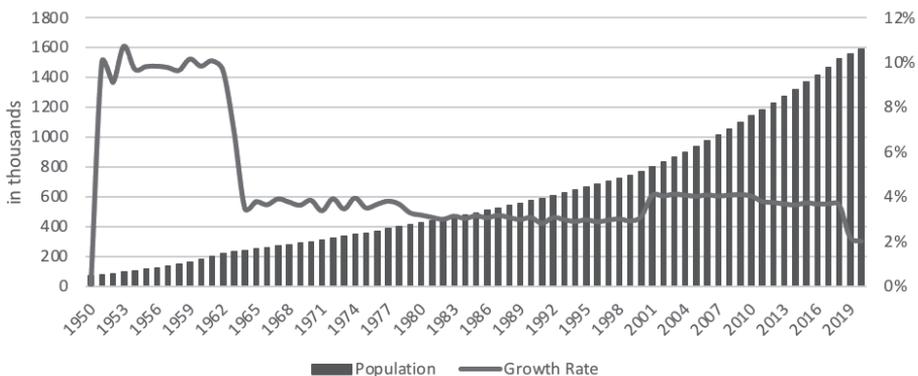
⁴ Chin. 胡同, term for a narrow street, currently used for the single-floor buildings or districts, derived from Mongolian term 'khot', which is a term for 'settlement' or 'city'.

networks, they were part of, as well as some post-nomads with longer experience of city life.

Urbanisation with local characteristics

The migration has been enforced by the economic conditions (Szykiewicz 2012: 200), but the change brought hopes and expectations of the imagined ‘city’. There is a structural discrepancy between Mongolia and China. The global trends of urbanisation for both states are completely different, but they share the effect of moving the majority of the population to urbanised areas in just a few decades. As for China it becomes the largest migration in humankind’s history, the story Nantun presented here is insignificant for the state system, but in many aspects emblematic of the wider processes. However, for Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar alone makes about half of the population with the constant stream of new migrants.

Mongolian city previously called ‘Urga’ has been renamed ‘Ulaanbaatar’, which means the ‘Red Hero’. As a part of the communist agenda, the country was to modernise by moving towards industrialisation. The special development of the city was based on Soviet projects, but the city needed inhabitants to found a working class. Moving to the capital was often not a voluntary decision, rather forced resettlement. For some, relocation was something sort of exile. That was the case not only of the core of the city but also was an experience of Kazakhs in Nalaikh, who were top-down directed from their homeland in Mongolia’s Western frontiers to the mine-based settlement on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar.



Graph 1. Changes of the Ulaanbaatar’s population

Source: Based on data of the Macrotrends.

Under state policy, a socialist city had been found, which soon after noted over a decade of double-digit population growth. Even after the drop in the dynamics of settlement, the inflow to the capital, 2–4% annually continued. The trend has not stopped after the transition when after the catastrophic zud the retreat from the pastoralism increased. The most recent drop can be linked partly to changes in local government policies, as well as to the base itself when currently 1.6 mln out of 3.2 mln of the total country's population live in the capital. As was highlighted in the demographic introduction, the UB became almost equivalent to the state itself. The continuing flow of new migrants will likely increase and petrify the position of the 'city', as there is almost no alternative for citizens to survive anywhere else (Al Jazeera).

In the PRC urbanisation is an element of state policy with its implications in the unprecedented development of infrastructure and special planning. Cities and towns have been primed for the increasing number of inhabitants, while registration *hukou*⁵ remains to coordinate flows of people with the capacity of developing cities to absorb them. In parallel, the Mongolian state lacked a similar organisational capacity. Its lack of political coherency is evident when the abolition of travel and settlement restriction from the socialist times meet with infrastructural deficiencies in cities and towns. In Mongolia, the situation is reversed when a complete liberalisation of movement came together with the significant withdrawal of the state in terms of urban planning and supply of public service or infrastructure.

China has conducted top-down planned urbanisation as a part of a wider modernisation project and boosting its economy (Golik 2019: website). The largest movement from rural to the city status in humankind history should be noticed as among the results in this context. The basic Chinese term referring to these process is *chengzhenhua* (城镇化 – urbanisation) rather than *chengshihua* (城市化 – urbanisation), when *zhen* (镇) means 'town', while *shi* (市) is 'city'. So, the literal translation is 'transformation of/into cities and townships'.

In the PRC a notorious issue linked to these dynamics is requisitioned land abuses (Hillman 2013: 29). It might seem that this problem was relatively well solved in Inner Mongolia, which largely seemed to avoid larger protests strictly on this kind of expropriation. However, on the pasturelands, the Chinese government implemented a controversial strategy in the context of the Inner Mongolia policy of 'eco-urbanisation' (Cliff 2013: 20). The general concept has progressive assumptions linked to the sustainable development of settlements, like pollution finding, protection of green areas, etc. In the case of many minority areas, it became a tool to force the herders and hunters to abandon their occupation and rural residence and move to the cities (Xie 2015: 206). These people unwillingly found themselves in different economic, special, and cultural contexts, amplify-

⁵ Household registration resulting in state's legal recognition of individual only in the county of origin.

ing the existing precariat. Their dislocation was claimed to be executed due to ecological reasons, as the much more harmful mining was left, some questions remain. The way of dislocation also proved deeply rooted in the Chinese mind's vision of backward minorities, which brought the implementation of the policy described by Yuanyuan Xie as "simplistic and paternalistic" (Xie 2015: 206). The results were at least harmful for the traditional communities, with arising various problems of economic, social, and cultural nature. Nomads and hunters who were able to maintain their way of life often turned to the city precariat with the perspective of temporary low-skilled jobs. They are an object of 'planning' and 'governance' of the enlightened government based on Sinitic concepts. The scattered migrant groups in the Han-dominated area became directly exposed to sinicisation.⁶ This is less prevalent in Nantun, which has relatively large and integrated minority social structures and supportive public institutions. However, the ethnic proportions are changing, so the younger generation already entered a path of rapid sinification.

Educational migrations and deficiencies in schooling before the year 2020⁷

What is common for both researched areas is that a rapid influx from the countryside, including the post-nomads, causes structural hierarchisation of the population. "The large gap between the demands of the rapidly expanding urban economy and the skills of the rural labour force remains a serious threat to inclusive development" (Hillman 2013: 30). The public authority has to face the disorder in a special development of the city, growing pressure on existing infrastructure, finally – increasing demand for public services.

Given the role of the state in the development of compulsory education attainable to migrants, the public authorities are fulfilling it to varying degrees. In the city itself, educational needs are not always sufficiently met. The problem may be the availability, quality, or type of educational service, which varies depending on the country and ethnicity of the migrating group. According to independent surveys, we can state that access to educational services is one of the main reasons for the population's gravity towards the city, and therefore urbanisation processes (Rakowski 2019: 261). The fulfillment of this need also becomes a factor in urban community formation around non-state actors, who try to fill the gap.

⁶ Understood as linguistical assimilation and acculturation to Sinitic cultural patterns (Szynkiewicz 2012: 185–186, 200).

⁷ Recent changes in the PRC's ethnic policy will most likely impact the whole minority system of schooling, including the perspective of its abolishing (Bandeira 2020: 3–5).

In the case of Mongolia, public services available in the cities are difficult to reach for incoming or outlying populations. Small towns often lack the capacity to provide even basic infrastructure and staff. Even local centres face problems with providing sufficient educational or road infrastructure, with assistance from the business-led NGO (Rakowski 2019: 237, 247, 266, 275, etc.). There was also a lack of state support for atypical educational segments like vocational and minority education run by the NGOs. Although in China these kinds of schooling are available, the first type is regarded as inferior to regular education (Hillman 2013: 31), while ethnic schools are provided in areas of importance in terms of demography or ethnic policy. I presume that for the first type of training, a similar situation might occur in Mongolia, while Kazakh minority schools operate far West Bayan-Ölgii aymag.

As for China, the state provides public services even in the smaller townships, but their access previously depended strictly on the registration (*hukou* 户口), which excluded administrative non-residents from them (Whalley, Zhang 2004: 2). The common phenomenon was the self-organisation of workers in the field of education (private institutions, home education), while migrants from national minorities dispersed in an environment dominated by Han Chinese were put under increased sinifying pressure. Recent liberalisation of this ‘internal citizenship’ (The Economist 2020) might result in wider access for the migrants (Chan, Buckingham 2008: 585–587).

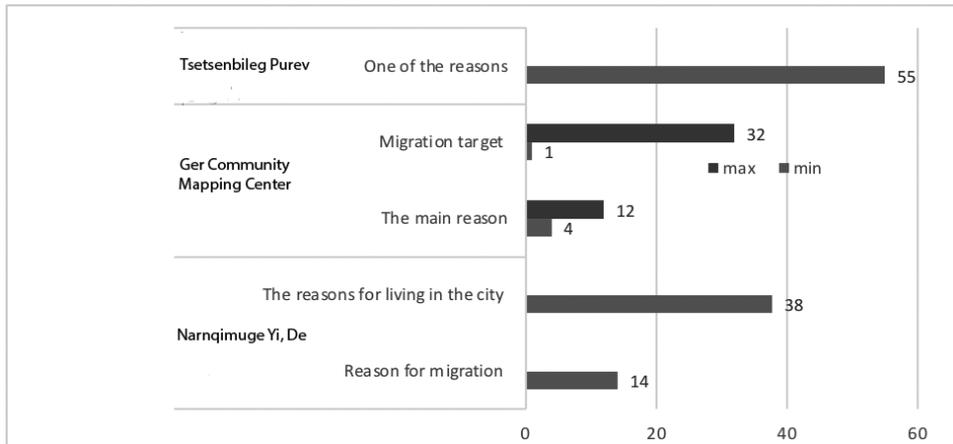
According to various surveys conducted by different institutions, education is an important factor in migration dynamics. Due to the large methodological incoherencies, the results can not be compared or extrapolated on the whole population. Their importance lay in reflecting on the reasons and goals behind the decisions to move towards urbanised areas. For China’s Dagurs⁸ surveyed in Inner Mongolia Academy of Sciences, education is the reason for migration for 14.1% of respondents. Children’s education as a reason for living in the city was pointed out by 37.8% of migrants (Narenqimuge, Yi, De 2013: 42, 44). The general view of the change is rather positive, when more Dagurs find difficulties in the adaptation as a minority (6%), while access to education is a lesser problem (5.6%). However, based on my own fieldwork, I would argue here that in some cases there can be a general satisfaction with education, however there is anxiety linked to ethnicity, when only a Chinese education is provided. Placing offsprings into better quality schooling is mixed with insecurity linked to its sinifying effects.

Mongolia’s case shares some similarities, but with more worrying results. Independent NGO’s cross-region surveys indicated that education is for 4–12% the main reason for migration. It becomes the key migration target when choosing a place to settle for 1–32% of respondents. Among the interesting findings is that it is predominately a women’s decision (GCMC 2018a: 39–40). The issue of educa-

⁸ Nationality related to Mongols living not only in Manchuria (including the Holon Buir region, currently under Inner Mongolia) but also in minor groups in Xinjiang.

tional migration can also be less directly found in academic research, when it is in a set of reasons for 55% of respondents (Tsetsenbileg, Purev, Batjargal 2014: 54).

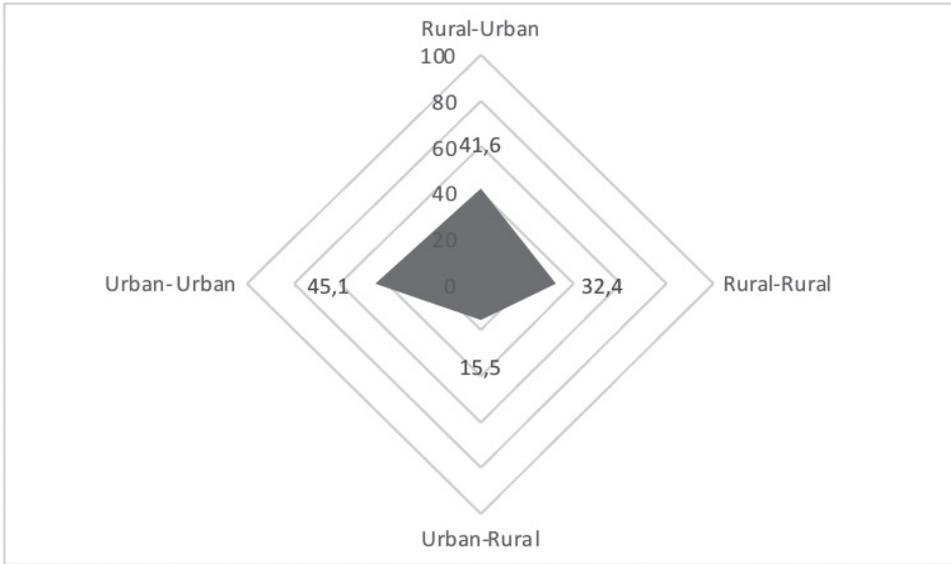
Qualitative research adds to these data an important aspect of the wider community experience of educational migration for the younger generation under the remote banner. The shuttle departures and arrivals of students to their *nutag* (homeland) becomes a cyclical celebration similar to traditional habits (Rakowski 2019: 220, 235–236, etc.). Mongolia's phenomenon is the migration of families following students. As 90 out of 113 universities are situated in Ulaanbaatar (GCMC 2018b: 13), this becomes one of many incentives to move to the capital.



Graph 2. Education as a factor in migration (%)

Source: Based on data: Narenqimuge, Yi, De 2013; GCMC 2018b; Tsetsenbileg, Purev, Batjargal 2014.

In Mongolia however, migrants face significant obstacles with access to public education, even that which is compulsory. This trend might negatively impact the scholarisation in the country, which was award in the 1960s by the United Nations for eradicating analphabetism. Especially, in any type of migration, less than 50% of newcomers improved the schooling prospects of their children.



Graph 3. Improving access to education according origin and direction of migration (%)

Source: Based on GCMC (2018b) data.

As a result, if needs were not met, settlers gathered around NGOs providing access to education. In the case of Mongolia, the integrating centres were religious institutions providing additional religious and secular teaching services. During the fieldwork, I was able to observe the combination of religious authority spreading non-religious education. Among the investigated institutions, some offered courses supporting official schooling.

In the case of mosques of Nalaikh and Songino Khairkhan, religious training is one of three branches of educational activity. Such institutional framework helps the community provide individual classes for school children from all subjects. The two mosque’s interiors and engaged staff, including trained pedagogues, provide upgraded conditions for the children in *gers* and houses. It is specially dedicated to migrants from a remote part of Bayan-Ölgii, who have low command of Mongolian and need special assistance in catching up with their classmates. The third type of training is a summer school dedicated to the national minority culture and language development, including not only Kazakh but also Turkish. The last element opens up new possibilities to study and work abroad as Turkey provides more support to grassroots educational programs for the Kazakh minority than Kazakhstan.



Photography 1. New mosque and a cultural centre in Nalaikh's Kazakh quarter

Source: Author's own archive.

Sain Nomun Khiid (Monastery) in Nalaikh seems to be exceptional in the context of Mongolian Gelugpa. It took lessons from Tibetan-style monasteries in India in terms of adopting an active approach based on Christian missions. While in some other Buddhist monasteries in the UB monks' offering is limited to prayer and ceremonies, Sain Nomun developed advanced studies on the religious doctrine, but separately in 2019 has had some advancements in the construction of a secular, primary school building. From what I was told at the time of my visit, they are seeking funds to open a kindergarten.

Diverse types of educational activity had been proposed by the Salesian priest in a school adjacent to the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, where he organised a variety of courses in vocational training. The idea was to create skills that are always needed in the labour market, which made it attractive for young people to reduce the risk of unemployment. The fee facilitated the financing of education to the poorest pupils from the ger districts and the homeless. Instead of paying for the training, they worked for the school providing services, including construction works, cleaning, or cooking.

The above mentioned cases illustrate the unsatisfied demand for various forms of education, that the state did not offer on an adequate scale. Formal education is of key importance for the migrants. The minority language and cultural institutions are not given high priority; however, it plays some role in the formation of non-government organisations' (NGO) activity. In Ulaanbaatar, Kazakhs organ-

ised around the mosque create a cultural space of their nationality in Mongolian surrounding. In China, this kind of initiative is undertaken in many Chinese cities, as well as virtually. The deficiency can be linked to the cities and towns outside of ethnic autonomy. In this case, national minorities establish bottom-up movements for establishing evening or weekend schooling. An increasing number of them were already established on the Internet via QQ, which had functionalities for group sessions⁹ (Golik 2014b: 101). The urban areas are the sphere of ‘Chineseness’. It is visible even in Hailar, which on almost every corner tries to reflect the ‘ethnic’ component. However, in Nantun, minority settlers constitute an important proportion of the population, which makes the issue of assimilation in the older and middle generation seemed not that alarming. Also, the banner’s local government did provide Chinese and Mongolian education, the later also dedicated to Evenks (with the language of instruction in the primary school). Given the significant ethnic and ethnographic inhomogeneity of the community, they required a more bespoke framework for their cultural development. The Mongolian autonomy of the region is supportive of the ‘standardised’ nationality schooling, while the banner is dedicated to Evenks, with Solon brach as the power-holders in Nantun (Dumont 2017: 520–521). From the perspective of distinctive ethnic groups, like Buryats, access to cultural institutions has been monopolised by the Evenks. Different Mongolic groups and Dagurs were marginalised; only one Ööld dance was to enter banner’s Ulaan Möchir.¹⁰ In such circumstances, these ethnic groups have founded their communities to teach their folk art. Some cases prove flow to Hailar with public institutions for the Mongols under Mongolian autonomy or commercial projects like music pubs.

The role of religious institutions only in the case of Huis, was a factor in settlement to some Muslims. What I found interesting, was the ongoing sedentarization of Kazakhs in UB’s Songino Khairkhan and Nalaikh and their tendency to gravitate towards the mosque surroundings. This process might result in the formation of post-nomadic *mahalla* communities, which are common in Central Asia and old urban settlements of Hui people in China (Szynkiewicz 2012: 200).

Their status held some similar attributes to minority migrants in China. They come with significantly different cultural and language backgrounds to the ‘city’ standard. They use various combinations of Kazakh, Mongolian, and Turkish. Linguistically fragmented, they also meet bilingual and monolingual kin groups from earlier migrations.

⁹ And probably inspired Chinese creator of Zoom.

¹⁰ 乌兰牧骑 (or 乌兰牧旗). In classical Mongolian: *ulaγan möčir* or *ulaγanmočir*. Cultural institutions responsible for organic inoculation of communist culture in the folk performances. The Mongolian term means ‘bud’, ‘branch’, ‘seedling’ or ‘department’.

Settlements and kin groups

As the new settlers adapt to urban life, they are in some places numerous enough to establish their districts – and more generally – influence the cityscapes. Therefore, they are not only passive receivers of the new way of life but, to some extent, the shapers of it. Ulaanbaatar is an obvious example, with about 60% of the surface covered with *geriin khoroolols*, which is a significant indicator in the continuation of nomadic dwelling traditions. Nantun's post-herding roots are less visible with the so-called 'hutong-style' houses – what has continued are the social networks, that are much harder to trace back. However, Evenk Banner (Ewenke Qi) develops its own 'city', which is the 'bagel' of the 'new Nantun'. It provides the town with a 'civilised' façade of Sinitic, a modern city like in many other minority regions in the PRC (Cliff 2013: 20–21).

Nantun's architecture can be linked with the three waves of urbanisation, starting with the one-layer brick hutongs, followed by the low blocks, then finally – high and modern dwellings built less than a decade ago. The county centre's urban development resulted in a dramatic change in the characteristics of this settlement. During my visit in 2007, Nantun was a small town, clearly distinct from Hailar with architecture, ethnic composition, and kilometers of the steppe. The town used to be mostly covered with hutong-type single-story buildings, inhabited by large population of minorities, next to Han Chinese, who remained running their small businesses. Currently, the remaining hutongs are used for local enterprises, occasionally dwellings, and NGOs' headquarters.



Photography 2. Nantun's music bar in a 'hutong' – urban life

The changes were mostly two types: replacing gers with modern architecture and gentrification of the cityscape. Within a decade, the township's spatial development was the particularly dynamic Northside, also towards West and South-West. Not only has Nantun's surface doubled, but it has merged with Hailar city. New apartments have been offered to those who moved from the demolished hutongs, as compensation for the land. Most of their inhabitants became the new migrants of the Han nationality. It resulted in the dispersion of minorities comparing to older Nantun, in which dense communities were not directly affected by the inflow of Han Chinese. What remained is the 'middle' architecture of low blocks at the crossroad of Caimao/Natun Rd. and Imin Rd. with the old Hui microdistrict and Buryat district, inhabited mostly by the minority with particularly visible Buryats. It is worth mentioning that this is the only ethnographic group, that continues to demonstratively parades wearing their traditional clothes and has kept a couple of traditional tailoring services at the main Imin Rd. in business. However, their increasing number also contributes to an upgrades in living standards as they move to the newly built blocks. The trading centre's surroundings become largely a place of fluctuating populations of rotating kin groups of different ages. What is noticeable, that is the migration of the school youth and the oldest members, while the middle generation often stays in the rural area. It is interesting, as there is rather a tendency for people moving largely in their 20s and 30s (Castro, Rogers 1984: 66, 69–72).

There are some migrants who move to the city with relatives, who are also rather newcomers and lack multigenerational social network ties with the inhabitants of the previous 'old Nantun'. These groups are more likely to face social alienation and lack of economic base. Their situation stands in contrast with the relatively stable social institutions of the inhabitants of 'old Nantun'. There are misconceptions, particularly on Dagurs, as there are two ethnicities, who also reflect strong class stratification. Hailar Dagurs as part of the oldest settlement in Hailar and Nantun used to be part of the Qing apparatus. Even after the stormy 20th century with the prosecutions and attempts to marginalise them, they are still maintain an intellectual elite. On the other hand, Qiqihar Dagurs came in the 60s to the region. They settled down partly in the countryside, and others in more urbanised areas. Currently, they move to Hailar and Nantun, as well as to larger cities in the PRC. In Nantun they usually work in service or are the beneficiaries of the counties generous welfare system.

Evenks in PRC consist of three groups (Dumont 2017: 520–521), while in Nantun are of Solon branch, from whom the autonomous banner is dedicated. Therefore, on the ground, they form a relatively stable community with generations of historical connections with kin groups and other nationalities, while official level they retain their political representation in the Party apparatus. They are favoured in the public sector and its institutions, including banner's Ulaan Mochir (the song and dance assemble), with the marginalisation of other nationalities. There-

fore they receive ambivalence not only from the traditionally antagonistic Dagurs and Buryats, but even Öölds or Barguts.



Photography 3. Ethnic huqing (music instrument) manufacture centre in a 'hutong'

Source: Author's own archive.

The situation among distinctive Mongolian ethnic groups is diverged, as they have a variety of migration strategies. While Barguts tend to move from the countryside to Hailar (unless they intermarry with another ethnic or national group), the Öölds tend to move to Nantun. According to the informants, Shenekhen Buryats stay in the countryside or move to Nantun, especially its older parts. The most complex communities are those of Khorchins, as there have been multiple waves of migrations, which also are not homogeneous in their places of settlement.

Despite ethnicity, what has been noticeable is the younger generation's increasing migration to larger cities like Harbin, Hohhot, Beijing, etc., which is rather universal trend. For the region, however, it is relatively new trend, as before there was a larger linguistic and cultural barrier. Among the informants, some were remigrants from the larger cities, where they have found difficulties in buying apartments or had family obligations in their *nutag*.

Comparing with Nantun, UB's ethnic composition is less diverse. However, the *khorooolols* organize their settlements partly by the *nutag* (homeland) key, which reflects an attempt to prevent social alienation and maintain the nomadic social relations. It sometimes corresponds with the ethnographic variety among Mongols, but this often seems closely related to *nutag*. Therefore it makes it arbitrary to extract the single condition.

A particular case is the mentioned Kazakhs, who are a distinct national minority. Most of them share *nutag*,¹¹ which is Bayan-Ölgii. However, the urban *ma-hallas*¹² also integrate migrants from other regions like Kobdo or Khentei, which reflect the priority of ethnic and religious identity among the migrants over localism, as it is typical for the Mongolian majority.

In the future, the development of education in migrant regions will be a factor shaping the social stratification. Schooling can become a tool in the cultural adaptation of post-nomadic children into urban society. However, there are many questions about the impact. What version of culture is it going to be? In terms of Ulaanbaatar, there is an emphasis on the praise of nomadic life with glimpses of the sedentary contemporary society (Gardelle, Zhao 2019: 364–385). For the Kazakh minority apart from Mongolian schools there is an alternative with the Turkish school and other international schools, however, such an option unaffordable for poorer migrants in the UB and too far for Nalaikh.

In the case of Nantun, standardised education in its Chinese version provided skills helpful outside the region, and also increasingly valid even in Holon Buir. Mongolian education was also of quality with training in standard Inner Mongolian and an oral language closer to the Khalkha dialect of the Mongolian state. However, due to the increasing migration of the Khorchins from proper Inner Mongolia, including pedagogical staff, there is a noticeable shift among the youngest generation into non-standard dialect. The future perspective is a functional replacement of minority education with standardised Chinese schooling (Atwood 2020: website).

In Ulaanbaatar migrants with poor admittance to education will find themselves underprivileged with prospects of endangering their precariat standing. Meager integration with urban residents will also impact the capacity to develop informal relations with matters in terms of prospects of employment. It seems that for the poorer population in the ger districts, entry to education is restricted due to limited supply from the local government and the state, as well as other conditions like the inaccessibility of buildings during rain or snow from the suburban highlands. Even after enrolling in public schooling, their employment prospects seem uncertain, but it is difficult to say how disadvantaged they are compared to the lower lower-middle class in the city centre. The question lies in the adaptation via school and family to urban life, then establishing wider ties not limited to the kin groups.

Migrant children with lower social capital, even if they manage to enter the schooling system, often end up in one of the multiple higher education institu-

¹¹ For interviews I used Mongolian (or rarely Turkish), so I referred to Mongolian concept of *nutag*. In Kazakh there are a variety of terms linked to place and kin groups, but according to the dr. Tunek Kunes its equivalent could be 'meken'.

¹² Muslim neighborhood associations which, in the past or in other countries, performed judicial and civil administration functions (Cieślowska 2015: 53–55).

tions (about 200 in UB), which results in an overproduction of the alumnae with a degree but with dubious skills. Instead of lifting them to a higher position, it consumes time and money, providing knowledge, on which there is relatively low demand in the post-transition economy. A higher studies diploma is a driver of migration, as it becomes a promise for a not better life, but survival. With the overproduction of educated or quasi-educated young people, the upgrade will hardly be felt, leaving them trapped in a vicious cycle of financial debt and labour instability.

In this context, a critical question is of the role of kin groups, which in at the new place sometimes reconstructs itself. In Nantun we can observe the maintenance of the social relations dating back to the Qing period, but including into the social system of *guanxi* or *khamaa* the second or third generations of migrants' heirs of Khorchin and other origins. Contrary to this, the descendants of the Qiqihar Dagurs, as well as Han Chinese and new migrations of Khorchins, establish relations among each other as clusters of support. It is also visible, that they dominate in the gastronomy service sector (together with Buryat migrants), mechanics, and the retail trade. Based on the information from the Ger Community Mapping, a similar situation can be observed in UB, where the regional groups settle down near each other and dominate in some niches of the local economy. Therefore the migration might sometimes become a catalyst for new-old type social relations.

Kin ties for migrants are the buffer in facing the new reality. They offer support in most aspects of life, from small loans to job fixing. Staying at the settlement inhabited by one's kin provides safety or at least an illusion of it. For a female in Ulaanbaatar, male kin can be a protective arm against crime. For Qiqihar Dagur from Nantun, who lost his job as an accountant in a metropolis, relatives became a safety net. They helped him to start a small business in his hometown, so he did not have to struggle to survive and find another occupation. A young Evenk graduated from studies in Xi'an and has found a relatively good occupation in private business, but without the opportunity to buy an apartment. This would mean that for at least a decade he will not be able to get married, as contemporary urban Chinese females find it as a basic condition for formalising a relation.¹³ Given this situation, he has returned to Nantun, when he inherited a flat and joined the military, then the CCP, which all told, significantly increases his desirability as a future husband.

From an individual perspective, relatives are an insurance policy, but there is a downside. A person has to pay off debts or support relatives, no guarantee of it being returned in this generation. They also have to remain loyal to a conservative hierarchic order. An individual is limited in making important decisions on their own, as has to take into account loyalty and sovereignty inside the group. The re-

¹³ For some minority females this rule might be less strict, but in the bigger cities they are an insignificant part of the population, also they increasingly adapt to the trend of expecting the possession of an apartment from future husband.

sponsibilities are of a different kind, including the care of elder parents. The burden on females can be seen on the example of an Ööld lady, who, when her parents become old and disabled, had returned to China and chose a job in services below her potential, to work relatively near to her hometown. However, the pressure can be also on males, which was the case of a Hamnigan Guran, who used to work in Chongqing as a manager, but was called back by his father, despite the fact, that his younger daughter was living and working with the parents. In another case daughter worked abroad while the mildly disabled son stayed with their parents.

The kin ties might be ambivalent when it comes to a Buryat owner of a small guest house. Some of his rooms are occupied by relatives from countryside instead of commercial guests, but on the other hand, these help him run the business, especially, when he returns to his *nutag* in the countryside. It is a typical situation of temporary usage of goods (Rakowski 2016: 97–99) when one is not fully an owner of their property or any object with relatives coming and staying unpredictably in terms of time. The exchange of services is also a part of the deal, of which a typical way is house renovation support. It becomes a necessity when the household lacks adult, healthy males to do it on their own. On the other hand, the helpers often arrive drunk or not show at all, which slows down or halts proceeding with work.

Social relations, especially those, which are based on family ties on a micro-scale aid survival. In the long term – as shown in the examples above – it can endanger one's position and prevent him from taking actions supporting social mobility other than supported by the clan. Based on these observations, it is still more of an asset than a burden for the family and some members, while for a few, traditional obligations limit their scope to maneuver. In this context moving from the suburbs to the centre of Ulaanbaatar or to a metropolis in China means the weakening of ties with the community. Leaving the comfort zone brings many risks, but also becomes an opportunity to become true urban citizens in terms of way of life and most importantly – occupation. In economic, social, and infrastructural terms, the suburbs are not city, nor countryside. As building kin and quasi-kin ties by the migrants become a conservative way of adaptation, the city can sometimes become an attempt to escape from the kin and *nutag*-based interrelations. This decision provides more financial and social autonomy but can lead to alienation.

The assumption is the improvement of personal position, the special movement towards the city centre, and the loosening of kin ties seem to be interconnected. During the Naadam of Kazakhs in Nailakh a resolute, 10-year old girl started a chat in fluent English, also interacting in standard Mongolian. During the discussion she revealed that she was born in Ulaanbaatar, her father was an engineer. She was attending a private school where she studied English only. The girl admitted that she can speak both Kazakh and Mongolian, but is not able to write either. This makes it obvious that she will not be able to function well in any of the communities inside the state, so she is rather prepared for a future emigra-

tion or a rentier position Her parents possibly find their native languages useless, which means family ties must be rather loose, so they are not interested in the child attending a Kazakh cultural centre or writing letters or e-mails to relatives. The child is able to interact directly to maintain basic social relations, but they are far less important than money from her parents. When she leaves for another country, she will be not expected to take care of her elders, as her father will be able to hire a professional carer.

Voluntary and forced migrations from the suburbs can dramatically change the social composition of districts. Their transformation can support the increase in access to upgraded education. The hypothesis can be that educational success or failure is strongly correlated with changing not only individuals but can also impact minor gentrification changes in the districts.

Gentrification

The gentrification of newly urbanised post-nomadic areas although a multi-dimensional concept, can be seen as a largely economic-driven process. The policy of local government also plays an important role, sometimes in an aspect of creating an operational framework, like urban planning or local regulation. The authorities can also take an active role in city development. As the term can indicate variety of urbanistic processes, in this text I would refer to it as the class remake of the central urban landscape (Smith 1996: 39) –

is one of the most important processes reshaping contemporary cities. Although there are many different types of gentrification, scholars generally agree that gentrification is fundamentally a process that involves the reinvestment of capital after a period of disinvestment, the production of an aestheticized landscape, and lower class displacement followed by middle class replacement. As an economic strategy, gentrification reinvests capital into disinvested areas in order to exploit the gap between actual and potential ground rent (Smith 1979, 1996). Culturally, gentrification means the displacement of low-income residents to make way for members of the mobile middle class who are looking to consume a certain lifestyle (Zukin 1991; Caulfield 1994; Ley 1996; Bryson 2013: 578).

According to the above-mentioned definition, we can adapt it to the demographic and economic situation of the suburbs of UB and of Nantun with Hailar. They both result in changes in architecture, followed by the movement of communities. However, the specific element is class dynamics. While usually gentrification's beneficiaries are the middle class¹⁴ at the cost of lower-class' displacement, in both studied cases reveals exceptions. In Nantun there are the subalterns, who benefit from the top-down public investments linked with the compensations for the land or the groups under the welfare programs, who receive apartments at re-

¹⁴ In some cases also the upper class.

duced prices. For the UB there used to be cases linked to proper land-rend evaluation when some of the former residents could have remained. Another specific situation is, what I called here a 'spot gentrification', when a family or a small community upgrade their neighbourhood and dwellings.

What has to be mentioned, are the different actors in the process. The UB's suburbs are in the majority inhabited by the lower classes. However, there are families, who are in the process of improvement of their financial status. In Nantun the hutong inhabitants were also members of the middle-class, who used to form the local elite. The gentrifying entities are of course developers, but as in Mongolia land prices are not precisely calculated and can vary to the extreme not only based on economic productivity potential but also the bargaining power of different actors. In China there is no land ownership, only temporary use, so the important players are local governments.

Gentrification is the most dynamic on relatively flat areas for economic reasons and the better air quality suburbs due to the heavy pollution of the situated city. These two factors seem the most important drivers of the transformation of substandard dwelling zone to prestigious – or even luxurious residential areas. In Ulaanbaatar, among the factors in the gentrification process, is the key role played by the scope of integration with the city centre and economic potential in terms of existing hard infrastructure, service, real estate, etc. These aspects often result from landforms. In the case of 3rd-*khorooolol* (microdistrict), the hilly area constitutes objective barriers to development, while 16th-*khorooolol's ger* district area has been relatively quickly replaced by the multi-layer blocks and multi-stores. Infrastructural deficiencies exist even in relatively developed districts, but in more prospective areas, there is more will to overcome them. When the land is attractive for the big players, like in 16th-*khorooolol* of Bayanzurkh, the power relation might be overwhelming to the poorly organised post-herders. In these kinds of cases possible development could result in changing the ger district into 'normal' urban space but with the removal of its previous inhabitants.

The inhabitants' perspectives for upgrading the dwelling standard vary. The policy of the central bank provides access to mortgages for the middle class. For lower-income inhabitants, it is a part of the unofficial economy with the circulation of services and capital inside the social networks (Plueckhahn 2020: 32–36) or underresearched shadow-loan market in ger districts. It proves that the quality of financing largely depends on social relations.

Ger districts replaced by multi-layer buildings means upgrading the status of the whole area. But this is not possible in every place, as mentioned before. Families living in less favourable conditions in terms of landscape or economic conditions can improve the dwelling standard individually with spot gentrification. It transforms the ger districts into single-house areas but with limited public infrastructure. It can be a parallel process with the organised real estate investments, like

in Yarmag and Buyan-Ukhaa. In the same area, the existing *ger* districts transform into solid single-family house area and nearby warehouse and department stores.



Photography 4. Mixed architecture in 3-*khoroool* of Ulaanbaatar

Source: Author's own archive.

The upgrading process may be spread via the communities like in the case of eco-building and ecological districts, organisationally by the Ger Community Mapping (GCMC: website) with financial support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other institutions. In only 2018 ADB issued an 80\$ loan for creating ecological mini-districts by building 1,500 affordable sustainable houses (ADB: website). Ger Community Mapping, as a part of the project of empowering local communities, works on integrating them around the implementation of ecological projects.

China again had to face contrasting developments. The apartments in multi-layer houses are also mostly unavailable for the lower classes, however, there are cases, when the poorer population moves into higher standard dwelling against market prices, but as a result of such state policy. The state tends to prevent new waves of migrants from building their districts, which is understood as poverty alleviation. The state acts against substandard formation to avoid slums development. The second aspect arises from the mentioned appropriation of the rural or suburban land, which after gentrification can become affordable if compensations is high enough. Sometimes the displacement of villagers can be imposed. In this case, memories are especially intense and they contain sentimental stories of deprivation from the ancestral land and problems with urban adaptation with the new generation growing up in better conditions with many facilities, also school

and hospital in the nearby surroundings. Although uprooted and without the local deities, they create human capital and a new society to transform China.

In this context, Nantun shares many of the pan-Chinese gentrification characteristics. However, it seems to be more a part of a success story than the brutal transition and forced replacements. Especially, that most of the owners of the new apartments are not very nostalgic about their old houses, some of them still use those hutongs, which have not been yet demolished, especially for business in the grayish part of the economy. This temporary life in two worlds usually is combined with the modest summer residence or close family living in the countryside. We can notice the constant spatial movement of the postnomads between the *ovoljoo* (winter residence) in the apartment and *zuslen* (summer residence) in the countryside. Some similar situations I have observed among the native residents of Ulaanbaatar, who had their *gers* (yurt) in the hot season on their land, often around Terelj.

There is another impressive trend in Nantun's gentrification process. The town's special development is combined with the merging with the Hailar smart districts, expanding southwards towards the river and fresh air from the grasslands. Posh houses and blocks obliterated the natural and administrative borders of the two settlements. The architecture of this transition zone does not share common characteristics with the previous waves of urban development. Unlike hutongs and soviet-style blocks of Nanun and Halars modernist architecture with Mongolian patterns, the effective new districts are a manifestation of the globalised imagination of the Chinese upper-classes with Serbian architects create the 'Western' space of pseudo-romanesque and early renaissance decorations. There is more of a 'Chinese characteristic' manifesting itself in more discrete ways when after urbanisation of the townships (*chengzhenhua*) one can notice expansion of the 'smart houses' services indoor and surveilled districts outdoor. This can be a prelude to the creation of 'smart townships' away from the highly developed metropolises, from which these technologies are being disseminated.

Conclusion

The comparison of two countries' post-nomadic settlements reflects the fundamental contrast in their urban policies, from visibly present public interventions in the PRC to the almost complete withdrawal of the state in the Mongolian case. In this diverse framework, the universal migration mechanism occurs, which is the economic pressure and hope for improvement of living conditions in rural areas. A characteristic element combining the cultural similarities of the two investigated settlements is the informal ties of the lineage- or clan-based social structures typical for the Altaic peoples. The bottom-up emerging of new social networks on the pattern of nomadic group organisation decides the position of migrants' in the

hierarchy. The way they operate in these new conditions becomes important for local conditions. The upgrading of dwelling and access to public services are key factors shaping migrants' situation. However, their placement in the social hierarchy as providers of services and owners of temporary businesses remains universal, not only in the region. Climbing the social ladder, although limited, provided in both cases a chance, which – in the event of success – impacts the migrant's social network. Among the conclusion emerging from the fieldwork is that post-nomadic districts reflect a scope of integration with the city centre, which impacts their gentrification potential. The upgrading of dwelling conditions becomes a resultant of the district's given conditions and kin or community capacity to use the city's opportunities.

Gentrification dynamics can vary depending mostly on whether it is top-down or community-led. For a big investor, it is easier to build a new district than to modernise and an old one. Local groups implement transition via the spot gentrification. The question is whether they can change their districts on their terms. In the case of more difficult terrain, a paradox is that the relatively poorer groups, who have fewer chances to sell the land in good conditions might have more opportunities to organise space on their own. It can become, what Ivan Peshkov has called a 'discrete modernisation' in the context of Bauman's liquid modernity and economic difficulties. However, when the land's parameters make it attractive for housing or business, the ger districts' self-arising semi-urbanisation would have to give way to the complete reorganisation of space and communities combined with transformation into the city.

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