Institutions and Inequalities

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
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The Fate of Earlier Social Ranking in the Communist Regimes of Russia and China

CAROLINE HUMPHREY

André Béteille (1969: 370) rightly points to the importance in all societies of the Weberian notion of 'social honour' alongside those of wealth and power. The communist revolutions of Russia and China engulfed many peoples whose societies were ideologically hierarchical. Some of these, such as the Yi of south-west China, had such deeply marked social and cultural divisions that observers have likened them to Indian castes. Generally it is assumed that these social rankings were quickly swept away by revolutionary processes. Yet was this really so, and can we observe differences in the fate of such social distinctions in the Soviet and Chinese cases?

Certainly one of the main aims of Communist revolutions was to eliminate previously existing social inequalities. Liberal views have also stressed equality before the law and parity of civil rights, but socialist societies attempted to extend the scope of personal equality beyond legal and political relations to the entire domain of social relations (Dunn 1984: 7). Following Marx, the theory was that earlier inequalities could be understood as class differentiation based on private property and more generally on control of the relations of production. The revolutionaries proposed therefore that social inequalities could be destroyed by eliminating private property and creating institutions that would place the relations of production under the control of the widest social formation, that of the state. However, as André Béteille has observed, from his early publications onwards, social forms of inequality like 'caste' are highly complex and cannot be reduced to property and production relations alone. 'Caste' involved essentializing notions of physical difference as well as social estimations of honour and purity, and these were played out in multifarious socially self-reproducing forms such as occupational ranking, marriage strategies, ritual prohibitions, spatial separation, rules of commensality, codes of dress, education, and language usages (1965: 45–65,

93–9). This essay addresses the question of what happened to certain such complex socio-cultural forms of inequality in early communist societies.

It is impossible in a short article to provide a comprehensive analysis, but a sketch of some of the processes involved can be made by examining the contrasting cases of the Yi and Mongol peoples in China and the Buryats in Russia. There are two aspects to the problem, the first concerning the relation between the state socialist-defined concept of class and the social divisions actually existing among the minority peoples, and the second concerning the rather different wider political cultures of Russia and China and the differing methods and periodization of attempts to implement policies of redress of inequalities.

With regard to the first point it will be argued that where the communist definition of class coincided more or less with the boundaries of the existing socially differentiated categories, as happened the Yi and the Mongols, the effect of the processes of 'class struggle' was to preserve and even highlight earlier social hierarchies. Certain caste-like features of the Yi were particularly resilient, while the Mongols' clan organization, which itself hardly survived, provided a vocabulary for retaining hierarchical notions on the ethnic plane. In Russia, on the other hand, where the previous social institutions were not categorizable in terms of class, as among the Buryat, earlier socio-cultural distinctions could not maintain themselves in the new socialist environment and were more likely to be sidelined, thrust underground or totally transformed by communist institutions. This includes gender hierarchy in the case of the Buryat, as mentioned later (though an adequate treatment of this subject would require a separate paper).

The second point is perhaps more contestable; it concerns the socio-cultural character of the revolutionary process and what I perceive as a different political interpretation in China and Russia of the relation of the individual to the social whole. The revolution in China happened in a hierarchical society that never removed the subordination of individuals to existing groups in the regions. People with a 'bad' social background were to be reformed by revolutionary processes and then reinserted with a transformed mentality into their local society. Hence the continuing importance of regional and ethnic specificity in the 'class struggles' there, up to and including the Cultural Revolution. In Russia, on the other hand, the attachment of individuals to existing local groups within society was first undermined by the 'cultural revolution' of the late1920s and then rather rapidly subsumed in the wider Stalinist urge for national supremacy *vis-à-vis* Europe and America. People of negative social background were expelled from local society by a variety of means (purging, exile, forced labour) and either cast aside in dire circumstances or thrust into the all-Union task of construction. This meant that for everyone else, although equality of opportunity for individuals (as opposed to groups) was not a particularly stressed ideological goal, it was an effect or by-product of economic development, of industrialization,

urbanization, the mechanization of agriculture and so forth. The crucial relation of the individual came to be one with the Soviet state, whose administrative units mediated between individuals and lower-level, earlier-formed social groups. The effect of all this was that revolutionary 'class war' ceased to be a major concern of the communists after the late 1930s. Pre-revolutionary social distinctions, while not entirely forgotten in Russia, were more effectively wiped from the scene than in China. They were replaced by the different, all-Union hierarchy of Soviet institutions and new, Soviet-generated categories of ethnic groups, occupational strata and 'enemies of the state' which were only tangentially, or not at all, related to pre-Revolutionary social status.

At the end of the essay I introduce some thoughts on the more recent results of such processes in Russia and China as regards the issue which has preoccupied Béteille's later work (e.g. 1991), viz. distributive justice and institutional well-being. In both countries, ethnicity was seen as a source of inequality parallel to that produced by class. As distinct from the 'exploitation' evinced by class relations, the kind of inequality perceived in ethnicity was a hierarchy of capabilities, with 'backwardness' and underdevelopment attributed to the minority peoples. The socialist regimes came to consider hierarchies *between* minority peoples as just as important, or more so, than those previously existing *within* them. However, in China, such was the sway of the class concept (in 1948–9, then in the land reform of the 1950s and again during the Cultural Revolution) that policies of support for 'backward' ethnic minorities fell by the wayside in these periods. A whole people such as the Mongols could come to be treated as a class, in this case first as a class of 'oppressors' of Han tenant farmers and later as a class that had unfairly benefited from subsequent ethnic support policies and was therefore deserving of punishment during the Cultural Revolution (Bulag 1998). In China, ethnicity continues to be seen as a source of inequality and is an essential criterion in the recruitment of individuals to institutions. In Russia in the later Soviet period, on the other hand, ethnicity itself was mediated by the federal administration, so quotas were designated for republics, autonomous regions, etc. rather than for the titular ethnic peoples of these regions themselves. It will be argued that this policy deflected direct ethnic antagonism within educational institutions.

It is interesting to consider Béteille's critique (1991) of reservation policies in India in the context of Russia and China. Although it is arguable that the communist regimes had such different political values from those of India that a comparison is pointless, nevertheless I believe that Béteille's argument that redressive justice as a political right may have a corrosive effect on institutions is relevant for a comparison between Russia and China. In Russia 'class background' did not cease to be relevant to the recruitment to institutions, but the classes concerned soon came to be defined by Soviet, not pre-revolutionary, realities, while the actual operation of quotas by the 1960s

came to establish a comparatively benign institutional regime. This can be seen as having had state-integrative aims more than goals of redressive justice. In China, on the other hand, the conflation of pre-liberation class categories and ethnicity at certain periods and the continued direct relevance of both in the functioning of institutions has kept such status ideas alive. Redressive justice there has become inseparable from sentiments of class and ethnic affront.

SOCIAL HONOUR AND REVOLUTION

Let me return to the main focus of this essay, the fate of previous systems of social inequality in socialist revolutionary processes. In pre-industrial societies, Béteille argues (1969: 371, 1991: 592), social honour or status has an even greater role, because the subordination of the individual to the group is associated with the prevalence of birth over achievement. Status honour might be associated with wealth and power but was not determined exclusively by them. Rather it was tied to the 'styles of life' of particular sections of society, these being sharply differentiated and buttressed by legal and ritual sanctions against members of lower groups adopting the styles of life of the higher. Endogamous marriage in particular was the social means of ensuring the continuity of birth within such groups and the maintenance of social honour. With hindsight we can see that this kind of status was a challenge for the communist revolutions in creating social equality, although at the time their leaders did not perceive their task in these terms, since property, according to Marxist doctrine, and power, as insisted on by Lenin, were understood to be what really mattered. 'Status', as Béteille remarked (1969: 370) about Weber's analysis too, 'appeared to be a residual category'. So what then happened to this 'residual' social stuff?

In both Russia and China communist revolutions did, over varying periods, reduce to a minimum private property in the means of production. All people were placed in an equivalent ownership position, because no one had any private property of general productive significance. However, it is a truism that citizens of socialist regimes were not thereby made equal. As Sen observes (1992: ix), one has to ask, 'Equality of what?' There was a concerted effort to equalize *incomes* in both Russia and China, until the Stalinist reversal of the policy in the 1930s and the Chinese economic reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s, but equality of *freedoms*—or, to put this another way, equality of power to take decisions in one's own interest—was never a priority of either regime. In both countries, the years of post-revolutionary 'class struggle' saw some groups placed in advantageous political positions, while others were deprived of political rights and freedoms. In effect, the revolutions tried to turn the previous order of power upside down, as the slogan 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat' indicates. But, in so far as they were successful, this was only to reinforce the subordination of the individual to the group.

> The more rigid the social hierarchy, the more strict the subordination of the individual. If there be any sociological law, it is this: in all hierarchical societies—by which I mean societies that are hierarchical by design and not merely in fact—the individual counts for little and the group for a great deal. (Béteille 1991: 592)

If to have a 'good class background' counted for so much after the revolution (i.e. to derive by birth from the poorest and least powerful groups in society) it was to that extent impossible to forget the earlier hierarchy. Nevertheless, the question remains: was a reversal of the economic and political fortunes of groups sufficient to turn previous notions of status and honour upside down too?

A negative answer to this question is suggested by the fact that certain groups that were earlier much disdained for socio-cultural (rather than economic or political) 'reasons' were never given access to the new class benefits. In other words, honour/dishonour in itself escaped the revolutionary machine. The Gypsies in Russia, for example, were categorized by stereotypes that were based on deeply felt cultural attitudes which had little to do with standard parameters of ownership and relations of production. Somehow, whatever their occupation, Gypsies never became working class. This reveals that actually the category of the disadvantaged was constructed quite selectively. In fact, the Gypsies remained an exception to the relative efficiency of the Soviet communists in de-stabilizing pre-existing forms of differentiation. Nevertheless, in many cases the new socialist categories of class did more or less coincide with the status groups of minorities embraced by the revolution. So let us examine one such case, the Yi, and see what happened to their elaborate hierarchy of honour.

THE YI AND THE MAINTENANCE OF SOCIAL HONOUR IN REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

My discussion here relies entirely on a remarkable paper by Pan Jiao (1997) on the Yi, or more precisely on the LoLo subgroup within the Yi.[1] Before the Democratic Reform carried out by the communist government between 1956–8, the LoLo social organization was based on separate ranks and slavery. People belonged to one of two hierarchically ranked groups, the *Nuohuo* and the *Quhuo*, the Black Group and the White Group. These groups were also called *Shepo* (dominator) and *Jiehuo* (dominated). The White Yi were further subdivided into three categories: *Qunuo, Ajia* and *Gaxi.* Pan calls this a 'caste system' because of the importance of status ranking and endogamy, which was reinforced by numerous rituals not unlike those found in India.

Let us briefly look at these groups in more detail. Black Yi (Nuohuo) were around 7 per cent of the population in the 1950s and the great majority of them were owners of slaves. They themselves could not be slaves under any circumstances and observed strict endogamy. Love affairs between Black and White Yi were punishable by death in the case of a woman and exclusion

from Black Yi status in the case of a man. The Qunuo, numbering around 50 per cent of the LoLo population, were vassals to the Black Yi. Not themselves slaves, they had their own lineages and possessed their own land and slaves, namely Ajia and Gaxi. They paid tribute to their masters, took loans at high interest rates from them, performed some corvée services annually, and military service when their masters were fighting. If a Qunuo died without offspring, his property usually went to his Nuohuo master and a Qunuo could not migrate without the master's permission. Although a Qunuo was not to be killed, sold or bought by the master, proprietorship of him could be transferred between one Black Yi and another. The Ajia, around 33 per cent of the population, were slaves who lived separately from their masters on land allotted to them, working between one-third and one half of their time for their masters. They could be bought or sold. However, good domestic management might allow them to accumulate property, expand their land, even buy some slaves, and redeem their personal freedom. The Gaxi were unmarried domestic slaves living in the master's household, doing the housework and farmwork directly under the master's supervision. They were around 10 per cent of the population. There was no rigid boundary between Gaxi and Ajia, and a Gaxi could become an Ajia as long as he or she married under the master's jurisdiction. All, or most, of the adolescent children of an Ajia couple had to become Gaxi of the master again (Pan 1997: 108–11).

The ideology binding this organization together, and accepted according to Pan by the entire LoLo population, was the idea of the pure blood and hard bone of the Black Yi. The colour black denoted self, nobility and dignity, and a dark complexion was a sign of authentic LoLo origin. White symbolized otherness and alienation from the self. While the Qunuo White Yi were believed to be genuine (though less respected) LoLo, who valued ancestry uncontaminated by the blood of the lower groups, the Ajia consisted quite largely of people of Han origin. This background was obscured in the (rather infrequent) cases of rich Ajia attempting to raise their status by marrying a Qunuo. The prestige of the whole lineage of a Qunuo would suffer from such a marriage.

The Democratic Reform was carried out by the Chinese army amid bloodshed and massive transfer of property. It was not only the slave-owning Black Yi who resisted. Pan writes, however, that on the whole the Black Yi failed to convince the mass of the population that this was a LoLo versus Han war and many poor peasants supported the Chinese army in quelling the resistance (1997:112). By 1958 the privileges of the Black Yi were abolished. They became 'people' (*ren min*) living on their own labour. The Qunuo ceased to be vassals of the Black Yi, and the Ajia and Gaxi slaves were liberated and allocated the necessary means of production as independent peasants.

However, status honour did not disappear. To this day, writes Pan, caste endogamy is still maintained. 'As far as I know, there is no single case of intermarriage between the Black Yi and White Yi in rural areas. In the urban

areas it is also hard if not impossible to find such intermarriages' (1997: 112–13).[2] Although Black Yi are few in the cities and are scattered over different counties, prefectures and even provinces, they have formed a covert network of marital information in order to preserve endogamy. The Qunuo White Yi were classed as labouring people after the Reform. This politically advantageous position and their larger population has enabled them to pursue endogamy more blatantly than the Black Yi. Pan notes examples of the lynch killing of caste-endogamy offenders during the Cultural Revolution and as recently as the late 1980s even among educated cadres.

Just as remarkable is the survival of the notion of honour among the Black Yi. In the late 1950s, the local government thought to correct 'leftist radical mistakes' and change the status of some Black Yi from 'former slave-owner' to 'labouring people' to represent their actual situation. In principle this should have been welcomed by the Black Yi, as former slave owners were subject to discrimination at that time. However, some Black Yi tried hard to persuade the authorities to maintain their slave-owner status. What they were really worried about was that they would become the same as the White Yi if they were classified as labourers, and they could not bear the thought of the persecution this would produce from other Black Yi (Pan 1997: 114). We see here how the classificatory work of the Chinese authorities was conflated with Yi categories of status, serving to reinforce the latter.

In post-Mao China Pan himself observed the reactivation of social honour. For example, in the late 1980s, a village newly formed in Meigu county 'felt bereft' without the presence of Black Yi. It was thought that the presence of a Nuohuo household would benefit the village by maintaining internal order and provide a defence against outside bullying. The villagers therefore collectively invited a Black Yi family to settle, even though for this to be accomplished each household had to donate a piece of their own land. Other examples of such actions are collective donations to poor Black Yi for the performance of rituals for their ancestors and the insistence by whole mixed villages that teams of shamans must include Black Yi because only this would guarantee the authenticity of the ceremony (Pan 1997: 114). Even in cities, among the second or third generation of the post-Reform population, some Black Yi boys would claim they never invite White Yi girls to dance because they want to preserve their own dignity.

The response of the state authorities to such phenomena was ambiguous. The fact was that class politics inevitably turned into 'caste' politics in LoLo areas. Not only were the classes approximately coincident with the previous 'castes', but unruly memories of earlier times meant that Black Yi labourers could not be treated in the same way as White Yi labourers (because even poor Black Yi still regarded themselves as superior and rich White Yi were bullied by poor Black Yi). The government did reject open attempts to manipulate law to the advantage of 'caste'—for example an attempt by the Black Yi to invoke the state's Freedom of Marriage Law to introduce a ban

on intermarriage on the grounds that this was LoLo custom—but such was the government's preoccupation with class that local cadres at one point were exhorted to be vigilant about certain former slave owners' attempts to 'blur the class line' by marrying former slaves. Inevitably, what this meant was official reinforcement in the name of a clear class line of caste-type prejudice and endogamy (Pan 1997: 118; see also Unger's very interesting discussion (1984: 131) of the idea of 'blood-line' and 'naturally red pedigree' among 'proletarian' classes of peasants in China). The official anticipation of class hostility was transformed into open encouragement of 'class struggles' during the Cultural Revolution, with the result that White Yi began to kill Black Yi indiscriminately across the Liangshan area. These massacres resulted in an uprising of the Black Yi, which was only put down after several years by the PLA.

Despite this tragedy, the Black Yi have emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as dominant in local state cadres and economically successful farmers. Pan (1997: 119) attributes this to several factors: the experience of negotiating with long political pressure, managerial experience, and the successful consolidation of existing governmental positions. After 1949 but before the Democratic Reform, the Black Yi had been enthusiastically recruited into the administration, and later communist authorities were wary of promoting people of slave origins for fear of Black Yi objections. These socio-political advantages were regularly interpreted by the Black Yi as the result of natural ability ('pure bone'), as in so many 'caste' situations. Yet as Pan argues (1997: 122), the maintenance of the LoLo 'caste' idea should not be interpreted as cultural lag, but as a feature of modern socialist class status politics.

THE BURYATS AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ARISTOCRATIC RANK

I contrast the case of the Yi with that of the Buryats in Russia.[3] Buryat pre-revolutionary notions of status disappeared rather rapidly, certainly by the late 1930s, and they have 'revived' in the post-communist period only patchily and in highly transformed guise.

It has to be stated that the Buryats before the 1917 revolution did not have anything like a caste system, though economic inequalities and differences in rank were marked. A clan and lineage system was the basis of Tsarist indirect rule, taxes being collected by clan chiefs from their members. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was already a potential divorce between ancestral seniority, which was an important component of high status, and either wealth or official posts in the Tsarist administration. In most regions the three coincided—that is, clan chiefs inherited their official posts, were also lineal seniors, and were also extremely wealthy. However, in other places, administrative, titled chiefs of clans (*taisha, zaisan,* etc.)[4] were elected (sometimes such positions were unpopular, being associated

with Russian repressive government), were not always chosen from the seniors, and did not always coincide with the richest people.

Honorific status was thus not entirely uncontested, being constituted within each clan by some locally negotiated mixture of titled posts and genealogical seniority. Ideologically, ancestral seniority was important in relation to folk religious notions of fertility and social reproduction. The chiefs or elders were the patrons of the rituals whereby the blessings of the sky, land and ancestral spirits ensured the good fortune of the people. Within a clan or lineage the seniority of birth was clearly known and respected. However, unlike among the Yi, the inter-clan system of relations was not hierarchical. Clans or local lineages were conceived as essentially different from one another, as conveying qualities such as bravery or cunning, or as fitting their members for certain tasks (e.g. some were 'good hunters', others 'smiths', others 'herders', and so on), but these qualities and abilities were not clearly ranked. It was inside clans that rank was perceived, the hereditary titled aristocrats of the senior line more or less coinciding with the wealthy and the unmarked or junior lines containing the livestock-less labourers at the bottom. Because the aristocrats sat at the head of separate, 'different' exogamous clans/lineages, and did not constitute an in-marrying circle of their own, the notion of honour/status was more dispersed than among the Yi.[5]

This tendency for rank to be established in each locality separately was evident also in the monastic organization of Buryat Buddhism. All clan areas, at least to the east and south of Lake Baikal, had their own monasteries. Each monastery recruited locally and was highly hierarchical, with numerous ranks and generally very rich lamas at the head and poor ones in the lowest ranks. The wealthy, highly ranked lamas tended to be oriented to the locality.[6] They were on good terms with the given clan aristocracy, but often at loggerheads with other high-ranking lamas from other clan areas. Similarly, the small Russian-educated Buryat intelligentsia was divided, by local cultural background, by attitudes to Russian culture, by political inclinations, and by different degrees of approval of Buddhist ritual practices. One of the most eminent of the Buryat intellectuals, Zhamtsarano, emphasized in an article in 1906 that 'tribal solidarity' was the basis of his vision of society:

> The basis of social and family life of the Mongolo-Buryats and Tungus is the clan way of life (*rodovoi byt*) and tribal solidarity. On this fundament rests the entire social activity of the Buryat: their productive, educational, sanitary, tax-paying, land-property, and charitable (care of orphans, the weak, etc.) activities. It is thanks only to clan consciousness and clan solidarity that all these affairs are carried out by the local community together, while within the community taxes are apportioned according to wealth. (quoted in Naidakov 1993: 16)[7]

The question still remains, however, as to why the Buryat ideas of status and rank did not work themselves into prominence in the revolutionary process as among the Yi. In my view, one answer lies in the fact that Buryat rank was

established within each clan separately, i.e. 'vertically', and therefore the 'horizontal' class categories introduced by the revolution cross-cut rather than reinforced the status system. This meant that newly prominent classes could not represent and provide a basis for regeneration of earlier status. Most devastating, though, was the ruthlessness of the state, which repeatedly found new categories of 'unreliable' people to punish. Although the accusations were ill-founded and in some cases ludicrous—spying for countries like Germany or Estonia, fomenting plans for a pan-Mongolian separate state, Trotskyism, etc.—nevertheless the effect in the end was to obliterate practically all the foundations of earlier rank during the Soviet era.

Let us briefly examine these processes. The class system first introduced by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s designated two opposed classes, 'feudal lords' and 'peasants'. In Buryatia a new term *noyonstvo* (collectively 'the lords') was coined to denote all those who held Tsarist posts, or were otherwise judged to be aristocratic. When their 'feudal' possessions of land and livestock were expropriated and distributed locally, and the titled aristocrats themselves were killed or fled, the keystone of the rank system in each clan locality was effectively chopped off. When 'peasants' were grouped in new administrative units unrelated to clan settlement the base of support for the hierarchy within each clan was destabilized.[8] Subsequent repressions, which I describe below, then attacked the remaining bases of prestige (in the 'cultural revolution' of the late 1920s) and wealth (in the 'de-kulakization' drive associated with collectivization around 1930).

First it is important to mention another important factor that differentiated the Russian from the Chinese socialist regime, the practice of exile or banishment (*ssylka*), which did not occur in China. Although Russian literature seems to take it for granted as a political technique, we can see exile as a cultural practice. In Tsarist times, exile was a punishment used mainly for the upper classes and intended in these cases to preserve status. The exile, often taking with him his family and servants, was not to be demeaned by being thrown into a common prison. In Soviet times the other side of exile predominated, the propensity to communitarianism and its concomitant, the exorcism of the *inaokomyslyashchiye* ('differently minded') from the 'pure' social whole. Exile was often added to a prison sentence and used indiscriminately for all classes of people. It is not always realized that exile was not just a matter of sending undesirable people away from cities to remote places like Buryatia. People were also exiled *from* those very same remote places.[9] Furthermore, the status-preserving aspect of exile never entirely disappeared. Thus, the Buryat intellectual Zhamtsarano, who had fled Buryatia and became a prominent leader in Mongolia during the 1920s, was in the 1930s exiled to Leningrad, where he was given a comfortable though lowly position in a research institute for a time (subsequently he was re-arrested and died in prison, Poppe 1983: 132). The effect of the exile system was to remove people from socially key positions and cast them, without rights,

into situations where they could not exert influence. In the mid 1920s the remaining Buryat aristocrats, and their hangers-on and loyal kin, were exiled to remote parts of Siberia where most of them soon died in appalling conditions. Some Buryats today know dimly about their high-ranking relatives, but say, for example, 'My wife's grandparents were aristocrats but they were sent to the Altai and we don't know what happened to them.'

In China exile was not practised.[10] Though 'class enemies' were killed during 1948–9 and again during the violent land reform of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution, the more prevailing idea was reform of 'alien mentalities' by labour *(laogai)*. 'Class enemies' were sent to labour camps to be transformed, but thereafter they returned to their communities. Even the last Manchu Emperor was not killed.[11] Nor were most of the Mongol princes who fought against the communists in the 1940s; they and former lamas and aristocrats returned to rural areas in lowly positions and everyone was aware of their class origin. So Pan notes for the Yi case:

> There has been little change in the residence pattern whereby Black Yi are distributed according to their lineage memberships. In addition, there started a huge movement among the White Yi to find their respective lineages and move to live together after they had been emancipated by the government. This means that in terms of the population composition and distribution of residence the basis of the LoLos' traditional lineage politics has never been destroyed. (1997: 121)

In Buryatia, the combined impact of the 'cultural revolution' of 1928–31 and collectivization in 1928–35 effectively destroyed the coherence of the previous status system. Resting as it did on ideas of seniority of birth in patrilineal lineages and clans, combined with the religious and ritual institutions mentioned earlier, the indigenous ideology of rank was vulnerable to attacks on kinship and religious belief. Campaigns against the family began in Russia from the earliest days of the Revolution. There were decrees in 1917 on immediate availability of divorce if either partner wanted it, the decriminalization of incest, bigamy and adultery, and availability of abortion. Inheritance ceased to exist during War Communism. Women were instructed to take jobs, and furthermore, labour law made it compulsory to accept any post and often husband and wife were assigned to different towns (Timasheff 1998: 304). Timasheff argues with regard to Russia in general that the disintegration of the family was precisely what the Communists wanted to achieve, but by around 1934 they became disturbed by the collateral effects of their policies: huge rise in divorce and abortion seemed to have caused a marked decrease in the birth rate and attacks on parental authority seemed to have produced 'wholesale dissolution of community ties, with rapidly increasing juvenile delinquency as the main symptom' (ibid.). In Buryatia, matters were not so extreme, but I have certainly met rural women of the revolutionary generation who scorned the idea of marriage as a bourgeois institution and enthusiastically joined communes of the 1920s in which no

one had any property at all ('not even a spoon'). Women were frequently in the communist vanguard. The movement, which was backed by terror, threw not only the previous kinship system itself, founded on respect for seniors, strict exogamous arranged marriage, the subordination of women, and the inheritance of property, but also its signs and marks, into shadowy disgrace.[12]

The cultural revolution was to surge over Russia in the late 1920s and its excesses combined with the anti-family policies to produce the disorder subsequently reined in by Stalin. Carried out in the name of class struggle, the cultural revolution was unleashed from Moscow as a political confrontation of 'proletarian' communists against the 'bourgeois' intelligentsia, but it turned into something much wider. It carried the message that conciliators of earlier high culture, of bureaucrats, Nepmen (entrepreneurs), kulaks (rich peasants) café-haunting literati, wreckers, priests, expropriated capitalists and foreign spies were all on the same side in the political struggle and collectively were enemies of the Party (Fitzpatrick 1978: 17). Fitzpatrick has argued that such a widespread movement may have been started from the centre but must have required participation from wide sections of the population to flourish.

> Social purging seems to have been an activity that required only absence of discouragement from the center to flourish, for good Communists had always been suspicious of 'bureaucrats' and 'class aliens.' Cultural revolution produced an upsurge of a condition that had been chronic since 1917 and remained so during the 1930s. [. . .] The result was that the activists of the society turned on those whom they had traditionally suspected, using the familiar method of the institutional purge. (1978: 23)

In the Buryat case, the purge (*chistka*, cleansing) may have been initially strange to them, but it became familiar during the early 1920s as successive governments, increasingly dominated by Russians, removed the Buryat intelligentsia from positions of power. Several prominent Buryat politician-scholars fled to Mongolia, and the rest of the pre-revolutionary leaders, and even the Bolshevik ones, lost their political positions in the cultural revolution period. The most enthusiastic activists were the Komsomol (communist youth organization) and it seems probable that these may have coincided to a great extent with the young people unleashed from parental authority by the campaign against the family. Proletarian rudeness (*grubost*) became a virtue, and even schoolchildren were encouraged to rebel against teachers and parents (Lewin 1978: 74). Suddenly a new policy of indigenization (*korenizatsiya*) of the state apparatus introduced large numbers of previously rural Buryats into the bureaucracy.[13] Russians were drafted in from far away to staff new industries. Also, at all levels, people adopted the habit of moving before they were penalized, downgraded or arrested (ibid.: 56). With workers, administrators, specialists, the rural peasants and herders all moving around in streams and floods, the political structures were in a flux. By the mid-1930s the Russian government was determined to take control of this situation

by a series of policies that Timasheff (1998) describes as 'The Great Retreat', a set of measures of social conservatism (efforts to instil values of discipline, patriotism, conformism, orderly careerism, and respect for the family). However, as Lewin writes (1978: 56), 'That such a policy should be accompanied by another shattering set of purges, in the later thirties, is yet one more enigma, amazing even for one who is already well versed in the vagaries of Soviet history and policies.' In Buryatia the purges of 1937 removed all the key leaders of the Party and main ministries.[14]

Meanwhile, an effect of the cultural revolution had been to divide the 'alien' cultural professions amongst themselves (in metropolitan Russia, proletarian writers and the Union of Militant Godless versus the established literary practitioners, Solomon 1978: 130). In Buryatia the Buddhist monasteries were the main surviving arena where this drama could be played out. Some groups of lamas, often whole monasteries, had proclaimed the compatibility of Buddhism and communism in the early 1920s. Buddhism is an 'atheist religion', they argued, and this set in train a conflict with traditional, ritualistic monasteries that lasted until the late 1920s when the communists definitively rejected association with religion of any kind. Intensive propaganda was addressed to young monks to make them ashamed of their 'backward', 'superstitious' beliefs. The embattled 'conservative' lamas remained in their monasteries until 1936–7, when the whole church was destroyed by force, almost all the buildings physically erased, and the lamas either shot or exiled to distant parts of Siberia.

The definitive blow to the cultural practices of rural Buryat society (i.e. the vast majority) was 'de-kulakization' and collectivization. In particular, the honourable pursuit of accumulating herds was made impossible. Nicholas Poppe recounts for example (1983: 99) how the eminent Buryat scholar Tsybikov had used all his professorial salary to buy cattle and sheep, acquiring over the years a huge herd, and after they were taken away in 1930 'soon died of a broken heart'. This again was a policy carried out in the name of class, and like the cultural revolution it also had far wider, socio-cultural effects. Of 1,06,000 households in Buryatia in 1930, 11,600 were classified as kulaks (rich peasants) and of these 4,500 were driven into exile in 1929–30 alone (Naidakov 1993: 53). The remaining kulaks were punishingly taxed and deprived of civil rights (they were called *lishentsy*—'deprived').[15] Soon they, and everyone else, were driven into collectives. Resistance was put down by force. The socio-cultural effect of all this was to destroy the clans and lineages as active social organizations, since collectives were deliberately organized in such a way as to separate kin and introduce outsiders as the managers. The lineage organization as an effective social institution was not revived by the pro-family policies introduced by Stalin. The ideological basis of lineal seniority, which was the elders' link through their ancestral spirits to the blessings of nature, was deeply suppressed. Such ideas were doubly

suspect: they were not only 'alien', like all non-Marxist/Leninist ideology, but they were also regarded as 'backward', like most of the culture of non-Russian minorities, i.e. as phenomena whose historical destiny was to disappear.[16]

By the 1960s, Buryat people certainly remembered their genealogies, widely practised lineage exogamy, and had not forgotten shamanic lines, but the social system, which had earlier linked honourable lineage status to administrative power and responsibilty for the community, had gone. Instead of class politics buttressing earlier rank by encouraging endogamy, as among the Yi, in the Buryat case they only weakened it: people of 'bad' class background (i.e. formerly high status) sought to erase this by marrying 'good' poor peasants. Their family members moved village, changed their names, tried to join revolutionary organizations, did anything to disguise their origins, or even just contacts, with former aristocrats.

It should be said that the Buryats were more thoroughly punished than almost any of the native peoples of Siberia, their geographical position on the borders of Mongolia and China making them constantly suspect of 'pan-Mongolian' nationalism and collaboration with the Japanese.[17] Even now, in the post-communist period when indigenous 'traditions' have become so popular, Buryats are ashamed of, and do not speak of, aristocratic forebears. In other regions, such as Sakha-Yakutia, people are beginning to reclaim ties with repressed intelligentsia and lords, and in the Altai, the old title of *zaisan* (native ruler) has been reintroduced alongside the local administration (Sagalayev 1997: 69). The patchy and variegated emergence of old titles, etc. does not necessarily indicate, however, the reconstitution of earlier social hierarchy. The clan type of organization, unlike the caste-like stratification of the Yi, was not able to gear into Soviet class politics. Rather, in Buryatia at any rate, it left floating, first in a hidden way and in post-Soviet times more openly, certain notions of honour, shamanic ability, sharing, and mastery that were disengaged from one another and in any case were transformed by new ideas of gender. The frequent appearance of women as leaders in Buryatia[18] is due to socialist egalitarian policies over the decades, and it has contributed to a conceptual shift whereby clan grids of 'males', with 'females' as destabilizing, interstitial figures, have been transformed into more temporary and practical kin networks in which key positions are less gendered, less concerned with boundaries, and more immersed in affairs. In all this, able performance (including performance of rituals) is what is respected, rather than seniority of bone or purity of blood. Both in the Altai[19] and in Buryatia, however, the situation is highly unstable and variegated, and the traditional notions mentioned above are being taken up or rejected almost on a village-to-village basis (for further discussion, see Humphrey 1998). Forced to exist first under or within socialist organization and latterly in the free-for-all of post-socialist economic collapse, these social values could not appear but as radical metamorphoses of earlier versions.

An example is seen in Serge Schmemann's account of the fate of his grandfather's ancestral estate in central Russia. He writes of this patriarchal, devout, well-organized estate,

> I believe it no coincidence that after the revolution, the village produced a remarkable number of honest, believing Communists, like Nina Semyonovna, Nikolai Shmanenkov, and Alexandra Trunina, who really did try to build a better world. I believe they were nourished by the same 'moral air' as my grandfather, the same harmony and faith . . . . (1997: 96)

Schmemann was told how some of the villagers having been scattered to the four corners of the USSR, a whole group of the believing communists had organized a reunion in 1967 at the village of the old estate. 'The heavyset, gold-toothed veterans of wars, labour and Soviet politics hugged, wept, recited poems, and revelled in memories of a youth spent on the beautiful Oka.' One returnee said, 'When we saw the (church) cross over the distant trees we all wept.' Later, in the 1990s, the villagers were to reject Schmemann for having inadvertently revealed to the Russian press the dire decay of the collective farm. We see from this that the removal of the aristocratic family itself did not entirely wipe out the climate of devout loyalty in this place they had created, though the new communist spirit was seemingly very different from the Orthodox religious one which had preceded it. In fact, as Schmemann comments, both were in some ways illusory, both the devotion to the estate (in which poverty was systematically ignored by the noble family) and to the collective farm (which was never as harmonious and prosperous as it seemed in rosy hindsight).

In Buryatia, on the other hand, lordly and monastic estates seem to have left no such ghostly after-glow in people's emotions. Instead, we see the mere signs of aristocratic dignity (silk clothing, ritual feasts) appropriated by the Party bosses as deceptive marks of ethnicity towards outsiders. For example, in the 1930s the scholar Poppe was given a Buryat silk gown and presented with a *töölei* (whole sheep's head with scapula and long ribs) at the very same dinner where the Party leader Erbanov cynically assured him that all lamas would be 'well preserved' in labour camps (Poppe 1983: 106; see also footnote 12). For ordinary people in the 1930s it would have been madness openly to present such redolently ethnic and non-Soviet objects, and in view of his later arrest and execution this kind of thing may have been rash even for Erbanov. The terror of those times seems to have been transmuted over the generations into an unwillingness even to think about what the reality of the old order might have been like. Buryat nationalists today, who are very few in number, lament that when signs of Buryatness appear (e.g. logos, restaurant murals) they are not 'genuine' but represent Russian images of this corner of Siberia.

If class wars, exile and purges destroyed the fundaments of earlier systems of social honour, the mass mobilization of the Stalinist period introduced a

new *de facto* relation between the individual and the community. In Russia, women and men were embraced in literacy programmes, technical courses, Party schools, and so forth only to be allocated to appropriate work places according to state plans. Trained cadres were commonly not returned to their homes but sent to regions where they could be of most use. In Buryatia this meant an influx of the western, more Russianized Buryats, who were quicker to benefit from these projects, into technical and managerial posts in eastern areas. The prevailing discourse was of the service of individuals to the state as a whole, and concomitantly nationalist separatism was seen as the major threat to the unity of the federation (especially after the Second World War when certain peoples had welcomed the Nazi armies). Even into the 1970s–early 1980s such was the fear of accusations of nationalism that documentation of ethnic facts remained a state secret.[20] In this situation, while the general policy was to 'raise' backward minorities to the educational level and living standards of Russians, the practice was to accomplish this via state administrative divisions, social strata, and the technical ministries rather than by direct mobilization of the minorities as such. I shall shortly discuss this in relation to the issues of redressive justice raised by Béteille, but first I return briefly to the different ethnic situation in China. I have argued that the clan system of the Buryats was more vulnerable to revolutionary processes than the caste-like system of the Yi, partly because of the 'exorcising' character of revolution in Russia, but also because the Buryat clan and monastic structures were themselves disunited. What then happened to the similar clan structures of the Mongols in China?

METAPHORS OF SOCIAL HONOUR IN INNER MONGOLIA (CHINA)

It will be suggested that while the Inner Mongolian clans have been superseded by new social groupings as in Buryatia, nevertheless a native discourse of hierarchy has survived. The marks of disparity perceived within the clan have been transmuted to the wider level of inter-ethnic relations, where they found fertile ground in the existing cultural traditions of hierarchies of 'races' among both Mongols and Han Chinese. As Béteille observes about caste (1991: 593), the crucial issue is consciousness: 'Caste is not a material edifice that can be physically dismantled and destroyed. It exists above all in the consciousness of people—in their deep sense of division and separation on the one hand and of rank and inequality on the other.'

The consciousness of rank in Inner Mongolia, it will be argued, was in some ways strengthened by early 'class struggles'. In the last section. I show that it was later deepened by the very policies of redressive justice intended to create equality. As Béteille continues (1991: 593): 'How can we exorcise caste from the public mind by deepening the sense in society that castes are entitled to their separate shares as a matter of right?' In China, the rights

assigned to minorities have created greater real equality, but they have not removed rank from the public mind.

The example of the Yi, described by Pan (1997), has parallels in Inner Mongolia, where the twists and turns of communist policy also reinforced the cultural self-consciousness of the Mongolian minority. If the aristocratic version of Mongolian culture focused on clan genealogies and princes attached for the most part to the noble house of Chinggis Khan, the revolutionary version was to stress the notion of the archetypal herder (*malchin*) as exemplifying the Mongol culture—even though by no means all Mongols were herders. During the 1950s, the relative political strength and perspicacity of Mongolian communist leaders enabled them to establish a separate policy for pastoral herding areas. Instead of the class struggle carried out in agricultural and semi-pastoral regions (which was disastrous for the economy), the pastoral areas were allowed to retain communal ownership of land, free trade and freedom of worship. Everyone was encouraged to become rich by the slogan 'dual prosperity in human beings and livestock' (Zhao 1998: 122–3). The princes and lesser office holders of the pre-revolutionary period lost their titles and had some of their property expropriated, but they were assigned to work in fairly high local posts and they were allowed to employ labour. 'They were to be united and their thoughts reformed', writes Zhao 'so that they might do something positive for the people' (p. 122).

This separate policy for pastoral regions resulted in marked relative prosperity. The Mongols were to suffer for this later (in the 1950s land reform and in Cultural Revolution) as an ethnic minority. In fact, as noted earlier, the sense of Mongol cultural separateness was reinforced by their double labelling as not only a nationality but also as a class of exploiters, which happened because the Han Chinese who lived in these areas were mostly tenants or hired labourers of the Mongols and in any case largely lived on Mongolian communally owned land. The Mongols suffered enormously at these times from *qing li* (class cleansing, including being put to death), which also took the form of Han–Mongol conflict and violent, ungovernable peasant attacks. But historically overall the Communist policies of *laogai* (corrective labour) and *xia fang* ('put down', i.e. sent to the countryside) prevailed, and in both practices the intention was for people to return, transformed by their experience, and reintegrate with their communities.

The 'reformed' aristocrats and their descendants did not abandon their identities because these, until 1976, were inscribed in their documents (Watson 1984: 89). They were severely discriminated against from the late 1960s onwards. Even after the mid-1970s, when class origin ceased to be written into passports and such people became known as 'members of the community', this was still a label different from those of the working classes. So, especially in rural areas, no one forgot the former status of their families. They themselves might proudly say, 'I may be poor now because of these temporary social conditions, but I still have white bone and you do not.'[21]

This is a reference to the Mongol classification of the Borjigid, descendants of Chinggis Khan's clan, as people of 'white bone', while commoners were said to have 'black bones' ('bones' here referring to patrilineal descent).

However, such talk of rank in rural areas is very muted and most people would think it quaintly outdated today. The older generation of formerly rather high-ranking people are as likely to pretend to hold socialist views ('What kind of "aristocrats" were we? We laboured alongside them, we talked the same language, wore the same clothes, we always shared our food with the workers'[22]). Furthermore, the lynchpins of the clan internal hierarchy, the descendants of the princes, have now removed themselves from the countryside and live in cities and towns. In other words, they have disappeared from local communities and reappeared in the socially higher and more prosperous space of the city. This is a result of the fact that even those aristocrats punished under the Cultural Revolution began to be 'rehabilitated' in the 1980s. They received some money compensation, and now a few of them even enjoy high status as members of the Conference of Political Consultancy (a kind of regional upper chamber) and other organizations giving access to networks of influence. Despite periods of extreme brutality, the official line has been that as long as you gave up exploitation and conformed in every way to Party goals, your prestigious social status was no longer regrettable but something useful that could be employed to serve the state. So, although emasculated in this way, the previous social ranks retain a certain prestige and now former aristocrats and their descendants are appearing as significant links in the competition for commercial opportunities.

The situation therefore is different from Russia, where the category of *lishentsy*, those deprived of civil rights because of pre-revolutionary social origins, was abolished in 1935 (Lewin 1978: 263). In Inner Mongolia, the vocabulary of rank was officially abolished but has been kept alive by the fact that certain former aristocrats were used as exemplars of the efficacy of Communist 're-education' and to give access to ordinary people who still respect them. In Russia the old ranks were swamped by the appearance of *new categories* of people disadvantaged for Soviet-era political reasons—whole peoples deported, exiled dissidents, the children of arrestees, and many others judged to be disloyal 'enemies of the state'. To this day, most Buryat villages have small populations of Tatars exiled there under Stalin. With the urgencies of these new statuses and general social disruption, the pre-revolutionary traditional ranks came to be repressed into barely recoverable layers of memory. If the boast about white bone in Inner Mongolia could well be contested or punished or laughed at, in Buryatia it simply would not happen. Such was the Sovietization of education that young people hardly know about such things. Even today in post-Soviet times, when intellectuals have put much energy into retrieving 'traditional culture', what they are coming up with tends to be hazy ideas about Asian philosophy or shamanic powers but *not* specific traditional means of assigning social rank to individuals.

Today, in Inner Mongolia the contemporary practical situation of being classed as a Mongol in China is far more important than pre-revolutionary status. Very often, however, it is the same old criteria of rank that are redeployed in the discourse of hierarchy between nationalities. In other words, the same criteria of differences in esteem have been ratcheted up from the internal local society level to that of the Mongol people as a whole, namely religious-spiritual superiority and seniority of descent. This may be a rather general process found elsewhere in the world: 'spiritual' Brahmins, as opposed to labouring people, come to stand for 'spiritual' India in opposition to the materialist West, or the public-school values of upper-class Englishmen are used to define the British in general in relation to those who had to suffer them as colonial masters. In the case of the Mongols of China, this tendency was sharpened when 'the Mongol minority' became an object of communist policy. It also coalesced with revivals of very long-standing Mongol notions of a hierarchy of 'races', with the Mongols at the top,[23] and it opposed even more ancient Chinese categorizations of peoples according to degrees of civilization. Contesting with the Chinese stereotypes of barbarians, which lay beneath the polite 'minority' discourse, the revolutionary-era herder image of Mongol culture has not, surprisingly, become deeply problematic.

Popularly, other images providing current legitimacy have superseded. Naran Bilik provides two examples to illustrate the idea. Certain urban Mongols today consider themselves more spiritually adept at *qigong* ('stream of energy' ritual practice) than the Chinese because 'their blood has become saturated with Buddhism over many generations, helping them to reach beyond the material world and to survive in the future'. The Mongols also are very proud of their writing system in comparison to that of the Han, since its graphic style, which goes from top to bottom and from left to right, is strictly vertical and symbolizes the Mongolian backbones, 'which never fail them in their uprightness' (Naran Bilik 1997: 18).[24] Bone, as among the Yi and the Buryat too, is also a metaphor for patrilineal descent. Suffusing much of modern Inner Mongolian culture is the cult of Chinggis Khan, the ultimate source of aristocratic lineage and symbol of power. Chinggis as an image combines the principle of internal generation of rank[25] and the definition of Mongolness *vis-à-vis* the outside. From all over the country people travel to worship at the Chinggis mausoleum and shrine in the Ordos region; many families, especially in Ordos, have substantial altars to the great emperor, and elsewhere Chinggis's portrait graces domestic shrines along with Buddhist deities and *qigong* masters.

Naran Bilik (1998) provides a fascinating analysis of the Inner Mongolian personality conflicts and cultural predicaments of the current period. These are perhaps the more acute because the Mongols of China are highly Sinicized (many no longer speak Mongolian) and have very high rates of intermarriage with the Chinese even while such marriages are disapproved of. At issue are many things, but one relevant to this essay are the changing relations between

individuals and local communal groups, between individuals and the Mongol people, and individuals making their way in China as a whole. Controversy over the paintings of the Mongolian artist Chog raised some of these issues. Chog's paintings depict exaggerated body parts and organs, with 'a piercing sense of inner strength, strain, energy, and above all emotion' (Naran Bilik 1998: 81). Chog's

> change of angles and prospects, self-indulgence in philosophicalization, rich visual experience of art work, interaction with various schools of artists and their conceptual systems, and his emotional struggles and reshaping[26] have placed him in a special position to stand out above the Mongolian folk system and the 'old self'. (ibid.)

The controversy over Chog's paintings contrasts the traditional ego ideal, infused with altruism and communal-collectivism, which was represented by a personal demeanour expressing physical strength and absence of emotion, with a new ideal, where the double challenge of westernization and Sinicization encourages individual self-questioning, self-interest, and personalities relatively free of emotional repression. The challenge of Chog's work for the Mongols is that it combines the 'old' images, of nature, livestock, and symbols of Mongolian communal herding culture, with personal emotional nakedness—emotion being symbolized by the bodily nudity in his painting merging with natural objects (ibid.: 82–3).

Another example of such combinatorial culture is the grafting of the 'old' metaphors of status rank (notably genealogy) onto the heroes of the new era, the few Mongols who have become billionaires in the last few years. Young people are eager to show off their knowledge of these rich men, and by inventing genealogical links with them both the speaker's and the hero's statuses are 'metaphorized up to a higher social ladder' as if closer to sacred genealogical lines (Naran Bilik 1997: 21; 1998: 80). The dilemma for many Mongols may be a practical one, whether to cling on to such local ties, which tends to be economically risky in such a relatively poor area, or to venture away into the far more prosperous regions of coastal and metropolitan China where solid careers can be made. But even here a hue of national ancestral qualities may be invoked to legitimate a career move—Mongols invoke their ancestor Chinggis Khan as perfect in all his endeavours, open-minded and expansive, not only in military affairs but also in political and economic fields (1997: 21).

Interestingly, similar cultural dilemmas are also present in Buryatia today, especially the cultivation of heroes and the elaboration of personal relations to include them. The difference, however, is that the ethnic differentiation is much less sharp—these heroes are not always conceptualized as specifically Buryat and often have a pan-Asian or all-Russian sway (Humphrey 1998). The whole discourse of 'traditional culture', such as worship at mountain cairns, is less public, less controversial than in China, and it is neither related to pre-revolutionary clan ranks nor even very strongly to competitive

nationalism *vis-à-vis* Russians. It is more a question of expanding diverse local practices that were carried on in secret, in highly attenuated form, in Soviet times and now reflect Soviet and newer social categories. Of course there are many factors which influence ethnic cultures in Russia, and they are different in various regions, but one background influence is the policy of redressive justice operated in earlier decades, notably in education. It is to this subject, and its difference from the policies in China, that I now briefly turn.

REDRESSIVE JUSTICE AND THE CULTURE OF MINORITIES

André Béteille wrote (1991: 596–7) that just as institutions have various purposes they have their own cultures, and that the sub-culture of a modern institution—its spirit or ethos—is at the opposite pole from the culture of caste. An institution's purpose is to function properly in its own field in society as a whole, not to meet the demands of employment, or to exemplify representation as if all institutions were political councils. Clearly there have been many conflicting views on this subject, since some institutions, like educational ones, not only function to provide education but also constitute the main channels for social advancement for the disadvantaged. In Sen's terms (1992), education provides wide social capabilities. In both Russia and China, as in India, even leaving aside the question of institutional ethos, there always was a practical conflict between the two goals of creating socially needed educated cadres and creating equality (Yanowitch 1977: 60). This has been reflected in the lurching of policy to one side or the other over the decades, a history I cannot review here. But in the last twenty years or so, the period to which I shall refer, it is the particular combination of the two goals and the manner of their implementation that has created significant differences between the experiences of minorities in Russia and China.

In China, specifically in Inner Mongolia, I have argued that class struggle, the periodic conflation of class and ethnicity, the re-integration of pre-revolutionary highly ranked people into society, and the strategic use of images of prestige in ethnic relations, reproduced many earlier forms of cultural distinction in the communist environment. At times the goal of social equality was pursued energetically, and in the process the Mongols found themselves in a lurching switchback, depending on whether they were regarded as a class of exploiters (subject at these times to the policies of *qing li* and *xia fang*) or whether they were seen as a backward, exploited people deserving special allocations and services. It is fair to say that the latter policy has been the more sustained and has prevailed since the Cultural Revolution. The Mongols took advantage of it with enthusiasm, with the result that the Mongols now have a significantly better general standard of education than the local Han Chinese, particularly in secondary and tertiary education (Jirimtu 1998: 107). Between 1982 and 1990 a greater proportion of Mongols found employment in professional/technical posts, administration, and especially

in commerce than among the Chinese, and the change in distribution was also to the Mongols' advantage in all prestigious occupations except that of state/party officials. The proportion of Chinese employed in low-status work, mainly agriculture, was higher than that of the Mongols and declining at a slower rate over the period (ibid.: 105).

These achievements of the Chinese regime must be recognized, but at the same time it is interesting to look at the way in which they have been implemented. I focus here on educational institutions, since they not only generate changes in general social advantages but also signal the high social rankings with which this essay is concerned. As Tishkov writes about Soviet Russia (1997: 164), and the same has been true in China, 'Higher education—and scholarly degrees and honorary titles in particular—became the most important form of social mobility for representatives of the peripheral elite.' Educational institutions in Inner Mongolia have followed the pattern of providing separate schools and universities for the Mongols, providing education largely in Mongolian. If this has served yet again to reinforce ethnic difference, the pattern is repeated as regards language even within the Mongol institutions. Here separate classes are provided in each subject depending on whether the Chinese or the Mongol language is used. Given the all-China prevalence of Chinese as the language of affairs, even Mongols often prefer to enter the Chinese classes. Indeed, one Mongol said to me, 'If you only get into a Mongol class, you're out.'

Just as significant is the method of entrance. In Inner Mongolia, entrance to higher education institutions is the crucial moment for an individual's future and the subject of the most intense competition.[27] Since the late 1970s, when debarment because of class background was gradually ended, the entrance competitions for universities have been differentiated only by direct ethnic criteria. What happens is that institutions in the region have a percentage of places for each ethnic group, decidedly to the advantage of Mongols. In the predominantly Mongolian language unversities separate entrance examinations are set in each language and there are different requirements for entry to Mongol classes than those for Chinese classes. There is therefore, no competition between Han and Mongol entrants. In Chinese-language institutions all candidates take the same entrance examinations, but the entrance requirement is set at a lower mark for Mongols than for Chinese candidates. Students from the three small nationalities (Orochon, Evenki and Daur) sit entrance examinations, but only for reference—they can enter quota places whatever their marks. This whole system means that standards of acceptance vary directly according to ethnicity. Within the institutions, there are separate streams for teaching in each language and the courses and examinations are then set by the teachers for their own students. So not only do entrance standards vary according to ethnic group, but there is no guarantee that final standards in, for example, biology taught in Chinese will be the same as those for biology taught in Mongolian.

This policy has had the contradictory effects one might expect. On the one hand, it has preserved Mongolian as a living language of scholarly activity (probably to a greater extent than the languages of nationalities of comparable size in the CIS, such as the Kazakhs, and certainly more than a language like Buryat). On the other hand, it has degraded the general social value of degrees from Mongolian-language institutions, with the result that even Mongols teem to get entrance to the more prestigious Chinese-language colleges. Worse, it has exacerbated ethnic tensions. The Mongols resent the privileges of the three small nationalities and the Chinese are jealous of the advantages of the Mongols.[28] As for the most prestigious universities, those in Beijing, the special preparation classes and lower entrance requirements for ethnic candidates there have aroused scorn from Chinese students. According to many accounts, such ridicule has turned some minority students in the capital towards bitter and nationalistic attitudes.

In 1981 student demonstrations caused turmoil in Inner Mongolian universities. Among the demands was an increase in the quota of places for Mongols, despite the fact that Mongols already had far more seats (around 25 per cent on average) than their population (around 13 per cent) warranted. What was the reasoning behind this? It was that in pre-Revolutionary Inner Mongolia practically the whole educational system was in Mongol hands, and that therefore communism and its associated massive Han immigration had brought a worsening in the Mongols' chances! Here we see how the preservation and heightening of ethnic consciousness in China has resulted in struggles to reverse inter-ethnic rank hierarchy. This is our land, the Mongols argue, and we are a people equal if not superior to the Chinese.[29]

In Soviet Russia, by contrast, in recent decades there have been no ethnic quotas in education as such.[30] Rather, general provision of universal education in Russian was the target; correspondingly, education in national languages was downplayed.[31] Nevertheless, the end result in the 1990s is that non-Russian peoples have generally achieved high standards in education. The Buryats, for example, have a considerbly higher percentage of people with higher degrees than the population of Russia as a whole.

Early policies targeted 'the illiterate' or general categories like 'the small peoples of the north'. In the post-war period, elite institutions reserved places for representatives of administrative regions and particular professions under ministerial jurisdiction. This meant that a representative of Buryatia at a Moscow institute might in fact be a Russian. Or that a Buryat would be a candidate as an engineer sent by a ministry, for example, rather than as a Buryat. In local institutions, while most candidates sent by collective farms in Buryat regions would be Buryat, the occupational not the ethnic criterion was the reason for their being there.

Furthermore, as work experience gradually ceased to be a criterion for admission after the 1960s, the entrance procedure for higher institutions (the same examinations for everyone in Russian) was generally seen as competitive

and fair. The policy of having all-Union elite institutions, to which units of the whole country had rights, was both meritocratic and unifying. What was the impact of this with regard to Béteille's concern with institutional well-being? Though children of Soviet-generated undesirable categories (e.g. deportees) were excluded from the most elite institutions, and though there was bribery and nepotism, the chances were that central institutions benefited from the continued influx of talented candidates from the regions. Unlike in China, the idea of a hierarchy of ethnic peoples was minimized in education by its mediation through state administrative units. This created a space in education where students could see themselves as equal individual parts within a country-wide whole; and though this has been neglected in the study of Soviet Russia, it seems to me to have generated extraordinary loyalties to educational institutions. They were places where, broadly speaking, there was the opportunity to transcend, or at least move through, the limiting hierarchies of regional societies.

As everyone knows, however, Russia today is riven with ethnic discord. The main reasons for this, notably competition for economic resources and changes in centre-periphery relations, lie outside the scope of this essay. Even so, the former educational policy itself has not been simple in its effects. Except in a few republics (now independent countries) the prevailing Sovietization and Russification was at the cost of the effectiveness of ethnic cultures. So in a place like Buryatia, even nationalist exhortations happen in the Russian, not the Buryat, language. The wide use of Russian has not hindered the emergence of multifarious discourses of identity all across the country. Tishkov (1997: 164–5) relates this to the high expectations of a well-educated populace, to the prestige of the intelligentsia and the ease with which they are able to convey their 'elite-produced perceptions and mythological constructions' to the mass level. It is true that in several places the intelligentsia have welcomed separatism with open arms. An example is South Ossetia, whose capital was virtually an academic city, where every third resident had been educated at the pedagogical institute and there was a library for every 600 people (Gessen 1997: 134, 137). Scholars took over the separatist government in the early 1990s—a period of disastrous ineptitude, it seems. Gessen reports that all the scholar-politicans, as they dodged bullets in the half-built new university, professed a burning desire to leave politics and return to academe (ibid.: 151). To me this is more than an amusing remark. It reflects an internal cultural contradiction, equivalent to those mentioned for the Mongols of China, whereby the desire to get embroiled in the interests of Ossetian separatism was at odds with a formation acquired earlier, that of the value of pure learning.[32] To a greater extent than in China, higher education in the Soviet Union had been broadly comparable across the country, enabling people with regional qualifications to work elsewhere and integrating them into wider hierarchies of respect that reinforced local ones.

The Ossetian scholar-politicians seem to have thought of resolving the

clash between politics and learning in the following way: returning to their studies, they would use their experiment in governing in their research in history and philosophy. Noting one or two of the garbled theories proposed (' "I have some interesting thoughts on the development of national spiritual and world-view nucleus," explained Dzugayev, an adherent of historical-materialism'), Gessen observes that the traditional respect for elders and teachers in South Ossetian culture was damaged by their advent to power. 'Now that teachers had stepped into an area where unsuccessful experiments were not merely the basis for further study and where faulty theories could contribute to war and destruction, they had, perversely, lost much of their status' (1997: 151).

CONCLUSION

Comparisons such as those attempted here inevitably involve abstractions from far more complex historical processes. Attempting to explain the different fate of previous systems of social rank in Russia and China I have focused here on the interplay of three important factors. The first is the difference in the robustness of the pre-existing systems themselves. I have suggested that the caste-like organization of the Yi, integrated horizontally by endogamy, formed a stronger set of relations than the separate clan-based hierarchies of the Buryats and Mongols. The second factor is the difference between two kinds of socialist revolution, a matter which also should be understood culturally. The continued regeneration of Yi ranking might not have occurred were it not for the Chinese dynamical notion of continuous revolution, which repeatedly engaged in 'class struggles' over the decades. By contrast, the Russian Communists' understanding that they had *abolished class* by the 1930s, and their operation of exile and purging, meant that subsequent social policies were aimed not at class relations in particular regions but at tasks of state-national integration—the 'enemies of the state' were no longer members of the former bourgeoisie but collaborators, spies and 'wreckers' of the state seen as a whole. The third factor is the degree to which communist-generated categories of class corresponded with the social categories of pre-existing societies. It has been argued here that because the Chinese class classification did correspond more or less with the ranks of the Yi and (at least at certain historical moments) with the ethnic category of 'Mongols', the effect of class struggle was to reactivate the native relational distinctions. In Russia, on the other hand, where class was not in fact a correct diagnosis of the basis of Buryat distinction, the policy of class elimination and the forces unleashed by 'cultural revolution' almost inadvertently destroyed the earlier system by total disarrangement of social life in general.

Perhaps the most important point here is that the Chinese revolutionary processes reactivated social relational conciousness, in this case seen in the Yi obsession with preserving rank by endogamy and the Mongolian concern

to distinguish themselves ethnically from the Han so as not to be swamped by them. Such continuously regenerated sensitivity to relationality in China was nourished by remembrance of earlier successful historical confrontations—the Chinggisid relation to China springs to mind here—and can be contrasted with the experience of Buryatia, where endless piecemeal domination by Russians was superimposed on clans that did not care much what happened to other distant clans. The people of one Buryat clan were not constantly referring to those of another to gauge their status, unlike the situation among the Yi and the Inner Mongols.[33] So weak was Buryat integration that it could not transform into any kind of ethnic response to Russians.

Most important is that while the content of the 'classes' engaged in class struggle in China changed over the decades, these groups were seen by the Communist party as transformable parts in a whole. 'Re-education', rather than exile or destruction, was understood as the key revolutionary process (despite the cruel havoc that actually took place at times). Perhaps an analogy with concepts of the body is appropriate here. In Russia, the body politic was one in which the diseased parts were to be cut out and expelled, whereas in China the idea was more one of imbalance between interactive organs that required healing and the re-establishment of harmony.

So I have suggested that *reversals* of pre-revolutionary status rankings, where 'class' more or less coincided with earlier categories, did not prevent the reconstitution of consciousness of differential social esteem. If this happened inside the community in the unusually caste-like case of the Yi, a more common historical process in China was the transferral of status ranking from internal hierarchies to those between ethnic groups, as happened in Inner Mongolia. The state participated in this process too, since the units of struggles for equality of esteem came to be 'minorities' that were in many cases defined as such by state commissions.[34] However, because among the people the criteria used in the discourse of equality were primordial (even racial, as Naran Bilik argues (1997) they have operated to create an arena that dangerously conflates wild essentialist ideas with the practical policies of the Chinese regime to achieve equality of education, and to a lesser extent equality in politics and the economy.

G. A. Cohen (1994: 128) writes, 'An old right-wing notion says that leftists seek to eliminate all significant inequalities, yet cannot hope to eliminate ones like inequality of esteem.' The issue addressed here is not just that, given human diversity, egalitarianism in all respects is a social impossibility,[35] nor even that equality in one dimension, say, opportunity to develop talent, means inequality in others, say, achievements and respect (Sen 1992), but that there are different kinds of esteem. Esteem due to essentialized cultural constructions of primordial rank causes unnecessary hurt and resentment in modern societies and is different in nature from other types that are based on inequalities of wealth/power or on inequalities of intellectual attainment (Cohen 1994: 128). This essay has supported Béteille's argument that such

'primordial' notions of honour are not eliminated by policies that assume that status ranking derives from wealth or power. The violent history of Russia has shown that they are, on the other hand, vulnerable to total social upheaval and displacement, but a point more generally relevant to the rest of the world is that they are also sensitive to differences in redressive education policies.

The history of minority regions in China suggests that if such policies are directly addressed to classes or ethnic groups with the aim of redressing 'backwardness', perceived hierarchy can have the effect of making education seem a zero-sum game. This, of course, it need not be; and in fact in both Russia and China all social groups have achieved impressive levels of education. But some policies allow people to think that others' achievements are at the expense of their own. This must in part be due to the fact that at some level people know (however much they are emotionally involved with mythic notions of bone or blood to the contrary) that the ethnic criterion of esteem is in principle arbitrary, while that of educational attainment should reflect effort and talent. Despite its horrible earlier history, the later policies of the Soviet state, which rewarded effort and talent while creating an ethnically status-neutral space in education, have much to commend them—even if they have not seemed very effective counters to national separatism in the 1990s. Nevertheless, I still feel that the general acknowledgement of the educational levels of individuals across the federal space of Russia is a hopeful sign. In China, on the other hand, perpetual Sinocentrism and raw competitive ethnicity have made endemic a continued resentment over inequality of esteem. However, the thoughtful scholars from the Chinese minorities, whose works I have quoted so extensively here, are making efforts to develop ideas that transcend this mode of thinking.

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NOTES

1 The LoLo People, with a population of about 1.8 million in 1990, live in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in the southwest of Sichuan province. They are called Yi, but the latter term also encompasses a number of other groups scattered over Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and the Guangxi Zhuang regions. The Yi numbered 6.5 million in 1990 (Pan 1997: 108).

2 Interestingly, Pan notes that 'inter-caste' LoLo marriage is very uncommon even in urban areas. In cities it is easier to find intermarriages between either Black or White Yi and Han Chinese than those between the two LoLo groups (1997: 113).

3 The Buryats are a far smaller people than the Yi. According to the 1897 census there were 1,10,000 Buryats in the Irkutsk *guberniya* and 1,78,000 Buryats in the Zabaikal Oblast. In both areas Buryats were around one-fifth of the total population, most of which was Russian (Naidakov 1993: 9). In 1989 there were 4,17,425 Buryats in Russia (Tishkov 1997: 267).

4 By the late nineteenth century, 'clans' as administrative units had come to diverge from genealogically based clans, being based on territories within which various incomers were fictively included in the 'clan' structure.

5 High-ranking aristocrats tended to marry women from families of equivalent wealth, but not necessarily of genealogical seniority in other clans. It was also common to marry women from distant areas, perhaps in order to counteract possible interference from affines. This, together with difficulty in communications in the forested, mountainous terrain and strongly localized cultures and dialects, mitigated against the formation of a unified aristocratic stratum.

6 They also had their own long-distance relations with monasteries in Mongolia, China and Tibet.

7 The clan principle of government was attacked in 1901 when an attempt was made to replace the 'steppe dumas', headed by clan leaders with Russian units called *volosti,* led by 'peasant governors'. This, together with proposals of land reforms to the advantage of Russian settlers, led to a Buryat movement of protest in 1902–5. Zhamtsarano's article was part of the attempt to raise Buryat consciousness in this period.

8 The Buryat clan leaders and high lamas continued to exercise much power during the confused times of the First World War, the interventions, and the civil war. The administrative situation was not stabilized until 1927. In this year a reorganization of administrative districts was accomplished that replaced the 'Buryat' units established in the early 1920s (*aimak, khoshun* and *somon*) with the all-Soviet ones of *raion* (also locally called *aimak*) and rural soviet (also called *somon*) (Naidakov 1993: 13, 49). The new units were intended to reflect separate areas of Buryat and Russian settlement, but emphatically not to coincide with earlier clan territories.

9 In the Buryat case, political exile intermeshed with the different Mongolian activity of pastoral movement (here meaning not annual transhumance within a home territory but the occasional long-distance marches in search of altogether new pastures known in Buryat history). Buryats started fleeing, or moving to new pastures in Mongolia and China, from the first day of the civil war and revolution.

10 I differentiate here between exile and the mass deportation of whole peoples for reasons of state, which was practised in both Russia and China. The disruptive effects of mass deportations on the social organization of these unfortunate peoples are still little known in detail.

11 He returned to Beijing to work in a humble quasi-scholarly post.

12 Poppe, who stayed with Alar Buryats in 1928 wrote (1983: 95): 'For the first few days after my arrival the Buryats were mistrustful and obviously afraid that I might report on them if they said anything against the regime. They therefore tried to convince me what loyal Soviet citizens they were by telling me how happy they were and how much they owed to the Soviets for their happiness.

Soon, however, they showed me old photographs in which they appeared in their best garments: the women in silk robes with golden coins sewn along the hems, and wearing precious necklaces. They said: "Formerly we used to wear beautiful garments, but we have hidden them so no one can see them and now we try to look as poor as possible and wear only the worst garments we have." These then were their true feelings!'

13 The plan in 1926 was to raise the number of Buryats holding office in central state institutions from the existing 7.8 per cent to 37.7 per cent (while Buryats were only around 23 per cent of the population). By 1928, 22.4 per cent of bureaucrats and 14.1 per cent of technicians were Buryats (Naidakov 1993: 49–50).

14 The linguist Poppe recounts how he was invited to dinner by Erbanov, the leader of the Buryat party in 1932. Poppe suggested that at least one monastery should be preserved as a historical and ethnographic art museum. 'I disagree, professor,' said Erbanov. 'I'm sure you would also wish to preserve a few lamas, and I can assure you that we are keeping them in labour camps where they are being so well preserved you need not worry about them.' Erbanov himself was arrested and shot in Moscow in 1937 (Poppe 1983: 106).

15 The number of *lishentsy* in Buryatia is not known to me, but in Russia as a whole there were in the late 1920s 17,06,025 of them, 3.9 per cent of the potential voters, and in 1932 they were still 3.5 per cent. The category of lishentsy was abolished in 1935 (Lewin 1978: 59, 263).

16 This is one reason why the restoration of traditional cultural institutions in Russia, such as the Academy of Sciences, Bolshoi Theatre, and so on, was not accompanied by a revival of the Buryat equivalents. Practically all Buryat high culture was Buddhist and based in the monasteries, while a great amount of folk culture was associated with shamanic beliefs. Even the oral culture of epic narratives was condemned in the 1950s because of its 'feudal' associations.

17 For the Buryat communists Japan played the evil genius role that Germany did as regards many peoples of western Russia and the Caucasus. B. V. Bazarov writes that Buryatia 'became a spies' mecca' in the late 1930s, with 569 spies from thirteen foreign countries uncovered, 6,267 traitors arrested, and, in 1937 alone, 1,248 'pan-Mongolists' charged (1994: 78). Describing the repressions of the 1930s, D. D. Nimayev observes: 'According to the census of 1939 there was a reduction in the Buryat population to 2,25,000 (from 2,37,000 in 1926). Such a large absolute loss in this period is found, among the peoples of Siberia and Central Asia, only among the Buryats and Kazakhs' (1997: 16).

18 Women do not predominate numerically, but in the 1990s young and middle-aged women are found as directors of institutes, firms and collective farms, and in leading positions in local government. As far as I can tell, the recent ideological shift to the 're-domestication' of women is much less marked in Buryatia than in the Russian metropolitan areas.

19 Agnieszka Halemba, personal communication.

20 Published figures gave information on differential productivity, living standards, population, health, educational levels, etc., for administrative regions but not for ethnic groups as such.

21 U. E. Bulag and Hürelbaatar, personal communications.

22 Huürelbaatar, describing the reaction of his elderly relatives in Jirim, personal communication.

23 Naran Bilik (1997: 17, 22) describes one such Mongol categorization dating from the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1260–1368). The four categories of people were the Mongols, *semu* (literally 'colour-eyed', mostly the peoples of Central Asia), *hanren* (northern peoples, including the Northern Han and peoples like the Khitan and Jurchin), and *nanren* (southern Chinese).

24 The body metaphors of Mongol writing are carried further, so the leftward signs on the vertical stem are called 'stomach', 'horn', 'teeth', etc.

25 Most of the Inner Mongolian nobles traced their ancestry to Chinggis Khan or to his relatives. Although the genealogies allowed considerable room for myth and unclarity, and although there were princes in some clans with other bases for their rank, nevertheless the clan organization of the Mongols in Inner Mongolia was more ethnically integrated than that of the Buryats.

26 Chog was 'sent down to the countryside' for re-education in the 1970s.

27 I was told by one teacher, that once inside, hardly anyone ever fails and the marks given by the poorly paid, dejected teachers are not either given or taken so very seriously. This is a recent phenomenon related to the growth of commerce and relative downgrading of teachers' salaries. However, other Mongols assure me that examination competition among students is very high, though it is tempered by political loyalty and good *guanxi* (informal reciprocities with patrons).

28 Large numbers of Han changed their ethnic identity to Mongolian between 1978 and 1990, mainly to avoid the one-child policy and to benefit from affirmative action in education (Jirimtu 1998: 94). Between 1935 and 1990 the percentage of 'Mongolians' in the population of Inner Mongolia rose from 13.5 per cent to 15.4 per cent.

29 The demonstrations were put down, much of the Mongolian staff of the universities sacked or forced into early retirement, some students were arrested and many were put on black lists. The ethnic quotas were not improved but frozen.

30 These observations concern the RSFSR only; different policies were pursued in the national Republics.

31 In Buryatia, education in Buryat was abandoned altogether in the 1970s and has only recently been gradually reintroduced on a small scale.

32 As Gessen points out (1997: 141), Soviet scholarship was ideologized and tended to be 'a single-truth institution', which affected the kind of one-sided 'political lines' advocated in post-Soviet times too; but this fact does not negate my argument that Soviet education was seen by participants as ideally conveying truths, and that these truths were understood to stand outside humdrum politics.

33 In Inner Mongolia, by contrast, the effects of Qing Dynasty centralized rule, and later that of the communists, was to promote competitive enmity (but not indifference) between Mongol groups.

34 See Wellens (1998) for an interesting discussion of the role of official ethnic classification in processes of unification of scattered 'peoples' in China.

35 As John Dunn put it (1984: 7), 'A society which insisted on regarding all its

members with equal respect and patience irrespective of the character of their actions would not be so much deplorable and simply incomprehensible—it would also be extremely short-lived. Any real society requires effort and restraint of its members.'

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