8

# On Being Named and Not Named: Authority, Persons, and Their Names in Mongolia

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## INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists often examine naming systems in relation to building the social, naming as a way of making connections between groups. The relation between individual persons and their names is less often studied and it is this that I shall focus on here. A moment's consideration of ethnography reveals that we are not dealing with "a relation" but with a triangulation, that is, the complex field of interactive practices between those who confer and use a name, the person named, and the connotations of name itself. The literature on naming is in broad general agreement that conferring a name (on someone or something) is a performative act that involves a subject-constituting power and takes place within a wider field of conventions and ideological relations (Austin 1962; Bourdieu 1993; Hanks 1993). One might infer that the subsequent speaking out of this name simply partakes in the authoritative aura of this initial act of definition (Althusser 1971). Yet, as the Mongolian case shows, the practices of name-usage are situational, creative and playful. Located within the triangulation just mentioned we find situations of avoidance of naming, of disguise, mimesis, emulation, mockery, and self-protection, in which particular instances throw into sharp relief the relations between the self, one's name, and the external "society" of others.

This chapter seeks to illuminate the processes whereby names have an active presence for persons' sense of selfhood. The extremely authoritarian character of the Mongolian practice of naming people, in a context where generational, age, and gender seniorities are integral to a person's *amour propre*, provides a significant case for us to think with. It will be argued, contrary to views that pit "the individual" against "society," that the subject is at least in part constituted as a social being by being named. And just as naming is an authoritative social act, there also exists a variegated realm of negating practices in language

that themselves constitute resources for negotiation within the social. The named person is thus able to exert agency largely within and by means of linguistic conventions concerning when names may (or may not) be used. The possibilities of an individual radically breaking out of this situation, however, are very limited – essentially reduced to self-choice of a new name. Such an act is regarded by Mongolians as dangerous to one's selfhood, for the name itself (now being rejected) is held to contain something of a person's life force. People very rarely take such a step. The message of this chapter therefore is to point to the presence of a series of situational social means whereby the linguistic encounter is indirectly managed in such a way as to soften or disguise the effect of being named. By old age a person who is able to ensure respect from others will maintain this status by having their name erased from all encounters. This indicates that the subject has an existence beyond the definition achieved by naming (Butler 1997:34). In Mongolian, especially Buddhist culture,[1] in effect, one is one's "self," that is undisguised and unconstrained and thus somehow truly "close" to intimates, in having an existence that is at a distance from one's name. The obverse of this from the other side of the encounter is that to accord a senior respect and affection is to avoid the use of their name, or at least to side-step it in one of a number of ways. These kinds of avoidance are necessary precisely because Mongolians recognize that the name is a part of the person and that power is at issue in the practices of being named and not named.

Let me explain the authoritative character of Mongolian naming a little further. In Mongolia every person should have one single name and in principle that name should not be the same as anyone else's in the social world known to the name-givers. The name is given by someone in a position of seniority[2] and it normally consists of a word or words with meaning in everyday language.[3] This meaning denotes the intended character of the named child. Single names, such as Bayar (Happy) or Tsetseg (Flower) are relatively uncommon, while paired terms, like Narangerel (Sun-Ray) or Uranchimeg (Artful-Decoration) are the norm, and in the past complex names consisting of three, four or even five parts were known. To give a child the same name as someone else would be wrong, both because that would fail to acknowledge the individuality of the child and because it would also insult the existing bearer of the name by suggesting that this child is somehow "the same" as him or her. The insult lies in the fact that each generation is senior to the one below and it is considered belittling to a senior for his/her distinctiveness and difference not to be evident. The use of second names (surnames, clan names, patronymics, etc.) is not essential and most Mongols living in Inner Mongolia do not have them.[4] In this way, the Mongols until very recently have been

recalcitrant in respect of state attempts to categorize citizens' names according to "international norms," such as Russian or Chinese practice.[5] This strongly maintained Mongol system of quasi-unique single personal names reduces the overtly social connection-building of naming almost to zero: it means that there is no naming after relatives or ancestors, and there is nothing in the name itself that tells you about who this person is in human society. Yet clearly the Mongol practice is "social" in several ways. It relates the person-name dyad to the wider universe of sociality, that is, to socialized relations between people and the animals, plants, landscape features, time and astronomy, or qualities and processes in the world at large that form the vocabulary of names. It serves to individuate, to create a "subject," in a society that is otherwise in many way communal. And finally, it frequently indicates the social value attributed by the name-giver to the one named.

Central to the authoritarian character of the system is the fact that in Mongolia there is presumed to be an identity between the person and their name, a connection so intimate that some people even say that the name *is* the person. In any case, one's name is one's destiny (*zayaa*), Mongolians say. One should "be" like the name given to one by others.

This situation points *a fortiori* to the relevance of theories that posit the conferring of a name on someone as an extraordinary act of power, an "injurious act" as Butler put it (1997:28). For, as discussed in the introduction to this book, the name is not of one's own choosing. "One is, as it were, brought into social location and time through being named. And one is dependent upon another for one's name, for the designation that is supposed to confer singularity" (Butler 1997:29). In the Mongolian case, the name confers not only singularity but also, in most cases, a prospective identity in the wide universe of meaning and value. Yet we should distinguish the conferring of a name from subsequent naming as part of ongoing language practice. As Butler also argues, "If the subject who speaks is also constituted by the language that she or he speaks, then language is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject, and not merely its instrument of expression. This means that the subject has its own "existence" implicated in a language that precedes and exceeds the subject, a language whose historicity includes a past and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks. And yet, this "excess" is what makes possible the speech of the subject" (1997:28). I take an implication of this to be that in the usages of naming, the subject takes part in established linguistic practices that *act upon* the simple fact of being named – there are acknowledged (social) means of avoiding the "injury" of having to live up to one's name. I shall describe some of these below, in particular certain protective/avoidance practices in the use of personal names in address. And yet

this is not all, for besides the "excess" of (other people's) language there is also the subjectivity that is differently constituted from that of discourse, in other words the capacity for caprice and protest, mishearing, involuntary mistakes or even occasionally bold convention-breaking ruptures. As Butler remarks (1997:33), one is still constituted by discourse, but at a distance from oneself. It is perhaps in this realm – of a deeper unease, concerning not only how one's name is employed but with the character of one's name and being named at all – that the possibilities afforded within the authoritarian character of the Mongolian system are revealed.

This chapter will proceed by examining three issues in turn: the nature of names in Mongolia, the individuating practice of conferring names, and the speech usages whereby the relation between the person and the name is placed in question.

## NAMES AND SOCIALITY

The character of Mongolian names can be approached through looking at the old dichotomy made by certain linguists and philosophers between the name and the word, or denotation and connotation. John Stuart Mill said that proper names were "meaningless marks set upon things [or persons] to distinguish them from one another." And Camille Jullian wrote in 1919 that names are "sterilized words," words that have lost their original meanings and have come to be employed as simple labels (see discussion in Wilson 1998). Put simply, words connote and names denote. In this perspective, a name has no lexical meaning, or rather . . . whatever lexical meaning it may have had, or still retains, does not interfere with its denotative function. Thus, in Wilson's example (1998:xi), Stella is the name of the girl next door and not the Latin name for a star when she is referred to.

Looked at in this perspective, we can say that Mongolian personal names are highly denotative, far more so than are English proper names. For example, for there are many Johns, even several John Stewarts, but only one Lubsangotov (at least, as far as anyone who chose the name Lubsangotov knows). The Mongolian case contrasts with European tradition in the *longue durée*. We can see this from the fact that in ancient Rome, extensive trawls of inscriptions over several centuries revealed only sixty-four known *praenomina*, of which thirty were known in the first century AD and only fifteen were in common use (Wilson 1998:5). By contrast, the Mongolian scholar Dariimaa was able to cite around 15,000 Mongolian names in her study (1986). In effect, Mongolian names are infinite in number, since any object or concept in any language may be used as a name.

The denotative emphasis of Mongolian naming, however, does not bury its connotative aspects. It is now recognized that the denotation – connotation distinction is not absolute,[6] and Wilson (1998:xi) quotes Nicolaisen as follows: "Words which have become names never totally cease to be words, nor can names ever fully deny their lexical origins." This applies *a fortiori* in Mongolia where so many names are in principle understandable words, like "Dog," "Flower," or "Prosperity." In many contexts, of course, denotation buries connotation and Mongols would hardly bring such associations to mind. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they are repressed. For example, the current Prime Minister of Mongolia is named Bagabandi, meaning "Little Pupil-monk," and people have told me that it would feel awkward to be conscious of such a demeaning status in respect of such a high personage. Yet in other situations a name's literal meaning is brought into the open, as in the joking word-play that Mongols love, such as, when eating rice, someone exclaims, "Oh! I've just bitten my uncle's head" (alluding to the fact well known to everyone at the meal that he has an uncle named Stone). Sometimes, a more existential identity of person and name is thrown up almost as a challenge, as in following case when two young men met one another for the first time.

"What is your name?"
"Hürelbaatar" (Bronze-Hero)

"So you are going to slice me then, are you?" (this refers to the associations of "bronze" with "sword" and "hero" with "warrior").

Now this encounter was remembered by Hürelbaatar because of its unusually jarring and hostile character. Yet the never-completely-forgotten meaningfulness of Mongolian names can also be seen from the fact that when people avoid speaking names, as will be discussed later, they choose as substitutes words that have the same meaning (but not the same sound) as the unspoken name (Humphrey 1978:80).

So Mongolian names are *both* highly denotative *and* highly connotative. The serious point is that all these words used as names are chosen in order that the child thereby has something of that quality. This short chapter is not the place to try to categorize the words used as names. Suffice it to say that they include not only plain Mongol words but also Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Russian, or even English words known to Mongols. They include admired or symbolically resonant objects (e.g., Axe), materials (e.g., Iron), animals (e.g., Lynx), qualities (e.g., Calmness), colors (e.g., White), times (e.g., Wednesday), numbers (e.g., Eighty), institutions (e.g., KIM, the first letters of the Communist Youth International, or Seseer, the Mongol pronunciation of USSR), artifacts (e.g., Tractor), astronomical features (e.g., Sun), or deities

(e.g., Ayushi, the god of longevity). They also include – as will be explained later – denigrated objects, animals, or qualities, such as Dog or Shitty (Nyambuu 1969; Zhukovskaya 1980). Since the most desirable words are limited, Mongols create differentiated names by constructing them from two, three, or even more component words (e.g., Süxbaatar, "Axe-Hero") and by hybridizing through using several languages (a Mongol component plus a Tibetan or Chinese one, for instance). As cultural horizons have shifted through history, the ranges of Tibetan, Socialist, and Russian-originated names have become less common than straightforward Mongol words for new admired qualities (e.g., Soyol, "Culture").

What such names do is to identify people with "the world out there" and simultaneously to universalize the person. This move is often de-gendering – many word-names are not gender specific – and usually effaces kinship links. One exception is Otgon (meaning "last child"), which is quite frequently used as a name. Yet even here the intent of the name-giver is not so much to categorize the child's position in the family as to indicate the *kind of person* he should become – the "Otgon role" is to be the dependable support who will stay at home to care for the aged parents. Another exception is that name-giving is sometimes used by parents to create a "set" of their children.[7] One interesting case of this kind is the family from Alasha in Inner Mongolia whose sons were called Arslan (Lion), Bar (Tiger),and Irbis (Panther) while the daughters were given the distinctly less glorious names Hulgana (Mouse), Melkhii (Frog), and Shish (Fieldmouse). Such explicit internal gender valuations are rare, but the principle whereby meaningful qualities are imposed on people within a set of social relations is universal.

## INDIVIDUATING YET DE-PERSONALIZING

Mongolian naming is an individuating practice, but it is also, I shall argue, one that overrides actual real-life distinctiveness. The name is supposed to be the differentiating agent. As Mongols say,

> *Zuun xünii züs üsexeer,*
> *Neg xünii ner togtoo*
> You can see a hundred people and not distinguish them,
> but a name allows you to know one person

If it so happens that in a community two people have the same name, such as when an in-marrying bride turns out to have the same name as a woman in the husband's family, then the incomer's name is changed. It is the correlative of individuation that the person is supposed to be like their name, for each

person is held to have a singular character and fate. A woman called Chinbat (Firm-Strong) is intended to be different in her personality and behavior from one called Solongo (Rainbow).

Yet the de-personalizing effect of such names can be seen in several ways, the first being that such word-exemplars are often not in themselves human. How could one become "more like oneself" by emulating the qualities attributed to the rainbow? This outward-projective effect of the Mongol name is seen most clearly when given names frankly refer to the desires of the parents, as when female infants are called Hüü-Daguul (Boy-Next) or Hüü-Iree (May a Boy Come).

What are the implications of the "projective" and meaningful character of Mongolian naming? Even names referring to natural objects may be performatives in family-building undertakings, such that that newly named child is attached to a name that is intended to "work" into the future. This name not only has general culturally acknowledged associations (to powerful polemical effect) but very often is also part of the name-giver's vision of his or her own life project. For example, a Mongolian said to me, "I have had a difficult life. Both my parents died young, and I was nothing. But later I got married and then I had a son, and so now my life is complete. Therefore, I call my son Tergüül (Full-Moon)." This is a poetic, mimetic naming in which the son, Full-Moon, both metaphorically represents and *is* the completion of the father's life. His existence, by this name, is part of his father's, while his own is ignored.

Finally, in the common case where children are named simply for desired qualities, it is evident that names point to something that is not yet visible or may never become visible. By their exemplary character, such names create the space of the *follower* of the exemplar – that is of the person (or self) who is not yet like the name, or even not at all like the name.

## THE NAME AND THE SELF

The "name is fate" idea is sometimes instantiated by setting up an element of chance or non-intentionality in the conferring of a name. What this does is to make clear how names are simultaneous identified with people *and* detachable from them. Mongols often construct certain life situations as "fated" by means of ritually establishing a situation of randomization (for example the disposal of the corpse of a child, which used to be done by riding off into the steppe and "losing" the body by allowing it to fall off the back of the saddle). So it can be with naming. Hwan-young Park from his fieldwork in Mongolia in 1996 writes that around ten names may be written on slips of paper, put into a pot, and then one is pulled out. Names can also be acquired through

incidental events, as we can see from the following account, which also shows how names may, or may not, "fit" the child being named. The following is from the autobiography of a Mongolian herdsman writing in the mid-1990s:

I was a little boy who cried a lot, and because I was worshipped by my parents, they were often very upset. My tired father carried me, a crybaby, on his back everywhere. Besides crying, I fell over a lot, and my father was scared. The name Chuluunbat (Stone-Strong) was the first given me, but when I was ill, my family was so worried they took me to the Russian doctor, Mrs. Zh. Bondon.

The doctor looked around slowly, shook her head, and gave a lot of advice in Russian, but my parents did not understand the incomprehensible medical terms. 'You will be well,' she said, sticking up her thumb and laughing. My parents laughed along, though they didn't understand her. The Russian doctor called me 'Volodya'[8] and said in Mongolian that I would be cured. My parents thought she was renaming me and that 'Volojh' meant stone, so I would grow up to be a very strong man. From that day on, both mother and father were very happy to call me Volojh, I wasn't sick any more, and my mother stopped worrying about me to this day. I took into consideration how the Russian doctor blessed me with good health and peace of mind in calling me Volodya, and I hope she is well today.

However, when I entered the first class at school, I guess that some official movement had arisen to change Russian to Mongolian names. My class teacher one day made me stand up and said, "Volojh! From today you will be called Namkhainyambuu.[9] How does that sound to you?" I told myself that it sounded alright and after that, though locally I was still often Volojh, officially I was called Namkhainyambuu.

(Namkhainyambuu 2000:48)

In the herdsman's case, the idea that he should be "strong" was carried through the change of name and attached to the meaningless "Volojh." The story seems to imply that the strength of "Volojh" imparted itself to the boy so that he *was* and *felt himself to be* strong through the remainder of his life.

But what of the case where someone feels at odds with their name? In an authoritarian system, one may have to live with a sense of unease, for one is caught not only by the norm that *other people* give names, but also by a web of local linguistic associations that cannot be escaped. This is evident from the account of a woman from Inner Mongolia, named Uranchimeg ("Skilful-Decoration"). This name had been conferred on her by an older sister who loved embroidery and wanted her sibling to be good at it. As a child Uranchimeg used to play in the village with a young boy who found "Uranchimeg" difficult to pronounce and called her Udai (following the usual shortening practice of using the first syllable of a name plus a name-suffix ending). Soon the whole village was using this name. But Udai reminded everyone

of Utai, the name of the famous Buddhist pilgrimage site of Utai Shan, and soon Uranchimeg was being teased as "Udai-Lama." In the Cultural Revolution such a name became completely forbidden, but she went on being mocked, with another almost equally insulting second part to her name, as Udai-Sholom (Udai Fox Spirit). Now little Uranchimeg, who had by now come to identify herself with "Udai" and think of it as her real name, hated all of this. She went to her father and begged him to change her name. He gave the matter consideration and said he would re-name her Har-Hüü (literally "Black Boy," but meaning something more like "Ordinary Boy"). She knew this proposal reflected the fact that he had always wanted to have a son. Although Uranchimeg had always responded to her father's wish in a physical way – throughout her childhood she "walked like a boy" and was "mobile and active" like a boy – she did not agree to be renamed Black Boy. "So keep your name," her father then said. Even now she is a married woman in her thirties with children, Uranchimeg is called "Udai" when she returns to the village. The suffix however has changed to Niang-Niang (Senior Woman/Grandmother) and she is called Udai-Niang-Niang even by people older than herself. This reflects the fact that she has entered the senior generation early, because her father was relatively old (fifty years) when she was conceived. Meanwhile, through all of this, Uranchimeg also felt that it was her destiny to follow the name her sister had given and indeed she became a skillful seamstress.

This history indicates how difficult it is to escape the web of naming practice and the associated wishes of others. Uranchimeg also told me that anyone would be very anxious about willfully changing a name, because the name carries something of oneself. This idea applies also to representations of name, that is, either as a sound, or as something printed on a page.[10] To explain this idea, she described how she carefully cuts out her own and her family's names from pages (old letters, envelopes, etc.) due to be thrown away, since they would otherwise be bound to be dirtied and polluted in the garbage and this would be to harm oneself. A similar idea lies behind the feeling that to take a new name (which requires giving up an old one) is dangerous, since one would be abandoning something of oneself thereby. So even people with frankly demeaning names tend to keep them. An example is a woman called Hüü-Daguul (Boy-Next) who became the Party Secretary of a large Inner Mongolian township.

Occasionally people change their names. Such a decision is sometimes taken when a person has a long run of illnesses and has a "hard" (*xatuu*) name. In Inner Mongolia, a "hard" name is one that is ambitious or aggressive, such as Red Happiness or Dragon's Eye. Parents give such names in the hope that their children will also be "hard," but it may be decided that the illnesses indicate

that the child's longer-term fate is not to follow this goal.[11] Such a decision is never taken lightly because of the dangerous effect of parting from a name. A religious specialist should be consulted, and he will also choose the new name.[12] It may happen that a child goes to school and learns that his name is the same as that of an impossibly high figure, such as a Tang Dynasty Emperor. In this case, the name is subtly changed. Sometimes people feel unhappy with too religious a name (in socialist times) or too socialist a name like Lenin or Tractor (in post-socialist times), or a name that seems laughable in a new social context.

In the family mentioned earlier where the daughters were called Mouse, Frog, and Fieldmouse, all three girls grew up to become respectable teachers. When Melxii (Frog) moved to the city she felt increasingly unhappy with her name and changed it to Oyuntsetseg (Pure-Flower). Yet no one at home forgot the name Frog, and out of respect for her the members of that family still do not call frogs "frog" but find another word for them. With this odd ethnographic fact we enter the realm of the social conventions of naming practices referred to at the beginning of this chapter. For whatever name one has, a new one or an old one, Mongols hold it important that that name *be respected* in everyday life, since acts in respect of the name are held to be acts in respect of the person. It is in this whole realm of "acts of respect," which might seem to consist of almost arbitrary conventional performatives (as arbitrary as the sound-meaning aspect of language itself), that people can exert agency and battle for the presence of their personality.

## NOT BEING NAMED

In this section I consider conventional practices of address and in particular the avoidance of using personal names. In a previous article (Humphrey 1978), I discussed the question of why in Mongolia respecting someone should imply not addressing them by name. My suggestion was that, since it is juniors who must refrain from using seniors' names – juniors who should also be subdued in other behavioral respects – the issue is one of attention. The calling out of one's name inevitably attracts one's attention and it is somehow injurious to seniors to compel them in this way. Such an interpretation, which I still uphold, is supported by the Mongol injunction that ancestors' names should not be spoken aloud, since the sound of the name will cause "bones to ring out" (*yasan xanggina*). In other words, the sound of the name will "hit" the ancestor's bones and disturb him.

This chapter will take a different tack, however, and will discuss more general Mongolian ideas concerning talking to and about others. In general, name

avoidance, like the use of honorifics or other conventional linguistic practices of respect, domination, insult, and so forth, is a question of "language ideology," the complex systems of ideas and interests through which people interpret linguistic behaviors (Irvine 1998:52). Research in this field has shown that particular social structures, such as the presence of courts, hierarchies, or "caste" systems, cannot explain the presence (or not) of honorific linguistic practices.[13] Rather, it is the local linguistic ideologies that interpret and rationalize forms of talk that are the key to understanding. At the deepest level, a language ideology involves conceptions of language itself and its relation to a world of referents and social interactions (Irvine 1998:62). This article cannot attempt to answer such a broad question in relation to Mongolian. But the mere positing of the issue in this way – the suggestion that cultures may differ in understandings of language itself, as well as having their own interpretations of the particular forms and practices of any given language – indicates the need for a critique of theories that attempt a universal explanation of authoritative address. The most powerful theory of this kind is perhaps Althusser's theory of interpellation (1971). But before proceeding to discuss this theory, let me first outline the ethnography of name avoidance and associated practices of the Mongols.

Mongol names are in fact relatively infrequently used, either in reference or especially in address. There are really rather few people – all juniors – you can politely call by their name. In other words, the names of whole categories of people are what the Mongols call *seertei* (forbidden or tabooed) to other whole categories of people. Because names cannot be used, other ways have to be found to refer to or address people. Here I briefly describe three situations in which such practices occur: babies and young children, who are thought to be too vulnerable to have their names used; friends and age-mates, who negotiate their closeness and equality through various conventions; and seniors and highly respected people, for whom titles and kinship terms are used instead of names.

A baby in Mongolia is either not given a name (*ner*) for a time,[14] or, if it does have one, that name should not be spoken aloud. One woman from Jirim, Inner Mongolia, called both of her children, a boy and a girl, Muur (Cat) instead of giving them names. I should mention that the cat is not an animal the Mongols particularly like; they tend to think cats are rather spooky creatures. If the children of a family are sickly, and especially if one has died, the succeeding children are frequently given an *etgeed ner* (meaning a side, strange, or perverse name). This name is also known as the *xaldaxgüi ner* (name conferring inviolability). Unlike the ordinary, real name (*zhiriin ner*), it can be used and spoken aloud. Such names include Xünbish (Not human),

Nergui (No-name), Terbish (Not that one), Xenmedex (Who Knows), Xench Yaaxav (Whoever), Muu Noxoi (Bad Dog), Baast (Shitty), Ömxii (Smelly), and many others. Mongols say that this custom prevents evil spirits from getting to know where a child is by overhearing its name spoken aloud, thus deceiving them into not attacking the child. Meanwhile, as the mother is calling her child "Not You" (Chibish) or "Not me" (Bibish), all her milking cows have personal names![15]

Perhaps we can see the relation between the *etgeed* name and the child at this point as being like dress, that is, something non-integral, a protective, even misleading, carapace, given from outside. The idea is supported by the fact that, especially if they have been subject to illness, babies and toddlers are sometimes dressed in the clothing of the opposite sex, also in order to deceive the spirits (Szynkiewicz 1982:236–7). Babies are also deliberately "neglected" and made to appear uncared for, though Mongols actually love their children to distraction. If for some reason very young children have to be taken out after dark (when evil spirits are held to be most active) a sooty mark is made on their foreheads, and this is said to put off the spirits. All toddlers have uncut hair until the hair-cutting ritual at the age of around three to five, when distinctive gendered hairstyles are given and the "ordinary name" (*zhiriin ner*) is bestowed, if the child does not have one already. Until this point, it is often impossible for an outsider to say what sex a child is (Park 1997:14). Using the "side name" thus fits in among a number of practices on the body. These are designed to create a false, unmarked, and genderless exterior, fronting an interior that is unknown to anyone beyond the immediate family.

Quite often these "strange" or "side" names linger on and become the accepted public name of the person throughout their life. In this case, such names must be respected along with all others. In other words, a junior should definitely not use them in address and furthermore in the close family other words are preferably found as substitutes in conversation and reference. More usually, as children grow up their "strange" names and nicknames discarded in favor of their proper names, but these are "shortened" (*tovchilo-*), "softened," or disguised. Thus, Choinum is "softened" to Nijamaa and Dagidmaa to Damis-egchi;[16] the rank Gegeen ("Enlightened") is "softened" as Gegeenten and Lama as Lamxai or Doorom-Maam.[17]

This shortening and softening is practiced along with "respecting" (*abgaila-*) whereby seniors are referred to by informal "respect names," often together with a kin term (e.g., Danjia Axa, where "Danjia" is a generic "name-like" sound with no meaning and *axa* means "older brother").[18] In address, people usually avoid speaking aloud any kind of name and instead use generalized kin-terms, such as *axa* (older brother) or *egchi* (older sister). The people

referred to in this way may not be brothers or sisters at all,[19] and the same is true of *bagsh* (teacher), which is commonly used for any somewhat learned or unusually skilled person. Nicknames are widely used among age-mates. Though avoidance of naming is most serious for incoming daughters-in-law (Hamayon and Bassanoff 1973; Humphrey 1978), it is considered offensive for anyone to use the name of any senior person. Thus, for elderly and very highly placed people, there may be no one alive who can use their name. Indeed, children sometimes do not know the name of senior relatives or village dignitaries. Urgunge Onon, now in his eighties, who was the eighth and youngest son of a respected Daur village headman, told me that he did not even know his own father's name – he had never heard anyone use it, and it would be inappropriate for him to find out what it was. Such names came to light mainly when people had to cite them in official documents. This is not just a matter of the past; a young Mongolian in his thirties told me that his own children, now aged around ten, do not know the names of his father and mother (that is, their own grandfather and grandmother in the male line). A whole village may know a respected senior woman simply as Xögshöö (old woman). Thus, as people grow older even the individuating function of names seems to fall away, to be replaced by categorization into a social type.[20]

In this situation, "not to be named" is seen as somehow indicating both respect and a warm and close relationship. But people have to learn how to use this convention correctly. A woman told me that when she was a young girl she used to run after a glamorous young man visiting her family. She called him Older Brother. But at one point her mother reprimanded her, "You are treating him like a *nameless* older brother (*nergui axa*)!" In other words, the girl was inappropriately treating him as close, when he was merely a visitor. The obverse of this is that even in situations where speakers are socially equal to one another and thus in principle could use one another's name, actually to do so is to create a distancing effect. A telling example of this convention is that it is said that husbands and wives "are one" and therefore should not use each other's name.

Even in the case of reference – that is, when talking about someone in their absence – it is often the case that people have to find other words that are not the names of respected relatives. This is particularly an injunction for adult juniors, most specifically the incoming young wife. Mongols have many tales about the adroit young woman who finds a witty verbal substitute, and other tales about the tongue-tied or clumsy bride. One example of the latter is the (true) story of a young woman, married to a man called Namjilbaatar, who found herself at a Party meeting in Inner Mongolia in the 1970s during which a revolutionary song was sung. As everyone else was singing "Hai Hui

Heroes! Hai Hui heroes!" (*hai hui baataruud! hai hui baataruud!*), she was heard singing "Hai Hui Axe-handles!" (*hai hui süxiin ishduud!*'). She had to avoid the word *baatar* (hero), as it was part of her husband's name, and, by the association of the hero with the swinging of an axe she arrived at the odd alternative of *süxiin ish* (axe-handle). Mongolians fall about laughing as they tell such stories.

Funny as they may be, all such stories feed into the more general situation that it is understood to be injurious to point people out by talking about them. This is especially the case when people are discussed behind their backs, for such gossip is not subject to the norms of civility of the public encounter. Somehow, talking in this way about people is held to harm them, as it were magically, so that some misfortune will befall them. Such covert talk is called *xar xel am* (literally "black tongue mouth") if it is critical of the person and *tsagaan xel am* ("white tongue mouth") if it consists of praise, but it is held to be injurious in either case. It is specifically citing the name that makes the link between the speakers' talk and the one who will be harmed.

Even more generally, speech itself is conceived as active or creative in Mongolia, and thus potentially disturbing to the authority of stasis and the sheer existence of things as they are. In this situation, it is held to be proper for a young person to be *nomxon duugui* (literally "peaceful soundless"). He or she should hardly say anything at all in a social encounter among elders, for it is only the latter who have the authority to channel social life through public speech. It follows from this that among the seniors, the ability to speak skillfully is greatly admired, and there are numerous, highly formalized poetic genres ("praising," "offering," "teaching" etc.) through which oratory can be demonstrated. In fact, such speeches are performatives that transform or transfigure their object. In Mongolian culture, a specialist called *xelmerch* ("translator," "one skilled in languages") is essential in confrontations between two "sides," such as at political treaties or marriage negotiations. A saying about the *xelmerch* has become an exemplar for those aspiring to skilled speech: one should "speak to make thick cream sit on black water" (see Humphrey 1997 on the cultural importance of exemplars).[21] The idea here is that such speech can make the most unlikely thing happen, such as "persuading illiterate people to stop believing in Buddhism."[22] Thus, to summarize, controlled, public, and transformative speech has its counterpart in deliberate acts of subdued silence, and both are contrasted to secretive, formless gossip. Needless to say, the above remarks are highly reductive. Morten Pedersen's work in Northwest Mongolia has argued for the presence of several different kinds of social prominence, each of which carries with it idiosyncratic modes of use of language (Pedersen 2002). It is not possible to develop this theme further here, but my aim at this

point is to intimate the sense that there is a distinctive and complex "linguistic ideology" of the Mongols. This is one in which concerns about speaking may be not so much to do with the information conveyed as with what it brings about – the effects of speech in changing a situation.

## CONCLUSION: THE AUTHORITY OF "HAILING"

Let me return now to the critique of a universal theory of authoritative address mentioned earlier. In Althusser's theory of interpellation (1971:160–73) the subject-constituting power of ideology is conceptualized through the image of the divine voice that names and thus brings its subjects into being and at the same time subordinates them. The authority of the state, when carried in the "voice of ideology" that hails ("interpellates") subjects by name, is almost impossible to resist. This is because we are all ideological subjects. We live "spontaneously" and "naturally" in ideology, whose character we could only recognize if we were outside it (1971:160–1). Althusser nevertheless formulates theoretically the separation of the "concrete individual" from the ideological subject. The weight of his argument, however, is to submerge the former in the latter, who comes into existence only by being named. Yet the condition of the formation of the subject is a previous social setting, in which the child to be named (of course by the Father's name) is already expected, has an identity, and is pre-appointed as a subject (1971:165). Thus there is in effect a prior subordination to authority. Subsequently, the vast majority of subjects work obediently "all by themselves," inserted into practices governed by the state apparatuses. Interpellation constantly reconfirms subjecthood. The individual hailed by the policeman ("Hey, you there!") immediately turns around and thereby appropriates the term by which he is hailed as subject (1971:163). Interpellation almost always "works," and what seems to take place outside ideology (i.e., in the street) in reality is inside it, for "*individuals are always-already subjects*" (1971:164 emphasis in original). The Althusserian notion of interpellation has its place both within a general theory of the reproduction of labor power by means of state authority and social conventions and within a formal theory of the structure of all ideology. It thus creates its own terms, and might be seen as irrelevant to the ethnographic case of everyday naming we have been considering. Mongol naming practice, as mentioned earlier, has been recalcitrant to the various state forms experienced through history.

Butler's *Excitable Speech* (1997a) suggests how the idea of interpellation can provide the impetus for a more flexible analysis. She acknowledges the power of conferring a name as an initiatory act, but does not tie this to a theory of political-economic reproduction via the repressive state. Her

more Foucauldian formulation (1997a:78–9) applies well in a case like that of Mongolia, where the inaugurative power of name-giving is diffused and is echoed subsequently though the numerous social sites in which a person is hailed by their name only by persons senior to them in various different ways. Butler argues, not being caught in the Marxist inevitability of the last instance, that the subject need not be understood as pre-compelled. Unlike Althusser, she sees interpellation to be an address that "regularly misses its mark," since one might protest the name that is called out. In fact, she writes, with the diffusion of sovereign power, interpellation has an origin as unclear as its end. "From whom does the address emerge, and to whom is it addressed? If the one who delivers it does not author it, and the one who is marked by it is not described by it, then the workings of interpellative power exceed the subjects constituted by its terms, and the subjects so constituted exceed the interpellations by which they are animated" (1997:34). This suggests a way out of the closed cycle of subjugation implied by Althusser. Butler's book is concerned with the unpredictability and unlocatability of the workings of interpellation, in particular in respect of hate speech. The subject who speaks it is clearly responsible for such speech, but is hardly ever its originator. Racist name-calling works through invoking conventions that neither begin nor end with a particular speaking subject (1997:34). The idea that subjects "exceed" interpellation enables Butler to argue that while being called a name can be injurious, name-calling also may be the initiating moment of a counter-mobilization (such as "throwing back" a derogatory name in gay speech).

It is not difficult to see how Butler's ideas have influenced parts of this chapter – in particular the space she establishes between subjectivity (the self) and "the subject" (of naming). Nevertheless, her work cannot fully answer to an anthropological analysis, because it ignores the presence of different "linguistic ideologies." In the Mongolian case, a woman cannot easily "throw back" an injurious name such as Boy-Next. This is not so much because of the social weight of the idea (that so many families, including one's own, are waiting only for a boy), nor because jousting with names never happens. It is rather that the power of naming is explicitly recognized as dangerous. And this must be related, it seems to me, to the Mongols' language ideology, their recognition of the transformative capacity of spoken language in general. In this situation, the recourse is to "soften," shift, and retreat from the name, to end up as so respected and senior a person that one's name is never pronounced in one's presence. In this way, one can escape from being compelled by one's name. I have argued here that this cannot be seen as an "individual" response, or even one of group politics as in Butler. For the interpersonal conventions of not-naming are omnipresent in social life and deeply engrained

in proper behavior. Thus one would not even be angry, I was told, if some boy pronounced one's name – that would indicate simply a defect in him, a lack of self-control and inability to act in the right way. In turn, in *not* speaking out a name or title one is not just deferring to a particular person, one is also conveying respect for sociality itself and for one's own place in it. Everyone is caught up in this matrix of exposure and retreat.

Authoritarian as the Mongolian system undoubtedly is, it would nonetheless be incorrect, it seems to me, to describe it in terms simply of socially constituted discourse and convention. It is true that subjects stand in a relation of addressing and being addressed and a certain inescapable subjectivation takes place in language (Butler 1997:30). Yet, even in Mongolia, one *is not* one's name and the conventions of not being named do not exhaust the relation to the name. As this chapter has tried to show, there is also another dimension, that of a differently formed subjectivity, through which people variously attempt to bear with, live up to, surmount, or even reject the placing in the universe that their name has given them.

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NOTES

1. The belief in reincarnation and its relation (through the doctrine of *karma*) to the moral state of the person is one aspect of the separation of the self from the physical life in society. For an extended discussion of the Buddhist concept of "I" as understood by Mongolians and Buryats, see Morokhoreva 1994:74–85.
2. "Seniority" appears in a number of different, though overlapping, social rankings, the most important being that of generation within a kinship grouping. Age provides another indicator of rank, though it is subordinate to generation amongst kin. Gender (males senior to females), religious status (ranks among Buddhist lamas and between them and laypersons) and political hierarchies give rise to further differentiations of seniority. The interesting issues of the inconsistencies between these hierarchies and historical shifts in their relative salience cannot be dealt with here. In contemporary life, since the socialist state destabilized most other rankings, generational seniority is generally paramount in the naming context.
3. The exception to this is the formerly common use of Tibetan words as names by Mongolians. It is uncertain to what extent the meanings of such names, mostly referring to Buddhist religious ideas or personages, were understood by lay people.
4. In principle, a person has just one name. It is true that Mongols have also often used "second names," in the past that of the clan or Banner and recently that of the

began in the nineteenth century in Mongolia and became official, perhaps under Russian influence, in 1926 (Lonjid (1992) and Darbeeva (1969), quoted in Park (1999). The use of second names is inconsistent, however, and differs among Mongols living in Mongolia, China (Inner Mongolia), and Russia. A variety of means – addition of father's name, grandfather's name, clan name, name of administrative region (Banner), place names, or nicknames – are used to differentiate and specify people. Arguably, these additions are understood by Mongols to be occasional descriptive conveniences rather than names (*ner*) as such.

5. The existence of single names or fathers' plus personal names causes problems when Mongols travel (apply for visas, citizenship, etc.) in regimes which assume the personal name plus surname formula. They wonder, "Should I invent some second name? Or split my single name into two parts?" Either procedure violates the idea that one person has one single (unique) name.
6. See discussion in the Introduction to this volume.
7. For example, a family with five sons and one daughter were called Batzorig, Batmönx, Bathüleg, and Battseren (the sons) and Tserenhand (the daughter), Park (1999), p. 26. Rebecca Empson reports from her fieldwork in 2001–2 that she stayed in a family where the five daughters were called Uranchimeg, Uranbilig, Urandolgio, Urantsetseg, and Uranxaich. As mandated by "Uran" (skilled) all five girls were skilled at embroidery.
8. Volodya is short for the common Russian name Vladimir, which has no meaning. Volojh is a Mongolian pronunciation of Volodya.
9. This is a name consisting of two Tibetan terms, *namxai* [*namkhai*] and *nyambuu*, whose meaning was almost certainly unknown to the boy.
10. The same idea applies to photographs of people, which consequently should always be treated with respect.
11. *Buyan daaxgui* ("fortune does not follow"). This may be related to the Buddhist idea of karma, whereby a person's fate in a given life is determined by the acts of that soul in previous lives.
12. In the case of a girl called Dragon's Eye (Ch. Lung Yien) it was decided after much discussion not to change her name. A boy in the same village named Red Happiness (Ch. Hong-Xi) was, however, re-named the "softer" Coming Happiness (Ch. Lai-Xi). Jirim, Inner Mongolia, 1970s.
13. For example, Irvine points out that the Wolof society had royal courts and profound inequalities of birth and family origin and yet the language contained no honorifics, whereas the languages of the relatively egalitarian Bemba and Zulu do have them (1998:52).
14. I have not been able to represent adequately in this short article the extent to which customs vary in different parts of the Mongolian region. For example, among Buryats living in Halh Mongolia children are not given names until the hair-cutting ceremony at age three to four, while in Jirim and Barga in Inner Mongolia names are given after one month.
15. It seems that spirits are not so concerned with attacking cows. Rebecca Empson, personal communication, Dornod Aimag, Mongolia, 2001.
16. Rebecca Empson, personal communication, Halh Mongolia, 2001–2002.
17. *Doorom* is the term for a Buddhist learned degree. *Maam* is a softened form of "lama" in Jirim dialect. The idea is to soften the sound so that the word 'lama' is not heard distinctly. Hürelbaatar, personal communication, Inner Mongolia.

18. Morokhoeva (1994:43–4) describes how among Buryats names are avoided altogether inside the domestic circle and substituted by a fairly complex series of kinship terms. When there is more than one *nagasa* (mother's brother) in the circle the kin term is qualified by a marker of seniority/juniority.
19. Kin-terms that too closely delimit the category of person addressed also seem to be avoided. Thus a mother's mother's sister's husband, for whom a kinship term exists, is called simply Ye-Ye (grandfather). Nasanbayar personal communication referring to contemporary Alasha region.
20. In this respect, as in so many others, the Mongols maintain a different system from the Chinese, even though the two peoples have lived in close proximity for centuries. In Chinese society there is a sharp gender differentiation not apparent in Mongolia. The more names a Chinese man acquires during his life, the more socialized and the more individuated he becomes. By contrast, married women in rural China are essentially nameless, a situation Rubie Watson attributes to their non-attainment of full personhood (Watson 1986).
21. *Xar usun deer urum suutal xelex.* This is a quotation from the Janggar epic, well known to many Mongols.
22. Example given by Hürelbaatar, referring to life in North-East Inner Mongolia in the 1970s.