Logics, Stakes and Limits of Cultural Heritage Transmission in China, Russia and Mongolia. Introduction

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Introduction

Introduction

Anne Dalles Maréchal, Clément Jacquemoud, Pascale-Marie Milan and Yann Borjon-Privé

1 This thematic volume is a follow-up to a conference panel organised by the editors for the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (Leiden, summer 2019), and entitled "Logics, Stakes and Limits of Cultural Heritage Transmission in EurAsia". The object of the panel was to compare case studies of heritagisation processes among ethnic groups between Russia and the People's Republic of China. Whether ethnic groups are subject to or take advantage of cultural policies, the purpose was to analyse the effects and limits of the phenomenon of "cultural heritage" through emic and etic representations and uses. The present articles are an extension and deepening of the participants and organisers' presentations on that occasion with new contributions[1].

2 For the past forty years (a timeframe which corresponds to the Four Modernisation period in China and to the fall of the USSR), Russia, Mongolia and China have met with deep cultural, economic and socio-political transformations, in conjunction with a progressive opening towards the globalised world. Heritage, which is not a recent notion in these countries (Matsuda & Mengoni 2016; for Russia: Chistov *et al.* 2004; for China: Fresnais 2001; Zhang 2003), appears as a process tool into those changes. While Russia, Mongolia and China have signed the various UNESCO conventions[2], differences in cultural management can be observed. The various translations and interpretations of these conventions have led to specific heritage policies in the three countries which are the focus of our interest, a phenomenon which is, however, not limited to them. Indeed, numerous studies have already analysed the different implementations of the 2003 UNESCO Convention by the states that have signed them[3]. For one thing, studies generally highlight invisible hierarchies of census processes which raise several challenges, especially for minority groups (Tornatore 2011). For another, numerous scholars show local adaptations to the implementation of heritage in post-Soviet, multiethnic or rural contexts (Beaud 2015; Dumont 2021; Graezer Bideau 2012; Kikuchi 2015; Pabion-Mouriès 2013; Poujol 2000). Some studies also insist on economic and touristic merchandising (Berliner 2010; Dallen 2014; Hitchcock *et al.* 2010).

3 Ratifying the UNESCO conventions allows states to make a political use of heritage landmarks (Appadurai 2001), thereby representing and monitoring local and state identities that they wish to render sustainable. Russia, Mongolia and China, the three multiethnic states[4] under scrutiny in this publication, have a great deal to do with this question, central to national heritage initiatives. We argue that exploring, in a comparative approach and in light of the ethnic groups' own perspectives, the economic or political issues that underlie heritagisation processes will help us underline and understand the new stakes that have risen when administrations and populations became involved with the question of cultural (self-)representation.

Heritage, ethnic groups and state policies

4 Russia, Mongolia and China recognise ethnic minorities as part of their nations-states. However, these different groups are not on an equal footing, even within the same country. For example, despite the conceptual borrowings of Republican and Maoist China from Soviet concepts of nationhood, ethnic minorities do not enjoy the same autonomy or room for manoeuvre in the two countries. Moreover, in both of them, there is evidence of a majority group exerting domination over non-Russian or non-Han populations.

5 In the contemporary Russian Federation, the ethnic map results from choices made between the 1920s and the 1960s. Scientists and administrators took part in the processes of officially reorganising the ethnic diversity and territories, according to the Marxist ideology and Stalin's understanding of the concept of "nation" (Ru. *natsiia*) (Bertrand 2002). New "nations" were created, by mixing or splitting ethnic groups (Hirsch 2005). During the 1960s, the Soviet conception of ethnicity was reorganised according to the concept of *ethnos* (Ru. *ètnos*), defined as "a historically formed community of people possessing common, relatively stable specific features of [language, territory and] culture, as well as being aware of their unity and difference from other similar communities" (Bromley 1971, pp. 49-50). These processes underline the ideological and political choices made with the Marxist evolutionary system (Bertrand 2002; Hirsch 2005; Filippova 2010). Since the collapse of the USSR, minority groups with fewer than 50 000 individuals have been characterised as "Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation"[5]. As such, they are qualified for rights, privileges and state support earmarked for minority groups (Donahoe *et al.* 2008). Ethnic groups with more than 50 000 individuals are considered as "titular nations"[6], and have territories (autonomous republics or districts) with relative independence from Moscow. The ethnic groups of Russia concerned in this volume are the titular nation of the Altaians (C. Jacquemoud), and the small-numbered peoples called Nanai (T. Bulgakova & A. Dalles Maréchal) and Veps (A. Varfolomeeva).

6 Mongolia has followed the same path as the USSR. After gaining independence from China in 1911, it established a socialist regime (the Mongolian People's Republic), officially proclaimed in 1924. The new state administrators were faced with confused ethnic identification (Atwood 1994, pp. 55-56) and since 1945, the Mongol nation (Mo. *ündes*) and its Mongol nationality (Mo. *ündesten*) officially encompass each ethnic group (Mo. *yastan*) (Atwood 1994, pp. 61-62; Bulag 1998, pp. 31-32). Alongside with the main Halh ethnic group, Mongolia has more than twenty-five officially recognised ethnic groups within a relatively culturally homogeneous population, commonly referring to

the nomadic pastoralism of the steppes[7]. Most of these groups consider themselves of a common "Mongolian" descent, while some others claim another ancestry, such as the Turkic groups. After the political-economic changes of the 1990s, the different ethnic groups claimed recognition, which is the case of the Oirat whose dances are studied by Raphaël Blanchier in this volume[8].

7 The situation is similar in the People's Republic of China. Over decades of nation building, China has developed a conception of belonging which links the Han majority to the minority nationalities through common ancestry. In 1954, the Chinese government attempted to identify China's "ethnic potential" through the ethnic classification project (Ch. *minzu shibie* 民族识别) (Mullaney 2010). To this end, ethnologists and linguists investigating the diversity of the Chinese population adopted the concept of *minzu*, imported from Japan, but charged by the Chinese communist authorities with the Stalinist criteria of "nation". *Minzu* thus came to mean several things, such as race, nation, nationality and ethnic group. Thus, fifty-five minority nationalities (Ch. *shaoshu minzu* 少数民族) and a Han majority were officially recognised. By a strange equation, they nowadays all represent the Chinese nation (Ch. *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族) (Mullaney 2004). Like in Russia, the "minority nationalities" category implies that the minorities have to "become civilised" according to an evolutionary pattern (Harrell 1995). Furthermore, the Han "*minzu*" often merges with the Chinese nationality despite its own disparity and mythical unity (Mullaney 2012). The multifaceted nature of the term *minzu* partly explains why the Na, called Mosuo in Mandarin according to the official classification and considered a subgroup of the Naxi *minzu* (P.-M. Milan), and the Han Cantonese, also known as Tangren (S. Zheng), are studied in this issue at the same level.

8 Combined with national technical lexicons, whose political uses vary from one country to another, identity issues are inescapable elements of how groups perceive themselves, and how they are defined by the three states. However, the formations of identity and ethnicity are not subject to the same conditions of recognition and delineation. As a social construct, ethnicity can vary across time and space, but it generally refers to kinship, group solidarity, common culture, and shared strategy (see Barth 1969 & 1999; Glazer & Moynihan 1975; Nash 1989; Hutchinson & Smith 1996; Eriksen 2002). In accordance with Barth's interactional conception of ethnicity, we believe that this term enables us to study the social organisation of cultural differences within a processual approach.

9 Identity and ethnicity are, however, closely related concepts. Ethnic ties are caught up in the power relations of large social groups and ethnicity is more about local ways of thinking, or forms of belonging. It is clear that the ways in which this ethnicity is reproduced by the people concerned are constrained by a changing globalised world and by national policies. Identity issues are actually formed through the different interactional possibilities faced by individuals, and through the boundaries within which they and their groups construct themselves. In this sense, identities are co-constructed in relation, but also in contrast, to others: alterity provides the means to identify individual and/or collective specificities (Formoso 2011, p. 12).

10 Since the extension of UNESCO's devices through various conventions, cultural heritage has become a new framework for identity and ethnicity issues. In this context, to be interested in cultural heritage is to be interested in a system of relations in which identities are produced. It is also a means to examine the "forms and conditions under

which the *ethnic group* is realised as a type of belonging conferring an identity based on origin and cultural community" (Poutignat & Streiff-Hénard 2015, § 16).

Heritage and ethnicity: from a global to local phenomenon

11 Over the last decades, Russia, Mongolia and China have asserted their place on the world map of heritage. A new heritage fever has even spread, so much that each of these countries proposes many (natural and cultural) items to figure on the UNESCO World Heritage Lists. Meanwhile, each state has its own way of dealing with heritage within their national borders, whether by following UNESCO's recommendations or by carving items and lists with their own understanding of the heritage concept.

12 While these states do not manage cultural affairs with the same fervour or the same objectives, they enhance identities or ethnic categories as part of the heritage processes. Within such policies, the minority groups are somehow presented as stuck with practices of the past, and the underlying idea is that their way of life is "backwards" or that they are in need of civilisation and/or modernisation. In fact, rural groups are also considered in the same way, as if they had failed to adapt to progress (Chio 2014). Politically, and in a paradox that only politics are capable of producing, these representations of minority groups justify a support role by the dominant one and a rhetoric of "unity in diversity".

13 Enhancing ethnic cultural heritage as a multifaceted resource can therefore appear as a new trend for the governance of minorities. The past is often re-evaluated, "traditional" practices of minority groups often become "folklore" (understood here in the sense of all the traditions of a given group), and group identity is officialised and reinforced by a return to primordialist conceptions (blood ties, cultural heritage, custom). But, above all, it is undoubtedly the global tendency to make heritage a tool for ordering the world, both economically and politically, alongside tourism, which transforms it into an auxiliary of governance par excellence (Cousin 2008; Lazzarotti 2000).

14 The comparison of Russian, Mongolian and Chinese contexts also aims to show how the potential implications of different heritage policies can influence the outward and self-perception of the groups' identity, and their visibility. Lexicon is one way the authors paid attention to this question. The management of cultural affairs results, more often than not in their respective history, in a redefinition of local notions like "tradition", "culture", or "ethnic belonging". The authors in the present issue propose to investigate differences between the local conceptions of these notions and the supposedly universal ones used by UNESCO or the state, in order to analyse different relationships to the past and culture. Indeed, technical terms and concepts often do not imply the same actions of valorisation and conservation as initially expected by the institutions (Bondaz *et al.* 2014; Tornatore 2011). For instance, the term "community", employed in the five points of the 2003 Convention, does not refer to the same idea in the different countries. In practice, it can be translated in very different ways, depending on what it refers to within state policies (Jacobs 2018; Wang 2013; Zheng 2018).

15 Despite the political context of the three countries covered by this thematic volume, heritage, be it a natural landscape feature, a cultural practice or a material production, can also be a source of arrangement, negotiation or conflict at local, state and international levels (Appadurai 2001; Berliner 2010; Bondaz, Isnart & Leblon 2012). The institutions that shape heritage can also redefine local conceptions of transmission, tradition and safeguarding, and thus tensions may arise. Examining what exact place heritage holds for the local people is a perspective that helps foster the analysis of their agency[9].

16 By proposing a dialogue between fieldwork data collected in Russia, Mongolia and China, this issue seeks to document and compare heritage processes, focusing on specific cultural logics, thoughts and practices of the social groups under scrutiny. Case studies, because they are locally and demographically situated, allow the authors to focus on the voices of people too often silenced in these processes. The following papers tackle the question of heritage, looking at cultural policies, and the actors who implement them, to better emphasise local agency and the resulting subjectivations or consequences for the concerned groups. Embedded in a global phenomenon, cultural heritage can create a space of interaction between global models, state policies and local issues as well as ethnic thoughts. The authors gathered in this volume explore the narratives and cultural practices of, and about the past at the core of heritagisation, and the new values underscoring this process. Thus, they focus on different levels of heritagisation, from objects, actors or institutions, to the context and stakes of the process. They also address the different representations and discourses of heritage-making by confronting the varying notions of "tradition" and "safeguarding of culture". Within an empirical approach, the authors attempt to disentangle the state and local narratives to better understand what is at stake for local groups' (self-)representations, addressing by the same means the tensions that emerge in the background. These analyses raise questions: What variations and common features can be observed between visiting a museum in Russia, showcasing dances in Mongolia, or displaying "tradition" while participating in a festival in China? What are the local expressions or claims linked to these proceedings? What stakes do they respond to, and according to which projects?

Contributions

17 The volume opens with Pascale-Marie Milan's article, which focuses on Na (Mosuo) dances performed in touristic contexts, or at the villagers' discretion in the Lake Lugu area in the People's Republic of China (Yunnan/Sichuan), where she has been conducting fieldwork since 2007. The comparison of the performance contexts of these dances allows her to argue that to grasp the evolution of the meanings of the dances within tourist encounters, it is necessary to pay attention to their moral economy. This form of economy underlies the dances' efficiency and their stakes as a local practice at the root of their social organisation or as a cultural heritage enhanced as Intangible Cultural Heritage. The contrasting efficiency of the dances in a tourist context shows, however, that the Na people are not devoid of agency but that they tactically work to negotiate their ethnic identity in the tourist situation. Even though heritagisation came afterward to foster tourism development, examining the valorisation of "traditional Na dances" as heritage highlights the ambiguous trends of this notion in China. What the

terms “tradition”, “culture” and “transmission” mean, seems to be very different for the inhabitants and the national or international institutions.

18 Still in China, Shanshan Zheng’s article focuses on two dance practices performed during the Nianli festivals in Zhanjiang, Leizhou Peninsula, Guangdong Province. The author conducted an intensive investigation into the Han population of this region between 2015 and 2019, and compared this religious practice between villages. At the state level, the local Han population in the Guangdong Province is considered as a minority group, due to their preservation of a “traditional” way of life and the perpetuation of their own practices and representations. Focusing on the *nuo* dances and the dragon dance of Zhanjiang, S. Zheng traces first the heritagisation of these practices, and then highlights the way transmission models are reframed by the different actors, from practitioners to decision-makers, and at various levels, from local to national. She also analyses the commodification of these popular religious practices, considered before as superstitions, and nowadays valued as heritage.

19 The third article deals with material culture among the Nanai and the Hezhe in the Amur region, where Anne Dalles Maréchal conducted fieldwork investigations between 2011 and 2015. As a transborder people, both in China and in Russia, the Hezhe and Nanai develop embroideries within the context of policies on the safekeeping of “ethnic” crafts. Although material culture is believed in both countries to be “traditional”, what each group produces differs widely on either side of the border. In Russia, embroideries focus on the transmission of “older” practices from generation to generation. In China, the work of fish skins has led to the creation of new artefacts, unheard of before, to fit the touristic framework. The way the Nanai and Hezhe appropriate national policies in the creation of material culture is at the centre of this article.

20 The following article is still about the Nanai people in the Siberian Far East, who have been at the centre of Tatiana Bulgakova’s research for over thirty years. The author first questions the reception of the implementation of Russian heritage policies (mainly museums) by local communities. Their reactions combine scepticism as to the impact of said policies on actual “preservation” *per se*, and fear about the keeping and exposure of potentially dangerous religious objects (drums and spirit figures). On this latter issue, T. Bulgakova shows how museums have somehow become safe places for resuming some forms of shamanic rituals, thanks to the communicative space these institutions offer. In other words, the museum creates an environment where practices and relationships between Nanai and non-Nanai, humans and spirits, are renegotiated, thus displaying how the Nanai take hold of cultural policies.

21 The fifth article moves to the Altai Republic, in Southern Siberia. Clément Jacquemoud has been conducting his research among the Turkic-speaking ethnic groups of this region since 2005. In his paper, he analyses the repatriation and museumification of a 2500 y.-o. Scythian mummy in a museum renovated by the multinational gas company Gazprom. This study highlights the underlying tensions in the political management of cultural heritage. In this context, the mummy has become spiritually charged, and triggered the elaboration of complex rituals and behaviours to avoid the wrath of what is considered as a “disturbed ancestor”. At the centre of the article is the question of identity, whether self-assigned or attributed, and how it can be built upon heritage.

22 The next article takes us to Mongolia among the Oirat, where R. Blanchier analyses the *bii biyelgèè* dance. These dances figure both as a traditional practice performed by

minority groups and an item used by the government to display nomadic life. Indeed, the Mongolian national identity, based on the promotion of nomadic steppe pastoralism, not only relies on the features of the majority ethnic group of the Halh, but also on locally identified expressions from local groups. The latter are indeed perceived as reserves of "authenticity", thus embodying a fantasised, intact, pre-socialist world in connection with nomadism. R. Blanchier questions the heritagisation process of the *bii biyelgèè* within the broader framework of the redefinition of Mongolian national identity in a post-socialist context. He also looks at the transmission patterns of a dance considered as an "authentic art" among local actors, to better highlight the way these patterns are relative to heritage creation. Around the image of the bearer of the "tradition", whose life paths contrast with an ideal image, the question of identity-making processes and their relationship to political contexts is raised.

23 The last article takes place in the Republic of Karelia, in Northwest Russia, among the Veps, where Anna Varfolomeeva has been conducting her ethnographic research since 2015. The Veps have been extracting ornamental stones since the 18th century, and it has become part of what they perceive as their own ethnic heritage. This "traditional" activity is also staged as such by state institutions, like ethnographic museums and theme parks. But the issue of sustainability is also at the centre of the discourses on the practice of mining among the Veps, as this industry is taking its toll on the environment. With this case study, A. Varfolomeeva analyses the construction of ethnic discourses within wider state narratives on the Veps "traditional identity".

Museums, transmission, and agency: a comparative perspective

24 The articles gathered in this thematic volume have in common the discussion of the politics of representation of ethnic diversity and the way (self-)representations are negotiated locally. In the three countries under scrutiny, museums play an active role in disseminating the government's discourse on multiculturalism and the past, thereby attempting to strengthen the unity of the country. Small local museums have flourished as soon as minority heritage was to be valued. However, the arrival in 2004 of the notion of intangible cultural heritage in China (*fei wuzhi wenhua yichan*, 非物质文化遗产, abbreviated as *feyi*), along with the UNESCO conventions, has diversified the forms of representation and valorisation of ethnic groups. By contrast, Russian case studies show how much museums are at the core of heritage-making. In their articles, the authors show that museums offer a space (among others) for dialogue where local vs supra-local interests are discussed. For T. Bulgakova, museums allow the creation of an intercultural dialogue where a compromise can be found between two entities at first mutually exclusive, the tourism institutions which attempt to represent the Nanai, and the Nanai themselves. The museums also provide a safe space where rites can be reimagined with lesser spiritual impact on the Nanai. The same question arises in the Altai Republic, where the A. V. Anokhin National Museum of the Altai Republic allows the ritual treatment of a problematic deceased, the mummy. Becoming a kind of heterotopia, the institution transcends the desire for ethnic unity of the minority groups, beyond the wishes of the various decision-making bodies. The museum, as a place to rediscuss or redefine identity narratives, also appears among the Veps, where

it allows for the construction of a historical identity centred around the work of stones. Among the Nanai, museums help rewrite the life stories of embroiderers, thereby associating these biographical narratives to a form of identity.

25 Understood as practices and representations that were once considered "superstitious" by the communist governments attempting to modernise culture and society, so-called "traditions" have been revalorised through the processes of heritagisation to such an extent that groups formerly considered "backward" (see above), have seen themselves instituted as subjects of culture. This is the case of the Nianli Festival studied by S. Zheng in Guangzhou, which is perceived locally as a religious ritual and is nowadays valorised as a cultural festival through heritagisation. However, this kind of intangible cultural heritage, which bears witness to a desire for political intervention, has led to the transformation of the channels of transmission, as the figure of the "bearer" testifies. Some articles presented here show that new patterns of transmission emerge, or that transformations do not only concern the culture itself but sometimes the social organisation or the worldview of these peoples. For instance, R. Blanchier highlights the tensions that emerge from the implementation of safeguarding policies of a dance of the Oirat minority subgroups in Western Mongolia. He also examines the issue of transmission, in a context of professionalisation of a form of art supposedly corrupted or altered by Western, or Russian arts. In China, among the Na, or among the Cantonese Han during the Nianli festivals, the authors question the new channels of transmission set up when people perform within the framework of commodified practices. P-M. Milan and Sh. Zheng observed the transformation of transmission, from practices transmitted collectively to the valorisation of a single holder. Heritagisation of intangible cultural expressions also introduces the need for local people to incorporate new practices within older transmission patterns, as is the case for embroidery among the Nanai of the Russian Far-East, where an inheritance between generations is acknowledged. However, transmission can also be a matter of empowerment, a way to reappropriate a savoir-faire, as is the case for the Veps in Karelia, for whom the stone mining work, now in the hands of industries, is displayed as local heritage.

26 Several of these articles interrogate the way heritage policies or heritagisation processes exert pressures that change local cultures, and how people do not simply react to it. Each paper shows how people concerned by these processes creatively use – or not – the power they have to act on their own behalf. Communities, or "bearers", if we use the UNESCO lexicon, are acting subjects and, as such, they can interpret, adapt, resist or even subvert the framework they have to fit in. Acting this way, they sustain their visions of the world embedded in local histories, and try to carve out a place in the modernist states' agendas. A majority of the papers show how local people manipulate (self-)representations to negotiate notions of ethnicity and identity when they are compelled to do so by cultural instances. For example, Veps' agency can be observed in Northern Europe when they try to reappropriate their stone and mining savoir-faire as heritage in negotiation with large-scale industries. In Southeast Siberia, the Nanai react and somehow incorporate shamanist imagery in the work of professional embroiderers. They have also adopted the museum context as safe spaces for dealing with spiritually charged objects, and even to renew offering practices. Across the border among the Hezhe in China, there is a form of resistance when, despite UNESCO's efforts to revitalise "traditional"/ethnic practices such as, for instance, epic storytelling, people do not get involved with the official institutions.

Instead, rather than following UNESCO's impulse, they opt for a different practice, the traditional work of fish skins, when dealing with heritage. Still in China, in the Western Guangdong Province, heritage has led to new livelihood opportunities through the development of tourism, while in the Na case, it has led to the strengthening of an already existing tourism. Likewise, during the tourist festivities, the Na of Southwest China try to bend the Chinese representations of primitiveness or backwardness to define themselves as the tourists' contemporaries. In Mongolia, the actors of the heritagisation framework for the *bii biyelgèè* dance adopt relational positioning. Here again, it is the shaping of identities that is at stake. Whatever the relational positioning and modes of commitment of the actors, who have to navigate through heritage discourses and institutions, this "traditional" dance practice associated here with the Oirat minority "is valued as a cultural emblem of Mongolian national identity" (Blanchier, this volume).

27 Within an empirical approach, the seven contributions deal with questions regarding varying expressions of cultural heritage: engraving or carving, embroidery, dance, religion, archaeology, ethno-parks or ecomuseums, cultural tourism, etc. The authors specifically highlight the stakes, logics and limits of the thoughts and practices at play in the transmission and valorisation of cultural backgrounds in China, Mongolia and Russia. They also focus on the tensions underlying the (re)creation of culture, and how specific, and yet globalised contexts, shape a changing self-perception of collective social identity across these countries. By addressing heritage issues through the practices and discourses of those primarily concerned, those whose cultural practices are now brought to the fore, a contrasting picture emerges. For instance, the very terms of UNESCO's mechanisms illustrate the tensions between different systems of values, such as those held by heritage institutions or those prevailing in local daily life. The re-evaluation of what culture should be remains instrumental and often appears out of step with local postures, while giving rise to hybrid values that reflect the changing world inhabitants have to face. Moreover, the recognition system of bearers of cultural practices highlights some individualisation processes at odds with practices once collectively carried. However, the local participations of "bearers", communities or ethnic groups in heritage initiatives, show forms of reappropriation and implicit negotiation that illustrate their own concerns. Cultural values, such as transmission and legacy, are often reinvested. Within them, local populations try to reshape power relations, using their own means to tip the balance of power a little more in their favour.

28 Furthermore, economic goals pursued by governments have impacts on the local peoples: the commodification of their practices enables them to find means to improve their livelihoods, at the same time as it is integrating and subordinating them all the more to the modern nation-state. By shedding light on minority groups' voices, this volume issue aims at underlining reactions, resilience and agency at play when cultural policies are implemented at a local level. Approaching heritagisation comparatively, we hope to shed a new light on the very similar cultural policies between the three states to which each group may or may not conform, as well as the power and economic struggles that people face, while highlighting the similar cultural values and resources by which each minority actively engages with heritage.

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NOTES

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2. These are the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (signed by China in 1985, USSR in 1988, Mongolia in 1990), followed by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 (not ratified by the Russian Federation).

3. Bendix 2011; Bendix *et al.* 2012; Bondaz *et al.* 2014; Bortolotto 2011; Heinich 2009; for China, see Beaud 2015; Blumenfield & Silverman 2013; Bodolec 2012; Bodolec & Obringer 2020; Graezer Bideau 2012; Maags & Svensson 2018; Névot 2014; Padovani & Dutournier 2021; Shepherd 2009; Wang 2013.

4. China is more precisely a "unified, multinational country" (Ch. *tongyi de duo minzu guojia* 统一的多民族国家).

5. Ru. *korennye malochislennye narody Rossiiskoi Federatsii*.

6. Ru. *titul'nye natsii*.

7. The Halh Mongolian language is the official language, while other forms of Mongolian in the territory are considered "dialects" (Mo. *ayalguu*).

8. We are grateful to Raphaël Blanchier for his insights into ethnic issues in Mongolia.

9. The term "agency" explicitly refers to the forms of power people have at their disposal, the ability they have to act on their (own) behalf to influence other people, events, or interactions, and to retain some control over their life, even when caught between larger forces (Mahmood 2004; Ortner 2006).