

The Republic of China's Fantasy Frontier:

Shifting Portrayals of Mongolia in the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission

ALESSANDRA FERRER is a PhD candidate in the Department of Education at Kyushu University (744 Motooka, Fukuoka, Japan 819-1139). Her primary research interests include the politics of identity, notions of the “other,” and education (alessandra.ferrer8@gmail.com).

ABSTRACT: In 2017, the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) was disbanded after 68 years of operation on Taiwan, raising the question of how an anachronistic institution evolved as the Republic of China (ROC) underwent democratisation. Documentary analysis finds that until the end of military rule (1987), the MTAC retained a Han-chauvinist mission to civilise its “frontier” through development policy and reform. By the twenty-first century, rhetoric emphasising bilateral and international exchange emerged. However, MTAC literature continued to highlight the relatively higher status of Taiwanese development to that of Mongolia, even as espousal of political “Chineseness” had faded. As ROC statehood in the early twenty-first century has increasingly embraced Taiwanese “multiculturalism,” the history of the MTAC sheds light on a neglected but significant aspect of the evolution there of discourse on national identity.

KEYWORDS: Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, national identity, Republic of China, imperialism, democratisation, Taiwan.

Introduction

On 14 August 2017, Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen 蔡英文 administration officially announced that the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) would no longer receive funding from 2018 onward.¹ For a few days, the announcement received a brief flurry of media attention, with coverage highlighting the budgetary bloat of the “fat cat” (*feimao* 肥貓) commission.² At the end of 2017, after nearly 90 years of operation, the MTAC was officially disbanded with little fanfare. Despite its quiet end, the Commission's prolonged existence on Taiwan raises questions regarding how and why such a seemingly anachronistic institution survived so long, and how its mission and functions evolved as the nature of the Republic of China (ROC) regime itself changed.

The MTAC was originally established in 1928 with its headquarters in Beijing.³ The Commission was assigned two main tasks: (1) to “assist in governing” and (2) to “implement reform” in Tibet and Mongolia (Article 2), although its remit extended to the greater frontier in subsequent years (Lan 2017). In 1947, the MTAC was placed in the same rank as other national government ministries and affairs commissions, directly under the administration of the Executive Yuan (Article 3.16).⁴ After 1949, despite relocating to Taiwan along with the

rest of the ROC state apparatus, the MTAC continued nominally to pursue its original mission. For the next 68 years, a key function of the Commission was to produce literature on a range of subjects related to the Mongolian and Tibetan peoples and territories.

1. “蒙藏委員會年底裁撤?” (*Meng Zang weiyuanhui niandi caiche?* MTAC disbands at the end of the year?), *Taiwan People News* (民報), 15 August 2017, <https://www.peoplemedia.tw/news/bb84d28a-07a4-48a4-959f-dc9f39032c56> (accessed on 2 February 2021).
2. “人事費於7000萬僅53名正職: 傳蒙藏會年底熄燈” (*Renshi fei yu 7000 wan jin 53 ming zhengzhi: Chuan Meng Zang hui niandi xideng*, Cost of human resources is seven million for only 53 formal employees: It is said that the Mongolian and Tibetan Commission will turn off the lights at the end of the year), *Liberty Times Net* (自由時報), 14 August 2017, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/2162151> (accessed on 2 February 2021); “政院證實蒙藏委員會年底裁撤” (*Zhengyuan zhengshi Meng Zang weiyuanhui niandi caiche*, Government proves MTAC will disband by year's end), *Apple Daily* (蘋果新聞網), 15 August 2017, <https://tw.appledaily.com/headline/20170815/SOZWPQZZXUFY5Q74TE4TUMYGGI> (accessed on 2 February 2021).
3. Executive Yuan 行政院, 1929, 蒙藏委員會組織法 (*Meng Zang weiyuanhui zuzhi fa*, Organisational act of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/LawClass/LawHistory.aspx?pcode=D0000044> (accessed on 14 November 2022).
4. Executive Yuan 行政院, 1947, 行政院組織法 (*Xingzhengyuan zuzhi fa*, Organisational act of the Executive Yuan), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/LawClass/LawHistory.aspx?pcode=D0000044> (accessed on 14 November 2022).

However, over the same period, the political landscape both within Taiwan and in the wider Asia-Pacific region underwent significant change. Kuomintang (KMT) military rule ended in 1987, while the region saw a shift away from Cold War politics after reform in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the fall of the Soviet Union, and revolution in Mongolia. In 2011, on its now-defunct website, the MTAC portrayed its continuing mission as to:

(...) defend the aim of the ROC constitution, ensure the equal status of various ethnic groups, promote the regional autonomy of Mongolia and Tibet, enhance the economic and educational reforms in Mongolia and Tibet, foster Mongolian and Tibetan cultures, and respect their religious beliefs and social customs, in the hope of achieving harmonious ethnic relationships and protecting the ROC's sovereignty. (Pan 2015)

Thus, for many decades there has been a clear divergence between the ROC's effective sovereignty, limited to Taiwan and surrounding islands, and its national imaginary as reflected in MTAC documents. However, despite the MTAC's curious extended life on Taiwan, there is limited scholarship that explores the great volume of resources and output from the Commission since 1949. Some research has alluded to changes in the MTAC's work in response to shifts in the ROC's political context (Namgyal 2003; Pan 2015; He 2018), but questions remain regarding the extent and nature of such changes. Moreover, little scholarship has focused on the trajectory of official ROC portrayals of the Mainland's non-Han peoples after 1949.

While research on shifting official frontier discourse in the ROC on Taiwan is lacking, there are several notable works investigating the changing nature of national identity and statehood on Taiwan as compared with official ROC discourse prior to the retreat from mainland China. Looking through a lens of "territoriality" and focusing on mainland China as a whole rather than the frontier specifically, Chang (2015) investigates the contradiction between the official imaginary and political reality of national territory after 1949 as presented in the Government Information Office publications, the ROC Yearbooks (1951-2010). Chang argues that the state's decision to publish yearbooks starting in 1950 reflected the ROC's "territorial insistence" and a deliberate effort to demonstrate continuity in the state's legitimating ideology. Chang and Holt (2015) similarly argue for a continuity across the period of military rule with regard to official terminology for mainland China, with terminology chosen to demonstrate the ROC's rightful claim to sovereignty and to condemn the "usurpation" of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Only to some degree under Lee Teng-hui 李登輝 (1988-1999) did the ROC adopt more neutral language toward the PRC (Chang and Holt 2015), with a more localised interpretation of ROC statehood allowing for policy increasingly open to exchange and coexistence with the PRC (Rubinstein 2007). Under Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) President Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁 (2000-2007), localisation efforts begun under the Lee administration were further extended to pursue Taiwanisation to distinguish official ideology from China and Chinese identity (Chang 2004).

Consequently, analysis of MTAC publications provides an opportunity to showcase the role of "frontier" peoples outside of China proper in official constructions of national identity, and opens a hitherto neglected window onto ROC history. The evolving

portrayal of non-Han peoples and the relationship between China proper and its "frontier" raises questions regarding the legacy of Qing imperialism in the trajectory of ROC national identity and conceptions of statehood – already analysed by Leibold (2007) in relation to the early history of the ROC on the Chinese Mainland. But official ROC conceptions of the state's fantasy frontier in Central Asia have also formed part of the context for the emergence of contemporary discourse on Taiwanese identity. This investigation thus seeks to shed light on how the MTAC understood the state's relationship to its imagined "frontier," and how this understanding contributed to conceptualisations of ROC statehood and national identity after the regime's 1949 retreat to Taiwan.

Although the MTAC was charged with administration of Mongolia, Tibet, and other frontier regions, this paper focuses on MTAC documents related to Mongolia. The case of Mongolia, encompassing Inner and Outer Mongolia, stands out for its particularly complex geopolitical position between the former Soviet Union and the PRC during the Cold War. The case of Mongolia is also of particular interest due to its territorial complexity: the division between Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region in the PRC, and the independent Republic (formerly People's Republic) of Mongolia, further complicates investigation of shifting MTAC claims of sovereignty and portrayals of the region(s). The MTAC did not recognise the Mongolian People's Republic, even after its admission to the United Nations, and until 2002 instead referred to the country's territory as "Outer Mongolia," and the territory within the autonomous region in the PRC as "Inner Mongolia." Accordingly, narrowing the research scope allows a clearer understanding of the dynamics in the ROC's specific portrayal of Mongolia, including Inner Mongolia, "Outer" Mongolia, and Mongolian people more generally.

Spanning nearly seven decades, publications from the MTAC cover an expansive range of subjects and genres. Part of a larger ongoing project on the MTAC, the present paper focuses on themes related to the "frontier," national identity, and the imagining of a national territory. It addresses one principal question: How does the frontier imaginary of the MTAC illuminate the trajectory of official ROC discourse on national identity? More specifically, how has the MTAC portrayed the relationship between China and the Mongolian people and associated territories? Finally, how does the MTAC's portrayal of Mongolia shed light on official conceptions of ROC statehood? Before answering these questions, the following section first reviews the source material and methods.

Methodology

Data collection of MTAC publications was primarily conducted on-site at archival libraries in Taipei and via the Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Centre's (MTCC) online archival collection. MTAC publications largely consist of pseudo-scholarly articles and books on the history, geography, politics, and, increasingly in later decades, culture of Mongolia, Tibet, and/or other ethnic groups within Greater China. Many documents do not credit a specific author, thus appearing to channel the voice of the Commission or the Mongolian Affairs Office (MAO). For those works with a named author or authors, often contributors were former or current academics holding an administrative position within the Commission. Amongst the latter,

authors of the excerpted passages referenced in this paper include Guo Jijiao 郭寄嶠, former chairman of the committee; Wang Weifang 王維芳, former committee consultant; Liu Xueyao 劉學鈔, former consultant, office chief, and chief secretary; and Jin Shaoxu 金紹緒, former committee member. Of those academics without an official title at the MTAC, most were affiliated with university departments of history, politics, and multidisciplinary studies within Taiwan.

Adopting a Foucauldian understanding of discourse enables documentary analysis to highlight ideological shifts. Foucault (1974: 49) states that discourses are “not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention.” Consequently, following Foucault’s approach to history and discourse, analysis must prioritise the context in which the text was born, including both relevant historical legacies and contemporaneous factors. Under this framework, from Taipei’s public archival libraries and the MTCC website, 48 documents were chosen for review, with excerpts of 13 selected to illustrate certain trends. However, without a master list of documents published either for an internal or public audience, it is unclear what proportion of the total extant archive these numbers represent. Interpretation of emergent trends aims to illuminate the shifting conceptualisation of official ROC national territory relevant to the “frontier” generally and Mongolia in particular.

During initial readings several trends emerged, among them persistent reference to what amounts to a civilising mission in the state’s relationship with the Mongolian people. While a significant portion of current research is dedicated to investigations of early ROC history and its “frontier” (Leibold 2007; Chang 2015), rising discourses of popular nationalism in Taiwan (Hughes 2016; Wu 2016), and the ROC on Taiwan’s response to that discourse (Chang 2015; Hughes 2016; Dupré 2019), there is very little literature on the continued trajectory of the ROC’s mainland legacies, particularly those legacies related to its “frontier” and the problematic of the ROC’s Han-chauvinist civilisational hierarchy with regard to Mainlander peoples. Discussion of the ROC’s civilising mission is an essential part of the narrative of its transition from “Greater China” to “Taiwan” and thus forms a major focus of this project. The following section reviews the current literature on the ROC’s early history, its civilising mission, and identity politics from late Qing and republican eras to contemporary Taiwan.

The ROC, its “frontier,” and the MTAC

While the MTAC was officially established in 1928, its conceptual foundations were forged much earlier. Manchu imperialism during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) laid the groundwork for later Chinese conceptions of the nation, including governance of frontier territories (Rigger 2011). The Qing recognised five races in the empire, portrayed and conceptualised as one family (*wuzhong zhi jia* 五種之家): Manchu, Han, Mongols, Muslim Turks, and Tibetans (Harrison 2001). The Tibetan, Mongolian, and Turkic peoples were classified as separate from China proper, defined as the interior empire, and were organised as parts of the exterior empire of Inner Asia (Smith 1996: 9). Teng (2004: 9) argues powerfully for an interpretation of Qing rule as imperialist and colonial, characterised by “conquest” of non-Han territories with their “ethnically distinct, non-Chinese peoples,” and

their governance from a distant “imperial centre.” Through analysis of travel writing relating to the Qing’s island frontier, Taiwan, Teng finds evidence of a colonial civilising mission embedded in frontier policy.

In 1912, after years of rallying opposition to the Manchu Qing in the name of Han nationalism, revolutionaries succeeded in establishing a republic that claimed sovereignty over non-Han as well as Han regions of the Qing Empire (Harrison 2001). Abandoning calls for a pure Han nation-state, ROC founders invoked the concept of a “Five Nation Republic” (*wuzu gonghe* 五族共和), following the precedent of the Qing’s family of five races. In inheriting its national territory from the Manchu Qing, the newly formed Republic also adopted the Qing concept of “Inner China” and the corresponding “frontier.” According to Leibold (2007: 6), the frontier was key to forging a republican Chinese national identity: the frontier regions were imagined as home to a barbarian “inferior familiar other” dependent on culturally superior modern (Han) “liberators.” However, the political reality of republican sovereignty in these border lands was limited or non-existent. The MTAC was thus established in 1928, purportedly to assist in governance and engagement with local peoples in two of the Republic’s frontier regions.

This ethnic and civilisational hierarchy was embedded in republican era nationalism from its inception. The ROC’s hierarchical approach to nationhood outlined by Leibold (2007) is congruent with Osterhammel’s (2006: 8) definition of a civilising mission: “the self-proclaimed right and duty to propagate and actively introduce one’s own norms and institutions to other peoples and societies, based upon a firm conviction of the inherent superiority and higher legitimacy of one’s own collective way of life.” Osterhammel further identifies the mission to civilise as a key component of modern imperialism.

While Leibold (2007) ends his examination of ROC policy with the foundation of the PRC, this project investigates its lengthy afterlife following retreat to Taiwan (1949). Heylen (2011: 19) argues that after the ROC retreat, Taiwan remained on the periphery of an official “Chinese master identity” with Mainlander Han at its core. However, after the end of military rule in 1987, Mainlander-centric conceptions of official national identity faded in favour of a pluralist, localised conception of national ideology, with the emergence of an official “Taiwanese consciousness,” distinct from a Chinese identity (Liu, Hung, and Vickers 2005). Debate on the nature of this evolving consciousness continues.

The large body of research on national identity on Taiwan includes various investigations of both popular and official conceptions of Taiwanese nationalism(s), Chinese nationalism, and/or attempted navigation of the two. Hsiao (2003) argues that Taiwanese nationalism is a product of an oppressed ethnic group. Song (2009) also examines modern Taiwanese nationalist ideologies and the civic and ethnic component ideologies. Citing *territoriality* as a featured aspect of civic conceptions of nationalism and a particularly salient issue in the context of the ROC on Taiwan, Song includes consideration of how activists, politicians, and scholars have understood Taiwanese nationalism. Song argues that the first Taiwanese leader of the ROC, former president Lee Teng-hui, adopted a middle-of-the-road approach to accommodating Taiwanese nationalism by constructing a concept of ROC citizenship based on the sovereignty of those living on Taiwan.

Under Lee's administration, beginning in 1988, the KMT was increasingly pressured to engage in the movement for localisation by the rise of popular Taiwanese nationalism. Lee's administration oversaw the publication of the *Knowing Taiwan* (*Renshi Taiwan* 認識台灣) textbook, which restructured curriculum to centre Taiwan and present a "more neutral" account of Taiwanese and Chinese culture(s) and sensitive issues, such as the 28 February Incident and aftermath (Corcuff 2005: 160). Hughes (2016) examines first the process of "nativisation" of national identity, the KMT's response to democratisation, and the need to review what he terms the incongruous "China myth." Hughes concludes that over the course of the past three to four decades, "democratization has therefore allowed the steady growth of a pluralistic, civic sense of Taiwanese identity" (p. 167).

However, some scholars have been critical of the ROC's brand of localised multiculturalism. Hsiao (2005), examining discourse(s) of historical narratives in the Taiwanese literary world and their legacies, finds that nationalist recognition of pluralism on Taiwan involves a "strategic essentialism" of local ethnic identities. Hsiao subsequently identifies an "ethnisation" of politics in the ROC. Within the sphere of education, Liu and Lin (2011) link the localisation movement to Taiwan's multicultural education initiatives, but caution that some policy talk of multicultural education may be empty rhetoric. Research on language policy, especially work focusing on minority languages, often offers a more severe critique, arguing that policies promising to revitalise or centre minority languages are largely limited to extending recognition without significant redistribution of learning time or government resources (Tiun 2020; Ferrer 2021).

The large body of research on national identity on Taiwan includes various investigations of both popular and official conceptions of Taiwanese nationalism(s), Chinese nationalism, and/or attempted navigation of the two. Previous scholarship has surveyed a wide range of historical data and materials, including Government Information Office publications (Chang 2015), language policy (Dupré 2019; Ferrer and Lin 2021), and political speeches (Song 2009; Hughes 2016). However, these works rely predominantly on ROC materials related to Taiwan or China proper and do not incorporate official portrayals of "Outer China," the "frontier," or non-Han ethnic groups. These peoples and territories played a significant role in the unfolding of ROC history, reflected by the MTAC's high ranking within the ROC's government apparatus. Indeed, the MTAC's continued existence on Taiwan served as a symbol for the state's official conception of its statehood as Chinese and not Taiwanese. Consequently, the MTAC's body of publications remains an important source for a more nuanced understanding of the ROC's political history and development.

A brief overview of the institutional history of the MTAC on Taiwan

Since arriving on Taiwan, the MTAC's work has significantly shifted, falling into three largely distinct thematic periods. The first period (1949-1987), constructed under a Cold War political framework, was characterised by insistence on the mission to retake the Mainland. The island continued under military rule, and Chiang Kai-shek declared Taiwan to be a Three Principles of the People's "model province," emphasising the national duty to retake mainland

China (Chang 2015: 112). Mongolia, in addition to both Taiwan and other frontier regions across mainland China, was thus positioned at the periphery of the Han-Mainland core of the nation and conception of statehood. Consequently, despite being displaced from both Tibet and Mongolia, the MTAC continued to operate a variety of MTAC programs. MTAC documents consisted primarily of pseudo-scholarly national histories, ethnographies based on data collected from before the ROC retreat, policy reviews, and criticism of Soviet influence and CCP governance.

The second period (1988-1999) saw the early stages of democratisation and localisation across Taiwan, as well as the demise of a viable Cold War approach to politics as the Soviet Union fell. The 1990s saw a swell of Taiwanese and prodemocracy activists in the 1990s advocating, and at times competing, for their vision of a multicultural Taiwanese identity to integrate into official ideology. Still, mainland China remained the ideological core of the official conception of statehood, and the MTAC's budget saw little change throughout the 1990s, from 203,742,000 NTD in 1994⁵ to 229,223,000 NTD in 1999.⁶ Although the MTAC's work was not greatly impacted by local movements and identity politics, the Commission's approach to writing about Mongolia changed considerably following the liberal regime change in Russia and Mongolia. Most texts in the last quarter of the twentieth century shied away from the pejorative language of earlier MTAC criticism.

This transitional period gave way to the MTAC's third and final phase (2000-2017). Following the election of the first DPP administration in 2000, official notions of statehood and national ideology shifted to embrace Taiwan, both geographically and culturally, as the "national self" (Chang 2021). Consequently, issues of identity and nationhood could no longer be ignored by the Commission. The Commission's budget was gradually reduced to approximately half of the 1999 figure by early 2017 (115,105,000 NTD), with sizeable portions frozen.⁷ Furthermore, in 2012, the Commission was placed within the Mainland Affairs Commission (MAC), a considerable drop in status.⁸ Meanwhile, the ROC recognised Mongolia's independence in 2002 and established informal bilateral relations (formal relations being precluded by Mongolia's diplomatic ties to the PRC).⁹ With frequent appeals to Taiwanese democracy, multiculturalism, and exchange, MTAC documents consisted of largely scholarly histories and political analyses, professional and economic development programs, and cultural exchanges with Inner Mongolia and Mongolia. Finally,

5. Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan (DGBAS) 行政院主計總處, 1994, "歲出機關別預算比較總表" (*Sui chu jiguan bie yusuan bijiao zong biao*, Year-end summary table of budget comparison of agency's annual expenditure), <https://win.dgbas.gov.tw/dgbas01/83ctab/83c14F.HTM> (accessed on 20 October 2022).
6. DGBAS 行政院主計總處, 1999, "歲出機關別預算總表" (*Sui chu jiguan bie yusuan zong biao*, General table of agencies' annual budget), <https://win.dgbas.gov.tw/dgbas01/88ctab/88b140.htm> (accessed on 20 October 2022).
7. DGBAS 行政院主計總處, 2017, "歲出機關別預算表" (*Sui chu jiguan bie yusuan biao*, Table of agencies' annual budget), <https://www.dgbas.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas01/106/106Ctab/106C%E6%AD%B2%E5%87%BA%E6%A9%9F%E9%97%9C%E5%88%A5%E9%A0%90%E7%AE%97%E8%A1%A8.PDF> (accessed on 20 October 2022).
8. Executive Yuan 行政院, 2010, 行政院組織法 (*Xingzhengyuan zuzhi fa*, Organisational act of the Executive Yuan), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=A0010032> (accessed on 31 October 2020).
9. "Onward to Mongolia," *Taiwan Today*, 1 January 2003, <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?post=4126&unit=4> (accessed on 20 October 2022).

after the Commission's dissolution in 2017,¹⁰ its responsibilities and resources were reallocated to the MAC, Ministry of Culture (MOC), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (He 2018). The following discussion of my findings employs the periodisation laid out here, tracing the shifts in frontier discourse from the 1950s through the 2010s.

The ROC's civilising mission

Spreading civilisation: China proper and its frontier

For most of the twentieth century, covering both the period of military rule and the subsequent transition to democracy, the MTAC on Taiwan portrayed Inner China as centre, and Outer China as frontier, with civilisation flowing from centre to periphery. A depiction of this relationship can be found in *Frontier education*, a lengthy review of ROC education policy in its "frontier" regions, published by the MTAC in 1961. The book was part of the twelve-volume *Frontier collection* series, which covered a wide range of issues related to the "frontier" of the greater Republic of China. Each book ran with the same introduction, in which the "frontier" was defined as "Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Tibet, Xikang, and the southwest where Miao, Yi, and other groups live" (*Frontier education* 1961: 1). The series introduction then presented China's frontier as fundamentally different from most other countries' border regions: "Our frontier problem is not only an issue of protecting our borders and solidifying national security, but especially an issue of how to foster our various frontier brother-tribes (*xiongdì buzu* 兄弟部族), how to develop their economy, education, culture, and regional autonomy." (p. 2) The *Frontier collection*, including the 1961 *Frontier education* volume, imagines the "frontier" and the "tribes" who live there as younger brothers in dire need of aid and development support from China proper. In other words, the document portrays a relationship rooted in an official republican mission to civilise China's frontier, with particular emphasis on the issues of national security, aid, and development. Furthermore, the repeated inclusion of this distinct civilisational hierarchy in the introduction to the *Frontier collection* series suggests continuity of thought during the collection's publication run in the 1950s and 1960s.

Narratives of history were instrumental in establishing the ROC's civilisational hierarchy, in which China proper dominates its frontier. The *Frontier collection's* introduction, excerpted here from *Frontier education* (1961: 1), was explicit in positioning the "frontier problem" as a historical phenomenon "from before the Warring States period," wherein "incessant struggles" arose "between the Xia of the central plains and those nomadic tribes of comparatively low culture, surrounding all sides." The historical connection between the central plains of Inner China and the frontier was emphasised in many texts in both the first and second periods of the MTAC's operation on Taiwan. Furthermore, chronology was kept according to Chinese dynasties. For instance, in its recounting of pre-Yuan dynasty Chinese-Mongolian relationships, Chinese terms for nomadic peoples (defined as peoples eventually coalescing to form the Mongolian minority) were listed in succession according to dynasty, a pattern also observable in other publications further discussed below: *Central government administration of Mongolia and Tibet since the founding of the Republic* (Guo 1971) and *Survey of Outer*

Mongolia and introduction to tourism (Jin 1999). By exclusively using Mandarin terminology for these nomadic herders – Mongolians' alleged ancestors – and Chinese dynastic dating conventions, the historical narrative reinforced a Han-, or in the words of the MTAC, "Inner China"-centric perspective. In effect, the Chinese-Mongolian relationship thus presented "Inner China" itself as a permanent, cohesive unit. The MTAC's historical narratives centred the Han-Chinese perspective of history, failing to acknowledge or incorporate Mongolian perspectives or Mongolian terminology.

During the first and second phases (through the twentieth century), frontier discourse placed emphasis on ROC policies to spread civilisation, development, and education. MTAC works featured excerpts from the ROC constitution and policy documents, with tables of schools built in the frontier regions, and other such documentation of policy for Mongolia from 1911 to 1949. Language introducing these policies was not critical or reflective, but triumphant of the government effort it portrayed as promoting political, educational, economic, and cultural development (Yao 1954; Guo 1971; Jia 1988; Liu 1996). ROC policies were framed as significant, valuable, and as indicators of the ROC's civilising mission in Mongolia and other frontier regions.

Banditry and national defence

The narrative of victimisation at the hands of foreign imperialists and the CCP played a large role in MTAC documents. Written under an intertwined anticommunist, anti-imperial Cold War framework, this narrative portrayed China as a victim of Western, Japanese, and Soviet imperialisms, emphasising Soviet influence's corruptive power over the CCP. This theme was largely restricted to the first phase leading up to the end of military rule in 1987. Until the end of the 1980s, no text on Mongolia failed to mention either Russia/the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Japan. The series of secret pacts made by Russia and Japan in the early twentieth century were cited repeatedly as evidence of foreign imperial encroachment. Often, flowery language and idioms were used in these passages, such as the claim that the United Kingdom, Japan, and Russia "became co-conspirators" (*pengbi weijian* 朋比為奸) (Yao 1954: 45).

During the first (martial law era) and early second (transitional) phases of MTAC operation on Taiwan, publications passionately condemned communist policies and imperialist aggression. The book *Chinese communist "national minority" policy* (Chen 1983) harshly critiques the policy of the Soviet-influenced "communist bandits" (*gongfei* 共匪) as assimilationist. The term bandit was used by the MTAC and other official bodies on Taiwan following the retreat there in the late 1940s, and continued until 1987 (Chang and Holt 2015). The volume ends with the dire conclusion that the PRC's "national minority" policy is attempting to "finally eliminate the existence of their nations" by means of "class division and class struggle" (Chen 1983: 84). The text emphasised the oppressive and unnatural divisions resulting from Soviet-imported "Marxist-Leninist indoctrination" (*ibid.*), and sought to paint a portrait of Mongolian and other nationalities' victimisation. The text's insistence on

10. Executive Yuan 行政院, 2017, 蒙藏委員會組織法 (*Meng Zang weiyuanhui zuzhi fa*, Organisational act of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=D0000044> (accessed on 31 October 2020).

continuing Soviet influence over the CCP despite the rift between the two states since the 1960s was typical of ROC discourse during this time. Chang and Holt (2015: 63) explain that the Chinese Communist Party was seen as “but a special brand of Chinese [communism] bred by Russian [communism],” and therefore a foreign “evil” import from its outset, independent of contemporaneous Sino-Soviet relations.

Through the end of military rule, and for some years after, harsh criticism of communism’s impact on minority or former republican frontier nations continued. In the final year before the end of martial law, *The three way relationship of Outer Mongolia surrounded by Chinese and Soviet opposition* (Li 1986) targeted Soviet influence in Mongolia. Inflammatory language positioned Russia as a hostile, predatory power and referred to the Russian Empire and the USSR alike as “Russian bandits” (*E’kou* 俄寇). The document framed Russian and Soviet aggression towards Chinese Mongolia, and later support of an independent Mongolian state, as an attack on China’s frontiers. In another instance, the text accused the Russian Empire of “kicking [China] while she’s down” (*xiajing toudi* 下井投石) and “committing innumerable crimes” (p. 1).

To further expose the expansion and wanton violence of the Russian Empire and the USSR, that same book pontificated: “Having studied under the Tsar, the [Soviet] student thus surpasses the master, and goes one step further, using [rhetoric of] liberation as sugar coating to carry out their invasion” (p. 1). Following an introduction to this record of iniquity, the subsequent 41 pages comprise a table documenting major Russian (or proto-Russian) and Soviet depredations from the Song dynasty to the republican period. Accusations of Soviet imperialism also feature in *A brief discussion of Outer Mongolia from a geographical standpoint on national defence* (Jia 1988). Here the philippic is given an explicitly Cold War framing: “Repeatedly expanding, [Soviet] force can be used to resist American invasion, to carry out its communist world revolution, to be democratic nations’ shared enemy” (p. 37). While the MTAC depicted Soviet interest in Mongolia as fundamentally an attempt to extend its frontier region for security purposes, the main point served not to object to the use of Mongolia as a buffer zone *per se*, but rather to insist that Mongolia was not the USSR’s buffer zone to occupy. In fact, Mongolia’s function as a Chinese buffer zone was seen as especially necessary because of Soviet expansionism. Furthermore, since Outer Mongolia could not be expected to defend itself against Soviet influence, responsibility landed on the ROC to protect its vulnerable frontier.

During the 1990s, the narrative of victimisation was toned down. While discussion of the Soviet Union’s influence in Outer Mongolia, for example, still featured in a *Survey of Outer Mongolia and introduction to tourism* (Jin 1999), inflammatory language was absent: the pejorative “bandit” label for the now historical Soviet Union, the imperial and contemporary Russia, as well as the CCP was dropped, and terms such as “influence” replaced references to “aggression.” By the third (post-2000) phase, apart from scholarly texts with an explicit focus on history, MTAC documents generally omitted discussion of communism, Russia, or the USSR. No longer a Cold War enemy, and with informal relations established in 2002, the ROC’s priority shifted to making alliances with Mongolia. By the twenty-first century, MTAC documents no longer involved condemnations of imperial encroachment.

Social development and aid

In works published during the martial law period discussing ROC policy for “frontier” regions, emphasis on the central government’s leadership and generosity buttressed a vision of the ROC as pursuing a civilising mission. Until the early twenty-first century, references to support, advancement, and development were common tropes in discussion of the ROC state’s relations with its frontier regions. *Central government administration of Mongolia and Tibet since the founding of the Republic* (Guo 1971) pointed to the fact that it was the ROC that eliminated derogatory radicals, such as those associated with animals and insects (犬 *quan*, dog; 羊 *yang*, goat; 虫 *chong*, insect or worm; 豸 *zhi*, wormlike invertebrate), from the Chinese characters for “frontier peoples,” including Mongolians, Tibetans, and Hui, in the process of character standardisation. This note concluded emphasising how the law “showed the government’s respect for Mongolian and Tibetan social customs” (p. 9). Other policy notes included references to diversity of language and customs in the frontier regions, and the resultant need to adapt the central state’s governance according to local customs. In *Mongolian banner system* (Liu 1996: 32), this sentiment was reiterated with an eye to the future – stating instead that after reunification, it would be necessary to govern with sensitivity and respect for local customs.

In a similar vein of solicitude mingled with condescension, the issue of health was occasionally discussed in research on Mongolian society. *A survey of Mongolia* (Yao 1954) included a particularly vivid section on hygiene. While admitting that the MTAC’s efforts to promote better hygiene had not been successful, the text suggested these failures were primarily attributable to the rigid and superstitious nature of Mongolian society, which had “barely any hygiene to speak of” (p. 180). This claim was supported by various examples, ranging from “corpse abandonment in the wild” to accounts of Mongolians “going a whole month without washing their faces.” The high death rate was attributed to the lack of hygiene amongst the local population: “Mongolians do not treat their illnesses, and instead go to pray, and thus as a result each disease is passed around. Then, at a loss as to what to do, they let things take their course: death is everywhere...” (p. 181). This portrayal of hygiene characterised Mongolian people and customs as backward in the extreme: superstitious and irrational to the point of being unteachable. Failings of the MTAC’s advocacy efforts were blamed on the Mongolians themselves, portrayed as wilfully unreceptive to instruction in cleanliness. The amount of detail devoted to this topic was unmatched in other sections of the survey, indicating the special significance attached to hygiene as a marker of Mongolian backwardness and need for the civilisational uplift that the ROC state could offer.

After the onset of democratisation in Taiwan from the late 1980s, references to the specific ROC contributions to the “civilising” of Mongolia diminished. Within Taiwan, the healthcare system underwent many changes of its own. Lu and Chiang (2011) characterise republican attention to public health as limited to expanding vaccination and control of some infectious diseases until the establishment of the Department of Health in 1971. After 1971, the state became active in reforming the healthcare system with the goal of healthcare for all. After achieving this, in 1995 the objective shifted to establishing high performance measured against a “global”

standard. With rapid development of the healthcare system on Taiwan overlapping with the shift towards coexistence and exchange with its former frontier communities, the MTAC's portrayal of hygiene in Mongolia also underwent a transition. For example, the 1999 text *Survey of Outer Mongolia and introduction to tourism* touched on disease and healthcare. This information was presented within the book's guide to commercial tourism in Mongolia. Discussion of ROC efforts to reform its (former) frontier were omitted.

Still, this text continued the familiar theme of the relative cleanliness, health, and safety of the ROC in comparison to Mongolia. The subsection on disease issued a warning echoing the rhetoric of earlier decades linking hygiene and civilisation, although now in the context of the MTAC's promotion of tourism in Mongolia. While not explicitly condemning Mongolia for its superstition, this document drew attention to the difference in knowledge between its presumed Chinese-speaking readership and the Mongolian public. A section subtitled "Diseases currently necessary to take precautions against" begins with the statement:

Everyone knows that when traveling, the scariest thing is for a disease to arrive and plague the body. Especially when going to Outer Mongolia, this piece of wide-open land, if you get sick in a place where there are few people, it becomes even more difficult to cure. (p. 124)

There follow statistics related to the number of medical care facilities, types of common diseases, and health threats pertinent to visitors. While not touching on the issue of hygienic practices in Mongolia, the text warns of the lack of medical resources and development in the area, simultaneously stressing the presumably elevated knowledge and expectations of visiting Taiwanese/Chinese.

With a shift in tone, discussion of health in Mongolia continued into the twenty-first century. In 2014, the MTAC's journal *Mongolian and Tibetan Quarterly* published a report titled "Mainland Inner Mongolia medicine and health professionals visit and exchange to Taiwan" (MTAC MAO). Language in this report differed considerably from the previous era's detailed depiction of disease and death, instead placing emphasis on exchange, bilateral harmonious development, and cooperation. The health objectives were also distinct from those that concerned the MTAC in 1954, focusing on women's health, hospital visitation, and other issues (Yao).

Still, the subject of health, hygiene, and medicine maintained its presence, spanning all three phases of the MTAC's existence, from the 1950s to the 2010s. Although the tone and focus changed over time, there remains an essential assertion of the ROC's superior health and hygiene practices. Both twentieth-century portrayals of Mongolia as dirty and diseased and twenty-first-century images of ROC programs to foster the development of Mongolian healthcare serve to signal the ROC's virtues: good health and hygiene. The persistent appearance of this topic and relational superiority of the ROC also suggest that health and hygiene had become important aspects of ROC (or Taiwanese) identity.

To conclude, it appears that throughout the twentieth century, the MTAC continued to produce material reflecting an essentialist Han-centric approach to nation and the concept of territory, reflective of the assumptions underpinning its earlier active civilising mission. Indeed, despite the numerous changes in the international landscape

in the 1970s and early 1980s, including the ROC losing its United Nations seat in 1971 and formal relations with the United States in 1979, MTAC publications maintained a strict Three Principles of the People approach to national identity. The MTAC's ideological consistency is congruent with diplomacy through 1987, with the ROC persistently referring to itself as "free China" (Rubinstein 2007). Shifts in both domestic and foreign policy began in 1988 under Lee Teng-hui, including adoption of "pragmatic diplomacy" (ibid.), efforts to localise the state (Chang 2004), and increasing cross-strait economic exchange (Su 2009). However, under KMT leadership through the 1990s, branding of the ROC outside of Taiwan continued to feature Chinese culture, history, and identity (Chang 2004). The ROC's China-centrism did not simply mean that it focused on the Mainland – although it did do this – but more importantly, that it looked at the Mainland with a Han-chauvinist gaze.

Some change did occur during the transitional era, namely the end of MTAC preoccupation with the former frontier as a buffer zone and national defence priority. This shift was primarily reflective of the changing international relations landscape and the end of a viable Cold War framework. Especially when considered in tandem with the continued discourse of Han-centric historical narratives, paternalistic accounts of social development and distribution of aid, it is evident that ROC attitudes toward the Mainland shifted only in regards to its international standing vis-à-vis Beijing, rather than in its relationship with its former frontier nations. In other words, throughout the twentieth century, although the nature of the MTAC's rhetoric in its description of "frontier" peoples changed in its degree of condescension, assumptions of Mongolians' subordinate position in a civilisational hierarchy, and associated assumptions of an ROC mission to civilise, persisted.

Towards international exchange: Taiwan, Mongolia, and Mongolians in the PRC

Beginning in the third phase in the twenty-first century, with the recognition of Mongolian independence in 2002, international, cultural, academic, and economic exchange came to dominate MTAC discourse on Mongolian Affairs. Both *From the pastures with love* (MTAC MAO 2012) and *Taiwanese Heart with Mongolian Passion* (MTAC, National History Museum [Taiwan], and Mongolian National History Museum 2007) featured only introductions to Mongolia and Mongolian people, primarily limiting content to that on climate, geography, and collaborations between Mongolian and Taiwanese cultural institutions. "Taiwan" effectively became equivalent to the ROC in official discourse, with the DPP administration of Chen Shui-bian abandoning the pretensions to sovereignty over the Chinese Mainland. Indeed, a very different discourse was presented in *Taiwanese Heart with Mongolian Passion*, with appeals to multiculturalism, international exchange, and cultural collaboration. The text's introduction from the MTAC began with a comparison of Taiwan and Mongolia to highlight differences in climate, people, and culture, further noting: "Due to the two countries' distance, Taiwanese people have had few opportunities to see Mongolia's unique culture." The artists' visits and subsequent exhibition collaboration were then explained as part of the MTAC's attempts to "enrich Taiwan's philosophy of multicultural values" (p. 2), an important allusion to Taiwanese multiculturalism. The introduction

provided a sense of distance and exotification between the grass prairies of Mongolia and the island of Taiwan. Furthermore, published in 2007, the introduction marks the MTAC's introduction of the term *country* (*guojia* 國家) to refer both to Mongolia and Taiwan.

Both the "2013 Academic seminar on trade and culture in Taiwan and Inner Mongolia" (MTAC MAO) and "Inner Mongolian medical and health professionals visit Taiwan for exchange" (MTAC MAO 2014) focused on subject-specific exchange. Both articles championed the exchange of knowledge, and situate such exchange in the contemporary world, with little to no reflection of past histories. Again, terms related to the ROC were replaced with Taiwan, and the term China was used only in reference to the Mainland. The PRC was hinted at with references to cross-strait cooperation of different sorts. Language focusing on the development and promotion of cooperation and exchange were repeated throughout the two reports. In essence, by focusing on mutual growth, both articles looked toward the future and avoided the past.

Furthermore, the article "2013 Academic seminar on trade and culture (...)" fused images of Taiwan's technological advancement, its divergent culture, and exchange with Inner Mongolia, stating:

(...) this seminar allows Taiwan and Inner Mongolia to consider how to use the excellent resource industry of Inner Mongolia with Taiwan's leading digital technology, green energy, and service industries to create new opportunities for economic and trade cooperation between the two places. At the same time, Inner Mongolia's cultural significance and heritage can serve as a reference and an opportunity for introspection for Taiwan's marine culture. (p. 17)

Omission of the past in favour of depiction of future enterprise between two distinct territories signalled official determination to detach Taiwan from its former frontier and the Mainland more generally. Uncommon in the previous periods, the images and references to Taiwan-specific culture and geography, calculated to highlight its distinctiveness from a distant (resource-rich, industry-poor), exotic land, aided the twenty-first century effort to build the Taiwan brand as distinct, modernised, and developed.

In other documents, vestiges of past civilising discourse remained, though expressed in less derogatory terminology, and emphasising what *Taiwan* specifically has accomplished for Mongolia. The *Mongolian and Tibetan Quarterly's* "2011 Judicial seminar for Mongolian judges" detailed a list of Taiwan's efforts to assist in establishing Mongolia's judicial system. Certain keywords framed Taiwan's assistance, including mention of Taiwan and Mongolia's closeness and the "good interaction and exchange" for the "establishment of the two countries' justice departments," noticeably continuing to use the term *country* in reference to Taiwan and Mongolia (MTAC MAO: 16). However, although appeals to mutual, country-to-country exchange were frequently inserted throughout texts in the third phase, documents' content tended to focus on "Taiwan's" contributions to Mongolian development. These narratives of official benevolence communicated a relative developmental superiority, clearly an important facet of official national identity across eras.

Discussion

Over the course of its 68 years on Taiwan, the MTAC evolved from a symbolic link to "Greater China" into an advocate of intercultural and international exchange after the start of the twenty-first century. Throughout the era of military rule, the MTAC presented itself and the ROC state as the rightful government of the Mainland, including its vulnerable but vital frontier. By 2000, the MTAC had lost most of its bark, taking on a friendlier tone in its portrayal of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, while maintaining an implicit Han-chauvinist, Mainland-oriented approach. Following the trend towards localisation in Taiwan and official recognition of Mongolia as an independent nation in 2002, the MTAC began a process of reinventing itself and the ROC as embodiments of Taiwan as a multicultural, Asian island nation. Accompanying this shift in conception of statehood was a move away from highlighting the ROC state's relative civilisational superiority over Mongolia to a more subdued and tactful, but still unmistakable emphasis on Taiwan's economically or developmentally "advanced" status. Review of documents published by the MTAC on Taiwan has revealed the utility of Mongolia as vehicle for showcasing the superiority of the ROC (however defined) as a civilised, developed, and magnanimous nation.

The subject of medical development and healthcare remained a prominent feature throughout the MTAC's lifespan. ROC advancement of medical science and healthcare have been key domestic policies for decades (Lu and Chiang 2011), with an increase of special attention paid to the healthcare system after the ROC was expelled from the United Nations (UN) and UN subsidiary body, the World Health Assembly (WHA) (Alexander 2020). Particularly since the 1990s, foreign aid aiming to improve healthcare infrastructure has become a mainstay in ROC diplomacy, in part as an attempt to gain access to the WHA (ibid.). Alexander highlights the aspect of virtue signalling in foreign diplomacy, and pinpoints the ROC's foreign aid and domestic health industry as key markers in the ROC's drive for international recognition. While it is evident that health and hygiene are key aspects of ROC identity, and have become even more prominent in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (Lee et al. 2020),¹¹ the history of the MTAC complicates Taiwan's contemporary foreign aid and diplomacy. The issues of health and hygiene were primarily raised by the MTAC to showcase ROC or Han civilisational superiority vis-à-vis the portrayal of inferior hygiene and healthcare in Mongolia. Future research may look directly at the legacy of the ROC's civilising mission on its "frontier" and its influence on contemporary diplomacy's virtue signalling.

On the question of national identity, twenty-first century MTAC depictions of Mongolia reflected a new Taiwanese consciousness that in some respects echoed the old ROC conceptions of a civilisational

11. Lee et al. (2020) provide an insightful overview of the online forum "Covid and Governance: Global and Social Solidarity," the first event of a series jointly held by the North American Taiwan Studies Association, the European Association of Taiwan Studies, the Japan Association for Taiwan Studies, and the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*. Selected speakers in the forum discussed official discourses of the Covid-19 pandemic in the ROC on Taiwan. This included exploration of the online hashtag #TaiwanCanHelp and official efforts to showcase Taiwan's advanced medical care, foreign aid, and superior pandemic policy to argue for inclusion in the World Health Organisation and deflect criticism.

hierarchy and civilising mission vis-à-vis Mongolia. This argument that official discourse on Taiwanese consciousness adopts an essentialist view of civilisation and identity can also be seen in research on marginalised groups within Taiwan itself, including migrant spouses or “new immigrants” (Cheng and Fell 2014) and Taiwan indigenous peoples (Chi 2016). The change in self-appellation to Taiwan corresponded to a greater shift in ideological positioning. The ROC moved away from imagining Inner China as its national centre and toward a conceptualisation of the ROC as rooted in Taiwan. While the ROC has ceased to press for sovereignty over Greater China, its portrayal of Inner and Outer Mongolia maintains notions of a

civilisational hierarchy. Rather than being rooted in a grand five-nation Republic, the ROC manifests its superiority according to a regional Asian hierarchy, wherein Taiwan serves as the exemplary centre of an advanced, multicultural, democratic statehood in Asia.

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