

How is the Mongol culture represented in  
Mongol films and documentaries?

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October 2017

## **Abstract**

Films and documentaries, as a production of modern society, clearly record and represent the development of Mongol culture. They also sensitively reflect and represent the impact of problems on individuals and society. The usual lifestyle of Mongol people used to be nomadic, affected by trend of globalization and urbanization, but the nomadic lifestyle does not suit the modern community anymore, things are changing. Thus problems arose. The Mongol traditional culture was created by nomadic lifestyle. When this traditional life has changed, people no longer living in yurt on isolating grassland, everything will change. In this situation, people start to ponder: who are we? Where do we come from? However, nothing is simply isolated. The original culture keeps being affected by other cultures and developing. People continue to struggle between the modern and traditions. However, culture cannot return to the past, and then people want to find a balance. These problems have been shown in many films and documentaries, such as *The Two Horses of Genghis Khan* (2009), *KHADAK* (2006), *The Story of The Weeping Camels* (2006). In this dissertation, I will analyze these, using Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity.

## 1. Introduction

Influenced by modernity and politics, the conflict of cultural identity is becoming a serious issue in the world. In modern society today people want to find the “one true self” from one’s own original culture (Hall, 1996, p. 223). However, as Hall (1996) analyses in his essay, the “home” is not there anymore. The process of cultural development is irreversible. Many films and documentaries are representing the conflict between modern and traditional culture.

Urbanization has significantly influenced cultural changes. The nomadic culture of Mongol is over 700 years old, and during which time the whole cultural system of Mongol has evolved. Due to urbanization and various other reasons, people have moved to cities and created a new lifestyle. This is a huge and inevitable change for Mongols.

As a Mongol person who grew up in the city, the impact of change on Mongol culture has had a profound impact on me. Similar to other Mongols who have left their traditional Mongol grasslands, I think a lot about my cultural identity issues. Modern Mongols want to try everything new, however they also want to protect their culture, which was created by a long period of nomadic lifestyle. Memories of ancestors, and traditional culture connect people together. These are the warm and soft parts of our memories. While Mongols cannot discard traditional culture, we also need to look forward to the future. Mongols are trying to find a balance between all of these things.

These changes are clearly and sensitively represented in films and documentaries. The themes of these films and documentaries concern problems associated with significant impacts of lifestyle changes. These have been shown on many aspects of Mongol traditional culture. Nariya’s (2016) book *Liaowangzhe* has analysed that the Mongol culture has important aspects such as: mother’s love; father’s hero spirit; the spirit of Tenger (autochthonous deity of Mongol). In this dissertation, I will discuss films and documentaries from these aspects.

## 2. Cultural Identity

The change of culture is the inevitable result of factors beyond our control (Hall, 1996, p. 231). Mongol traditional culture is developing in different ways and is represented in different aspects. It is always affected by other cultures, but it still has the soul at their center. “Cultural developing” is a phrase with emotion, it can have both negative and positive connotations. For some, it means growth and a better future, while for others, it means going far away from traditions. Some young people would like to accept the change, however, on other aspects, traditions also need to be protected. There is perhaps no right answer to this argument. Thus, “change” can sometimes mean to create.

“Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1996, p. 222).

Culture is not stagnant. It is something that is continually being invented as society progresses. It is a process that from “one” to “another”. On this process, people start to thinking about the “who we are?” “Where are we come from”? It is question about the “one true self”. Cultural identity issue is a frequently mentioned concept (Hall, 1996).

Hall has analyzed this issue in two ways. The first point is the general meaning of cultural identity. He said:

“The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 1996, p. 223).

The soul of indigenous culture is related to the common historical experiences,

customs and the spirit from the ancestor. These sorts of the cultural codes provide us, as “one people” (Hall, 1996)

However, for the people who had experienced diaspora by various reasons, cultural identity will be a more complex issue that needs to be considered. In this dissertation, the word “Mongol” is used to refer not to the nationality, but to the ethnic group comprising all Mongol people living in Mongolia, China and Tuva, and diaspora spread across other countries (Janhunen, 2012). After the age of the Mongol Empire, Mongol have been controlled separated by other regimes and (Bulag, 2010). The People, who “leave” their “homeland”, will lose the connection with the original culture. They keep being changed and affected by other cultures. It is not only because of losing connection with “homeland”, but it is also the result of colonization of regime. “Colonization is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content” (as cited in Hall, 1996, p. 224). Bulag has also argued this issue in his book: “Mongols in China have become symbolically central to China’s self-representation” (Bulag, 2010, p. 2,3).

I am a Mongol person who grew up in the city. My family belongs to a tribe of Mongol empire. After the process of historical migration, our tribe settled down in the Inner Mongolia region. After a long period of time, the Mongols who stay in north of Mongol region were independent and created the Mongolian People’s Republic country by the help from Soviet regime. Other tribes that stay in Inner Mongolia region are control by China’s regime (Bulag, 2010). This migration process, not only changed the culture, it also brought people under a different political regime. In order to establish contact with the past, one needs to cross not only the border, but also transcend the differences that different political regimes have brought. When we try to establish contact with the original culture, we often find that we have changed on both sides of the border. The past is gone. The original homeland has been changed as well. The “brain” is being controlled and by other factors and culture is developing from “one” to “another”. Then talk about the cultural identity issue will be difficult (Hall, 1996). The “true selves” that we should follow is Mongolia or Inner Mongolia? There is no correct answer here. After long periods of time, they are all developing “as ‘framed’ by two axes or vectors” (Hall, 1996, p. 226). They have one start point, but

they are going to different direction. The cultural identity issue changes from “being” to “becoming” (Hall, 1996).

Secondly, Hall talks about what we have become. He says:

“Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (Hall, 1996, p. 225).

The process of cultural change is difficult and contradictory. With the influence of Chinese culture, Inner Mongolian culture has infused some Chinese elements. At the same time, Mongolia has been affect by Russian influence (Janhunnen, 2012). An interesting point to note is in the development of language and the inclusion of new words. Many words that are used today, such as computers, networks and passport, did not exist in the ancient times. In Inner Mongolia, the Mongol vocabulary has remained largely unchanged and not many new words have been invented. Chinese loan words are used where new words are needed (Bulag, 2003). While in Mongolia, the new words are drawn from European languages. And it is common practice to use English or Russian words in sentences (Janhunnen, 2012).

The past is a fact, but the culture will always be a developing process. People struggling with the cultural identity and they want to find a connection with the “homeland”. After being developing, we have lost that connection. Hall said:

“Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1996, p. 225).

We cannot return to the past, because history and social development will not return to the start. Mongol is no longer the nomadic group that it used to be; it is a new

world that has undergone a process of change. This change has come from within, brought about by migration of the Mongol people as well as from outside, brought about by influences from other countries. And all this has led to the creation of the modern Mongol culture of today. However, it does not mean we have lost our “soul”. As Hall mentioned: it is like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already “after the break”. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth (1996, p. 226). People want to find a balance between the past and the future, but it will always have Mongol soul inside.

### **3. Traditional culture represented in Mongol films and documentaries**

#### **3.1 The spirit world of Mongol people**

At the beginning of the book *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the author records: "There was a blue-grey wolf, born with his destiny ordained by Heaven Above. His wife was a fallow doe. They came crossing the Tenggis" (as cited in Nariya, 2016, p. 6). This is the legend of the origin of the Mongols. In the legend, the Mongols are the offspring of the wolf and the white deer. This shows why the Mongols spiritual world has close contact with nature. Thus, the wisdom of the Mongols is related to and derives from nature. In the process of adapting to the characteristics of the region, they could distinguish the difference of seasons, weather and habitats of different animals. A Mongol who lives on the grassland can predict the approximate location of sheep by analyzing the footprints and stool they leave behind. In the film *The Story of The Weeping Camels* (2006), the father knows the pregnant camel will give birth to a baby tonight, because her nostril is open big enough. They also know why the mother camel doesn't want to feed her baby and how they could make her change her mind. The profound understanding of animal and plants reflects the Mongol respect for life and awe of nature; it also reflects their rich spiritual world.

In ancient Mongol empire, the original religion was Shamanism. In 13 and 14 century,

Manchu government use Buddhism to control Mongol tribes (Heissig and Tucci, 1980). That is why Mongol culture is both influenced by these two religions. Mongols believe in reincarnation. They believe that everything in the world is a perfect circle. The concept of reincarnation is derived from Buddhism (Nariya, 2016, p.28). In Sanskrit, reincarnation has a similar meaning. They believe once something is gone (or dies), it will return to the world in another form. In the film *The Cave of The Yellow Dog* (2005), the girl buries her puppy. She put her puppy's tale under its head, because they believe it can make the puppy become a human in next life. They also believe when people got things from nature, which should return back in another way, it make things complete. They think nature gives people everything for life and people should give back in another way (Nariya, 2016). For example, in most of the Mongol film, such like *The Story of The Weeping Camels* (2006), *Two horses of Genghis Khan*, (2009), *Eji* (2010), etc., people always sprinkle milk towards the sky when they praying, which symbolizes returning something important to nature. The milk symbolizes life, because milk is important food for life. Another example is when people move house they must clean up the space the tent stood on and then cover the place with soil. It is believed that this returns the place to its original form (Nariya, 2016, p. 28). We could find it in film *KHADAK* (2006) , Bagi's family move to town, the area they left is clean and complete. Also, some Mongols choose to celestial bury the dead, which means that their bodies feed animals- vultures, eagles and wolves and grown from the soil as plants. Because they think they got food from nature, then should return it thus. In the film *Urga* (1991), when a Russian man exclaims to a Mongol that he saw a body being torn, the Mongol person replies, "I know, it was family member, Tu Muer - Aka. He belongs here (nature)." That means nature gives us life, after a human dies, we need to return the body and life to nature.

The spiritual world of the Mongols is mysterious. The Mongol also believed in the existence of the soul, they think everything has a soul, which is affect by Shamanism (Heissig and Tucci, 1980). In film *The Cave of The Yellow Dog* (2005), the mother said: when people die, his soul will never die. Shaman is medium between human and nature. They could communicate with Tenger and soul, convey information from them to human (Heissig and Tucci, 1980). Tenger is an autochthonous deity of Mongol. It has different meaning of god.

“Tenger is realization of the spirit, it is the each aspect of the reality of existence, it is the movement of the cycle, also it is the perfect derivative of some kind of regular pattern that be summoned” (as cited in Nariya, 2016, p. 31).

The force of Tenger gives Mongol people the right of being a good person, who has a personality of right-minded, honest and tolerant (Nariya, 2016 p. 31). This mysterious force of Tenger is the core of our spiritual world. We do not know whether mysterious power really exists. What makes it really exist is that we believe it (Nariya, 2016, p. 27, 28). It is the will that makes it to be true and also makes it exists. This power is created by the connection between Mongols and the natural world is strengthened by the trust and respect they have for each other. This is not something that existed only in the ancient society; it is something relevant and necessary in today's world. This spirit is subtly manifested in the Mongol personality. It forms the character of the nation, and shapes human behavior. Also the Mongols spirit is accompanied by the development of Mongol history and society. In Mongol films and documentaries, this spiritual power is usually expressed through a common event: a mythical story, or details of life. The directors find some special events as a primer to express the spirit and the changes of inner world. In the next section I will analyse it from three different aspects: Mother's love; father's hero spirit; relationship between human and nature.

### **3.2 The three parts represented Mongol culture in Mongol films and documentaries**

#### **- Mother/Love, Father/ Spirit/ Horse, Human & Natural world**

“能够发现独特的事务，并且能够使它和与之匹配的事务完美的融合，这才是一部电影诞生的基础。” (The basis of the film being created, is that the important point of view should be captured from normal life and then have opposite events to match it (Nariya, 2016, p. 34). In Mongol films and documentaries, directors usually start with special events, which could express the attributes or characteristics of Mongol society.

It might be unique or it might be a very common occurrence on Mongol grassland. It can be from daily life, from a mysterious story or from an old song. This special event could extend whole story.

Mongols believe the mother is like the ground that gives birth to everything; and the father is like the sky that contains everything (Nariya, 2016, p. 35). The Mother symbolizes nature and love. And the father represents a hero who has power and courage to protect the family. Especially in Mongol films and documentaries, they are distinctly visible. I will analysis it more detailed in the part of Mother/Love and Father/ Spirit/ Horses. In a nomadic lifestyle, the man uses his power to make money or earn food. The role of mother

always gives their love and cares to family. They are tender and considerate from female's nature gift. That is why family members all rely on them and respect them. The woman takes care of the family and makes food, while the father always plays a hero role in family. The fathers have power to protect the family and children always worship their father when they are little. The relationship is shown in figure 1 above.

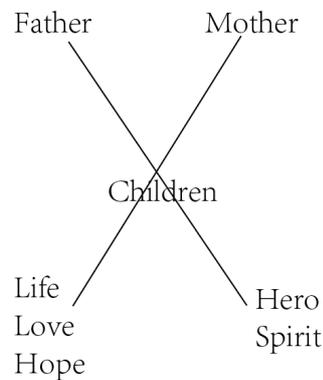


Figure 1: The relationship of family and spiritual world (Nariya, 2016)

However, because things keep changing in the new world, it leads to problems. As the following examples between these two periods shows. In the movie *Tuya's Marriage* (2006), the roles of men and women are exchanged because Tuya's husband's spine is damaged and cannot work. Tuya then carries out the heavy labor while her husband stays home to take care of children. A scene in the film shows Tuya going out to graze the animals. Her husband asks the child, standing on the top of the Ger (Mongol yard), to watch if his mother is coming back. Actually, he cannot stand this life, but there is no choice. In the end, Tuya could not stand the heavy labor; the doctor tells her that her spine, is too seriously damaged and, if she continues to work, she faces paralysis. After much thought, her husband tells her to divorce him, take the children

and find a healthy man. Tuya, left with little choice, agrees to remarry. But she wants to take her husband and her children to the new family. Eventually, her husband commits suicide in a nursing home. In the old lifestyle, the role of women and men in the nomadic Mongol family is irreplaceable. Men have to do lots of heavy labor that they cannot give life and maternal love to the child. But for this film, they live in the period between these two, but still maintain the nomadic lifestyle, which can must bring some problems.

### **3.2.1 Mother / love**

In Mongol culture, the mother always plays the central role in the family. In the film *The Story of The Weeping Camels* (2006), the director chooses to start the film with the footage of a mother making milk tea. After making milk tea, she prays in front of the Ger. She uses her left hand to hold the bowl, gently dips the ring finger of her right hand in the milk tea and sprinkles it towards the sky. Then, dips the milk tea again and touch her forehead and prays at the same time. This is a solemn ceremony that is carried out at the start of everyday. The director uses the character of a mother to complete this action because in Mongol culture, it is the mother who gives life to their child. A mother symbolizes life, love and hope. In most of the films and documentaries the mother has been chosen to do these actions. Many of the scenes that follow this opening sequence are related to the mother and motherhood. For instance, the grandmother is making milk tea and preparing food for the family, which is an important reflection of love.

In the film, a little camel had just been born and a herdsman cuts some fur off the mother camel. Then a female character in his family uses the mother camel's fur to weave the reins for the baby camel. The Mongol people believe that this symbolizes the bond between the mother and the baby camel. The mother's fur holds her love for the baby. This clip not only reflects love, but also expresses the respect of life.

The camel in the movie has spent two days giving birth to her baby; she has suffered great pain. Hence, she does not like her baby and refuses to feed it. That is why the

baby camel has become very weak. The colostrum of the Mother camel is essential for the baby camel to create his immunity. The baby camel is crying with hunger. The shepherd drags the baby camel to stay with its mother, but she still refuses to feed him. Therefore, the host family decides to conduct a ceremony to soothe the mother camel and make her love her baby again. They invite a musician to play the Molin Khuur (a Mongol traditional stringed instrument). The musician takes the instrument out of the box. Firstly, he carefully ties a Hatag (Khata, a traditional ceremonial scarf) on the instrument and hangs it on the camel's hump. By this, he is trying to connect the instrument and the camel and believes he can communicate with the camel through the music. When the camel hears the beautiful sound, she starts to calm down. At the same time, a female character is touching her fur and singing a Mongol long song. They drag the baby camel to get close to his mother. She is no longer irritable: the song has aroused her maternal instinct. Finally, the mother camel accepts her baby.

Many more Mongol films and songs have made maternal love their central theme. One example of this is the film *Two Horses of Genghis Khan* (2009), the main character Urna finds an old lady who is very good at singing. After introductions, the old lady helps her and kisses her forehead. The sequence shows an extension of this theme of maternal affection- showcasing it through a character that isn't the biological mother but more of a mother figure.

“All these films are examples represented Mongol traditional customs. It is the culture that could make Mongols get together. As Hall analyzed in his essay “Our culture identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared our cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’” (Hall, 1996, p. 223)...

The nomadic lifestyle creates the culture deep in a Mongol people's mind. But for the modern society, it also brings some new problems. In modern society, people live in the city and do not need to do much heavy labor. Both men and women can go to work, but Mongol women experience more pressures, because the whole family is always dependent on her. The culture has lead to the rates of single mother to grow. (World trade press, 2010) even though the mother and children will always be the

center of family that will never change. The man joins the family or separates, then another man will join again. It is like a circle that will never stop (Nariya, 2016). It is an era of “post- nomadic society”. People all have independent identity. It is not a person belongs to another. This issue leads to many children to not knowing their fathers. In that time, lots of films and documentaries have shown the children looking for their father or wanting their father’s love. In the film *Small Room (1994)*, a boy is waiting for his father to come back home all the time. In another film called *A letter for father in Ulaanbaatar (1961)*, a child does not know anything about his father. He really wants to have love from his father, so he sent a letter to his father without an address on it. He decided to go and look for his father in Ulaanbaatar. Everything has two aspects; for the new era, the old culture expectations must lead to problems.

### **3.2.2 Father / Spirit / Horse**

“If a man has no horse, it’s like he has no light in the eyes” (Eji, 2010). Mongol culture often connects masculinity, the Mongol spirit and the horse together. This is derived from the ancient Mongol culture of war- a man with a horse who set out to conquer the world. These three elements cannot be separated. This culture also has similarities with Native American culture. For the most of the Native American, horses are remain vastly important to them.

“...As objects of pride, as tokens of tradition, and for the ancient values they help channel into a difficult present: pageantry, discipline, prowess, concern for other living creatures, and the passing of skills across generations” (People of The Horse, 2014).

In recent Mongol films and documentaries, the representation of the grassland culture is gradually changing. New technology gradually changes the life. It makes economic development speed up, and then leads to Mongol culture rapidly changing and being effected by other cultures as well. In Mongol area, the horse is not the best transportation anymore. In film *Urga (1991)*, a Russian guy takes the husband to the town and they take his horse as well. In the city, he is riding a horse on the busy street.

He looks at other people who ride bikes or cars and people look back at him. He is like a kid who is curious about everything and he does not understand the ways of those that live in the city. It is totally different world. Some clips in this film show the conflict in the protagonist: He falls asleep on a carousel and has a dream about a beautiful city. In another clip, he sees someone with a baseball cap, and goes to buy one. In rest of the film, most of time, the main character is wearing the hat that he has bought from the town. He is unsure of which life is better for his family. All the same, he buys a television and takes it back to his home.

On the other hand, in modern society, people are more focused on the value that things can bring. In my project, in the second trip filming, I met the horseman Yalit. He is running Naadam festivals every year. He chooses to use Mongol horses for the competition. However, for marketing, Mongol horses have not much economic value. For competition, the European horses have more advantages than Mongol horses. This issue directly lead the numbers of Mongol horses are rapidly reduce. But the horse for Mongol people is not only an animal or tool that could bring money; it also represents their spirit. Yalit said “no Mongol horse, no Mongol man”. But for modern economic marketing, this is a serious issue that Mongol people need to consider.

Everyone has different points of view about culture changing. The people from traditional Mongol families always look for the right way to balance the modern and traditional culture. But on the process of seeking, they experience a struggle in their mind: which one is right? Which one is better? In the film *Urga* (1991), a man called Bajatu who is riding a horse, on hearing the sound of thunder, he immediately opens his red umbrella. The horse is in the traditional culture, but the umbrella is not. Riding horse does not need the umbrella. In here, Bajatu is a signal of the modern society is coming. In some clips, he holds a speaker while singing Mongol songs and wandering on the grassland. These modern elements have no connection with the nomadic life, but the director uses these different elements to show the beginning of change. These footages are a very interesting part of this film. The character takes the red umbrella everywhere; he also likes to bring new things back from the town: fruit, toys, poster, etc. He is also inventive and makes up stories. He shows photos of a man from a film poster and tells people it is his brother who lives in the America. People do not

believe him and think he is crazy.

The culture has been visibly influenced by other cultures. There is a contradiction in the ethnic identity; at the same time, these changes and contradictions are highlighted in films and documentaries. In the film *Urga* (1991), when the main character carrying the television, has a rest on the way home, he has a dream. In the dream, he is riding a bike on the isolated grassland, when he sees Genghis Khan and a group of armored soldiers riding horses come to him.

Genghis khan: Are you a Mongol?

He: Yes!

Genghis khan: Where is your weapon?

He: what?

Genghis khan: Where is your horse? Where is it! Are you going to join the war? He: No, I just came back from the town and I've bought a television.

Genghis khan: What is that?

He said: It is a television that his wife wanted.

Then, Genghis khan asks a soldier to destroy the television and drags him behind the horse. They inflict ancient punishments on him. He shouts, "I am a Mongol people!" But the soldiers do not listen to him. They burn his bike and everything that is modern. When he wakes up, the two horses still stand near him, carrying the television. Actually, the conflict between modern society and traditional culture had already in his mind. In this clip, it was showing the straggle in his mind: when he wants to try new things does it mean he betrays the traditional culture? Actually, he is thinking about the issue of cultural identity and if he leaves the old lifestyle if his culture will be lost or affected by other cultures. Hall (1996) has clearly answered this question in his essay. Also, in this film, the main character has shown his point of view. After he wakes up, he performs the dance of Mongol wrestlers on the grasslands and going to the distance. At the end of the sequence, there is a rainbow, and there is an eagle flying in the sky. In this part, wrestling hand-style jump is a formal action, which is always reflects the spirit. In a lot of description of the film can be seen. In the film *Garid magnai* (1990), the wrestlers dance like the eagle before the beginning of the

competition. This is a serious form to express the spirit like the Maori Haka. After these deliberations in his mind, he has found the right answer. He is not going to stay in tradition, or stay in the modern without traditional culture. He needs to create his own life between these two. He uses the body language to show the Mongol spirit. In the distance, the rainbow reflects the beautiful future, and the eagle flying reflects the freedom. In this clip also relate to Hall's theory. Cultural identity is a matter of "becoming" and "being". The identity that we need to seek is in the future, as well as in the past. In the film, he choose dance like traditional way. The essence of culture did not change (Hall, 1996). Hall said, "Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture.... It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return" (1996, p. 226).

### **3.2.3 Human & Natural world**

The essence of life is the process of balancing with the nature (Nariya, 2016). In the Mongol culture, ecology is managed by natural world, and life is how to find its place in it. They link their body to the spiritual world of nature and build the relationship between the Mongols and nature (Nariya, 2016). The Mongols believe that the nature made life in this world, and the life should respect and follow the rules of natural world (as cited in Nariya, 2016). If people take things from nature, then they should return back in another way because this view builds the balance of human and natural world.

Mongol films and literature often reflect this viewpoint. For example, before drinking liquor, Mongol people always pray first. They dip their ring finger into the liquor gently and sprinkle it towards the sky, to the ground, and then they start drinking. That small ritual is a way of thanking the god and the earth for everything that is provided in life. In the film *Two Horses of Genghis Khan* (2009), a craftsman took wood from a tree to make an instrument. Before the tree is cut down, he sprinkles milk on the tree, ties Hatag on the tree, reads the scriptures and prays. He then

proceeds to cut the tree after completing this ritual. In Mongol culture, people pray all the time. Every time they take from something they pray and thus, give first. In the film *The Story of The Weeping Camels* (2006), people dressed in new Mongol customs, take their best food and bring blessing of Hatag and come to the oboo (a place for special ceremonies) where the Lama is praying.

Lama: “我们，蒙古戈壁的人民，尊敬的自然和他的神灵，现在人类在地球上抢劫她富有的财宝，出走的神灵，应该保护我们地域的艰难的天气和疾病，我们必须记得我们不是地球上最后的生物，我们现在祈求宽恕，以便让神灵回来” (*The Story of The Weeping Camels*, 2006).

(Mongol people who live on Gobi respect nature and Tenger: Nowadays, human rob from nature for worldly treasures. The gods that should protect this world from natural disasters and diseases are not here. We must remember that we are not the last creatures on the earth. Now we praying for forgiveness, and then the gods will come back.)

The relationship between human and animals is special, particularly in Mongol culture. Human and animals are interdependent and this gives rise to mutual respect. In the film *The Cave of The Yellow Dog* (2005), as discussed previously, the little girl and her father bury a dead puppy. The father tells her that if you put the puppy's tail under his head, it would be reborn as a human. In the film *The Story of The Weeping Camel* (2006), the hostess asks if the camel would give birth that day. And her father responds that the camel's nostrils are become bigger, and big enough. In a nomadic setting, there is no equipment that can measure when the animal will give birth or how much milk it will produce. They all rely on long-term experience and observation to judge what will happen. On the one hand, there is no scholar on the grassland, while on the other, they think that the power of Tenger will help them find the direction. There is a delicate relationship between human and nature. One cannot use science to calculate. Mongol people believe that everything has a soul and that this soul cannot be controlled by science.

The environmental pollution and destruction is a very serious problem all over the world. When nature is destroyed, the Mongols feel the pain. In the film *KHADAK* (2006), the main character Bagi cannot only hear animals, he can feel what they feel

and can see the world through their eyes. The Shaman says that there is an ancient soul in his body. The ancient soul wants him to deliver a message from nature to humans. There is a sequence in this film where the government orders people who live on the grassland to move to the city because of a plague that would kill the animals. People are forced to relocate to the city and once they move into apartments, they cannot have animals anymore. Bagi has to say goodbye to his horse. He ties the hatag to the horse's head and prays for it and sets the horse free before leaving. After Bagi's family leaves the yart and they are on the way to the city, the horse returns to their original home but there is nothing there, only the memories of things that once were. The horse kept walking around the site where they used to live, capturing the smell of the place. Suddenly, Bagi has a premonition of his horse being shot and killed. He cries in pain. At that time, he has lost his home, and his best friend. Later in the story, even in a factory, Bagi hears the cries of sheep and horses. This is an example of how Mongol people belong to the natural world, but in the modern society, the destruction of environment issue is becoming more and more visible. In the film *Two Horses of Genghis Khan* (2009), a lady speaks of how her generation was very respectful to nature, and how they loved, revered, and worshiped it. She also complained: but now, the people are different. People came to find the gold, coal and other natural resource. They destroyed the environment, a lot of toxic substances leaked into the soil. This issue the old woman talks of is a global one, but in the Mongol film, this issue is more brutal and frustrating to the characters in it.

#### **4. The Effect of Urbanisation**

The nomadic way of life created the Mongol culture. However, it can no longer adapt to the rapid economic development. At the same time, it also cannot satisfy the material and spiritual needs. In this modern world, urbanisation affects the transformation of traditional lifestyle a lot. It has two characteristics: firstly, it is inevitable and secondly, one of its consequences is confusion.

In the film *Urga* (1991), the little boy has found a plastic bag from the case of a television. He wears that bag as a dress until the end of the film. This kind of sequence (the confusion over the “new”) has been shown a lot in the modern Mongol films and documentaries. In the film *The Story of The Weeping Camels* (2006), two kids ride camels to the town. On the way, they stopped and rest in a place where a nomadic family has put up a tent. There are many new things in this Ger: television, refrigerator and other electrical appliances. These things attract the two children. The younger boy doesn’t want to go; he repeatedly asks, “Can we go to buy a television?” His brother tells him that it would cost them at least 20-30 sheep in exchange. “But how can we give away so many sheep?” “Also we need electricity. We may have to give away all the sheep.” After they go back home, they ask their father: “Can we have a television? We really want to have one.” But the Grandpa says, “We do not need that. Otherwise you will stay in front of that glass box all the time, it doesn’t have any benefit for you.” This conversation reflects the different attitudes that different generations have with regard to novelty and technology. But at the end of the film, they buy a television. In every shot of the kids in the city, they are curious about everything. They buy ice cream, they are very cautious while touching the beautiful bikes and television sets. Everything is novel and fun, the kids even do not want to leave. In this clip, the shot is from the back of the two kids riding camels. There is a car coming over, and it contrasts with the children riding camels. It is a powerful shot to show the children looking forward the modern life and their imagination of the future. The ways of living in the grassland and the city are completely different. The people living the two lifestyles are always comparing and observing each other. No matter how one chooses, it cannot be perfect at all. In this film, the two kids are going to the city, they are riding camels with traditional clothes, but other children, riding nice bikes, look strangely at them. Then, the kids go into a building and pass through a dance classroom. The girls are dancing with ballet costumes. There is a dramatic contrast in this shot. Also, the two kids go through the classroom and keep looking inside. They see children wearing Russian style uniforms, learning Mongol traditional instruments. However, they belong to different worlds now, but they still could find something connect them together. “Since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother.”

(Hall, 1996, p. 226) In these shots, they look at each other, imagining the life of the other. In Hall's essay, he also has given an example of this issue. "Think of the identities as 'framed' by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture'. It shows another view of cultural identity, "is much less familiar, and more unsettling" (1996, p. 226).

However, for the people who living between these two eras, once they get into it, they feel lost and confused when the lifestyle has totally changed. In the film *Eji* (2010), the main character says: "I am a professional poet, working in the museum in this city. But I even cannot write a good poem. I do not know how much difference there is between poets and herdsmen, so I gave up the job and I am going back to the grassland that I missed so much."

The Mongol people who grow up on the grassland belong to nature. If one day, for some reason they must leave, they will be lonely, helpless, or even depressed. This passive state is uncomfortable and is forced upon them. They do not live happily in the city. True happiness is derived from memory, spiritual happiness and satisfaction. This is depicted in the film *KHADAK* (2006), Bagi's family is forced to move to the city, leaving only the marks of Mongol Ger behind. In this sequence, Bagi's horse is hovering around this place. There is an empty sheepfold in the clip. This shot is very long, it also shown a few pieces of old furniture left in the open grassland, the broken wooden door floating; it all looks lonely and helpless. Inside the truck that Bagi's family has been shoved in, no one wants to speak a word.

For people who grew up on the grasslands, living in the city is lonely. People are constantly looking somewhere to find their spiritual world. In the film *KHADAK* (2006), one clip particularly impressed me. In a room of an apartment in the city, there is nobody, but the radio is turned on, playing a tradition Mongol long song. Bagi's grandfather is doing his own work in another room. He doesn't speak a word. The shot passes through the door to film him, showing the audience his alienation. When Bagi comes home, there is a conversation between the grandfather and Bagi. The Grandfather says: "How poor we are at defending ourselves, the spirit of the place where we were born and of the water in which we were bathed, and even the

stone of the riverbed are dreaming of us. Even the souls of our ancestors are dreaming of us.”

People always show great hope and expectation on films. In the film *KHADAK* (2006), Bagi and his friends save animals and give them freedom. The animals run back to grassland. Herdsmen are running out to claim their own animals. People lift the shackles of imprisonment and go back to the grassland. It is a happy ending, but in real life, modern Mongol people are still confused. In the process of urbanisation, it is difficult to find a balance. Some people want to, some people have to, and some people are struggling. Everyone has a different reason. This is a never-ending topic. This is shown the film *Two Horses of Genghis khan* (2009), when Urna says to the herdsmen: “In here, you still keep the traditional lifestyle, it is very nice. I hope you could keep protecting our culture”. But the man's eyes reflect a dilemma. When he hears this, he hesitates and cannot decide which life is better.

## **5. The future**

Everything has different aspects-both positive and negative. When cultural integration happens, urbanization is bound to follow. This is the process of developing. Young people are struggling with a sense of lost culture, because they do not want to forget who they are. Of course, cultural integration also has a positive side. But as for the nomadic culture- it really is disappearing. In the film *Two Horse of Genghis khan* (2009), Urna's grandmother has a broken instrument that was handed down to her from ancient times and she keeps that like a treasure. She really wants to repair that, so she asks Urna take this instrument to go to Mongolia and find a place where he can repair it. But no one could fix it. In this clip, the old instrument represents the traditional culture. The craftsman would like to use modern techniques to repair, but Urna does not agree. She knows we cannot return to the past time anymore. Even though the skill was very valuable, we couldn't go back. It is an irrevocable progress; the original “Mongol” is no longer there. As Hall said, “it has been transformed. History is, in that sense, irreversible”. In Hall's essay, he uses Edward's words to analysis the original identity is “imaginative geography and history” , which helps

“the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dreamtising the difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (as cited in Hall, 1996, p. 231).

In the film *KHADAK* (2006), when Bagi feel confused for this era, Tenger is talking to him:

Bagi: where I am?

Tenger: You cannot ask where, you should ask is when. Here its future, it is a possible future.

Bagi: Do you mean in other words, the future is only possibility?

Tenger: There was a time when man took from nature too much. The desert has moved, life is extinguishing. The desert will always win.

Bagi: The animals are still alive. I must go to find them now.

Tenger: the word now doesn't make sense.

Bagi: Then here has no meaning either.

Tenger: You are right. You may get lost, don't be afraid. Your ancestors are dreaming of you. The Tenger is watching you.

People in the modern world keep finding a balance. We cannot lose the culture, but also we need the new things. This balance is our future that could create the new way to live. Young Mongols should not only protect their culture, but also need to have hope in the future. Mongol culture needs to develop. Do not be afraid to inherit the spirit and value from the traditional culture. And get the energy from the natural world. Do not leave the “soul”. Do not refuse the change. We need to build a new world.

## **6. Conclusion**

The conflict of culture between the tradition and modern is a popular issue nowadays. Culture is changing and developing all the time, thus, cultural identity is becoming a complex topic. In this dissertation some typical examples of how films and documentaries clearly record and represent the development of Mongol culture have been drawn on. Through my analysis of these examples I have illustrated how people

in Mongol region also have suffered the struggle and confusion of cultural change on many aspects such as individual identity, spiritual and natural world. I have also highlighted how these aspects do not exist independently, but instead they all have a sensitive connection. However, people do not have any choice to say “no” about their culture changing. This does not mean that traditional culture should be thrown away, because the “soul” is central to Mongol culture and cultural identity if we are to build a future.

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