

# The Prospects for Inner Mongolia's Independence Movement

For the People's Republic of China (PRC), the nationality problem in Inner Mongolia is not as acute as that of Tibet or Xinjiang. However, since 1979, many disturbances have broken out in the autonomous region, including one ten thousand-strong demonstration in Hohhot. According to Document No. 13 issued by the General Office of the Inner Mongolian Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Committee in 1994, there were at least twenty-three cases of disturbances or separatist activities in the years 1981 to 1993. Over the last two years, important incidents have included a petition signed by some four thousand cadres of Inner Mongolia's 120 CCP and government organizations (including about 3,700 CCP members) calling for the reorganization of the region's Party and government leadership and for the dismissal of the CCP secretary and the chairman of the autonomous regional government, the escape to Mongolia of a group of Inner Mongolian officials carrying confidential documents, and a demonstration provoked by the arrest of two leaders of a cultural group on charges of counterrevolutionary and separatist activities.

Since 1989, gatherings, petitions, and demonstrations demanding democracy and independence have occurred with increasing frequency in Inner Mongolia. This trend has probably been encouraged by the introduction of democratic reforms in neighboring Mongolia and calls for independence among the former Soviet republics.

Most Inner Mongolian civic organizations or groups, such as the Inner Mongolian Liberation Front, the Inner Mongolian Committee for National Autonomy, the Asian Mongolian Freedom Front, Justice, the Inner Mongolian Alliance of Human Rights, and the Yikezhao Meng National Culture Association, advocate the merger of Inner Mongolia and Mongolia to form a single independent Mongolian republic. Demands for independence have thus become apparent in Inner Mongolia.

When the two leaders of an Inner Mongolian cultural group and six other Mongolians were arrested by the Chinese in May 1991, about one thousand students demonstrated in front of the PRC Embassy in Ulan Bator. They called for an end to repression in Inner Mongolia, and they asked the PRC to release Inner Mongolian political prisoners and to end its assimilation policy toward Inner Mongolia. According to one of their leaders, the demonstrators were actually calling for an end to PRC rule in Inner Mongolia. Protest activities of this kind have made the Chinese afraid that Ulan Bator could become a base for Inner Mongolian "separatists."

The Democratic Party of Mongolia's open call for the "merger of the three Mongols" (the Buryat Republic, Inner Mongolia, and Mongolia) in February 1990 evoked a response in some quarters in Inner Mongolia. Then at the World Conference of Mongolians in July 1993, one of the seven Inner Mongolian delegates was elected chairman of the World Federation of Mongolians and another was elected to the Federation's committee. The "merger of the three Mongols" is similar to the Japanese-backed pan-Mongolian movement of 1919. Therefore, the PRC blames outside interference, in particular Japan, the United States, the Dalai Lama, and Isa Yusuf Alptekin (an advocate of Xinjiang independence from East Turkestan) for the separatist movement. Obviously, Beijing's leaders are deeply concerned about the internationalization of the country's "nationality problems" and interaction and cooperation among independence advocates in Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

Participants in the pro-independence activities in Inner Mongolia are mainly young cadres, students, and teachers. To cope with the increasingly serious unrest, the Inner Mongolian State Security Office issued a document in March 1992 that prescribed education in the Marxist outlook on nationality and the CCP's nationality policy and insisted that prompt action be taken against all signs of unrest. In Document No. 13 (1994), the General Office of the Inner Mongolian CCP Committee also reiterated the necessity of paying close attention to both stability and economic development. Judging from the PRC's ruthless suppression of other pro-democracy activists within its borders, it is reasonable to predict that it will also strike hard on Inner Mongolian dissidents.

Indeed, the Mongolian nationalists' dream of a "Greater Mongolia" would be hard to realize. Mongolians account for only a small percentage of the total population in Inner Mongolia, and the region is included in the Beijing Military Region. If any serious unrest were

to break out there, the tanks could be in Hohhot within seven hours. Therefore, as long as the PRC remains politically stable, separatist aspirations in Inner Mongolia are unlikely to bear fruit.

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