

# Study on the "Homeland" Consciousness of the Mongolian People

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**Abstract:** *This article delves deeply into the "homeland" consciousness recorded in Mongolian language texts such as Jangar and The Secret History of the Mongols, exploring its background, origins, components, and evolution. The study aims to clarify the Mongolian ecological cognition and ecological protection awareness, revealing the embedded humanistic spirit, the ideas of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, and the underlying values.*

**Keywords:** *Mongolian "Homeland" Consciousness, Ecology, Ecological Awareness, Ecological Environment, Jangar, The Secret History of the Mongols*

## Introduction

"Homeland" refers to the garden within one's home and, broadly, to one's family or hometown. Synonyms include countryside, birthplace, hometown, and family, and in English, it translates to home, homeland, hometown, or family. A homeland is the place where humans naturally exist throughout their life journey, providing comfort and a sense of security. While people are mobile, throughout the long history of human evolution, those at home praise the beauty and warmth of the "homeland," while those far from home seek it. This search for the homeland's beauty and the longing for one's hometown, or the journey back home, has become an essential theme in human history and a significant content recorded in many oral literatures and documents.

In China, there have been records of the environment, ecology, and homeland since ancient times. China's first anthology of poetry, The Book of Songs, includes many poems reflecting homeland consciousness. In the Mao's Preface, six pieces are explicitly mentioned as works that express longing for one's hometown: the poems about a woman from Wei who was married away and missed her home, Bei Feng·Quan Shui, Wei Feng·Zhu Gan, Yong Feng·Zai Chi, and works expressing the longing of scholars for their destroyed homelands, Shi Wei and Shu Li. Another piece, Wang Feng·Yang Zhi Shui, conveys a soldier's homesickness.

In The Book of Songs-Cai Wei, the lines "When I left, the willows were green and lush. Now, as I return, it is snowing heavily," depict the change in scenery from the time of departure to the time of return, metaphorically reflecting the changes in one's homeland and expressing a longing to return home and the bittersweet realization that things have changed upon returning.

Similarly, in European literature, one of the Greek epic poems, The Odyssey by Homer, tells the story

of the Greek general Odysseus, who left his homeland to fight in the Trojan War for ten years and then wandered the seas for another ten years before finally returning home. Odysseus' journey back home was arduous, even more challenging than the war itself. He led his soldiers through various temptations and difficulties before finally reaching his homeland. Only in one's homeland can one live comfortably and securely, embodying a strong sense of territorial awareness and ownership. The struggles faced by Odysseus on his way home exceeded those of the Trojan War, highlighting the difficulty and distance of his return journey.

Globally, there are many artistic creations centered on the praise and longing for the homeland. These works, using simple language or true records, describe the building of the homeland and the stories of defending it, showcasing the relationship between people and land, humans and nature, and ethnic groups and their homelands.

## **1 The Concept of "Homeland" in Mongolian Literature**

Mongolian literature contains numerous records and stories about the concept of "homeland." In Jangar, the homeland is described as Bomba, while in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, it is referred to as Agolhvi (rear, logistics) and Burhan Khaldun. The concept of homeland in Mongolian literature manifests in various forms, reflecting both derivative relationships and parallel developments. Due to the nomadic lands and cultural customs of different tribes, as well as the diverse Mongolian dialects and vernaculars, a complex system of names and references to homeland emerged.

The Mongolian people have long lived a nomadic lifestyle, deeply rooted in the vast steppes and natural environment. This way of life has not only shaped their unique social culture but also profoundly influenced their understanding, depth of perception, and emotional attachment to the concept of "homeland." The nomadic production mode provides the backdrop for the Mongolian concept of homeland, with movement acting as the driving force. The expansive grasslands, deep forests, and deserts form the ecological environment in which the concept of homeland was developed. To date, the discovered literature and oral heritage record the ecological awareness of the Mongolian people.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Mongolian consciousness of homeland derives from their long-term production, life, and survival in the blue sky, white clouds, mountains, forests, deserts, and steppes. Therefore, the Mongolian homeland includes the vast grasslands' tangible homelands, the imagined homelands in heroic epics, and the homelands celebrated in oral literature and folk songs. These homelands stem from people's praise for their hometowns, gratitude for their homes, and longing for their homelands.

In Mongolian culture, the concept of homeland is not just a geographical location or a place of birth, life, and survival. It also serves as an emotional anchor and spiritual refuge. Names of mountains and rivers like Altai, Khangai, Burhan Khaldun, Onon, Ergune, and Xilamulun, through long historical processes and the transmission of production and life, have become geographic markers and sacred places in people's hearts, serving as emotional and spiritual sanctuaries.

The composition of the Mongolian homeland is complex, first and foremost in its geographical diversity. The vast region presents various landforms and natural conditions, ranging from mountains, plateaus, and hills to plains, basins, deserts, steppes, and rivers. This diversity provides varied conditions for the development of ecological cognition and viewpoints, leading to diverse ways of utilizing ecological conditions and marked regional and tribal differences.

Additionally, the nomadic lifestyle involves constant movement within the environment, exposing herders to a broad and diverse range of conditions throughout the seasons. The clearly defined seasons of the Mongolian Plateau, with changing scenery, humidity, temperature, and precipitation, further contribute to the diversity of the Mongolian ecological consciousness, awareness, and emotions. Recognizing, praising, longing for, building, and returning to the homeland are the five major themes about homeland that run through Mongolian literature.

## **2 Classical Texts on "Homeland"**

### **2.1 *Bomba in Jangar***

*Jangar* is an epic of the Mongolian people, primarily circulated in the Altai region of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China. Most scholars believe that *Jangar* originated in the Oirat Mongolian tribe in China and spread to Mongolia and Russia along with the migration of the Oirat tribes in the 17th century, becoming a cross-border epic. The development and dissemination of *Jangar* were mainly through oral transmission, although manuscripts and printed versions exist. *Jangar* is still sung among the Mongolian people today. On May 20, 2006, the *Jangar* declared by the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists approved by the State Council of the People's Republic of China.<sup>i</sup> On May 24, 2021, the *Jangar* declared by Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was included in the fifth batch of national intangible cultural heritage representative project lists approved by the State Council.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Jangar* describes the story of *Jangar* and his twelve lion generals and thousands of warriors who fought against evil forces to protect their homeland, Bomba, ultimately achieving victory. This epic deeply reflects the Mongolian people's life ideals and aesthetic pursuits, holding high artistic value. Bomba, where *Jangar* and his heroes reside, is the political center located "between the western slopes of the Altai Mountains and the Irtysh River." This place is depicted as a paradise with beautiful natural scenery: "The land of *Jangar* is like paradise, where spring lasts all year round. There is no scorching heat nor biting cold, with gentle breezes singing and precious rain falling, flowers blooming, and fragrant herbs flourishing. The land of *Jangar* is vast and boundless, where even the fastest horse cannot reach its borders in five months. The holy lord's five million slaves thrive here, forever youthful, like twenty-five-year-old young men, never aging or dying."<sup>ii</sup> This idealized land of Bomba represents a utopia without distinctions of wealth or status, where livestock flourish, and game is abundant. It symbolizes the Mongolian people's longing for peace, happiness, and a prosperous life. This fictional "paradise" is sacred, just, and eternal, providing people with the hope for a beautiful life and strengthening their love for the grasslands, homeland, and country.

### **2.2 *Agolhvi and Burhan Khaldun in The Secret History of the Mongols***

*The Secret History of the Mongols* is a historical work from the 13th to 14th centuries, written by an unknown author. The book recounts the history of the Mongolian nation over five hundred years, from the twenty-second generation ancestor of Genghis Khan, Bodonchar Munkhag, to the twelfth year of Ogedei Khan (1240). It records the rise and fall of the Mongolian nation over five centuries. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, *The Golden History of the Mongols*, and *The Origin of the Mongols* are collectively known as the three great historical works of the Mongolian nation. In 1989, *The Secret History of the Mongols* was recognized as a world classic by UNESCO. It has been studied by scholars

worldwide since the 19th century, with translations in Japanese, Russian, German, Hungarian, English, French, Cyrillic script, Turkish, Czech, and more. Several countries, including Japan, France, Germany, the Soviet Union, and Hungary, have published Latin script phonetic restoration versions.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **2.2.1 Agolhvi**

In section 136 of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, it is recorded that Genghis Khan's old camp was at Halhgn Tugai. The Jurkin people attacked those left behind at Agolhvi, taking the clothes of fifty people and killing ten. Those remaining in the old camp reported these actions to Genghis Khan. The term "Agolhvi" used by the historian Tseten Dambyn Suren translates to "great rear," referring to the camp of families (elders, wives, concubines, slaves) and baggage (property, livestock) left behind during wartime. In section 233 of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, it mentions, "They (the guards) manage the relocation and stationing of tents and the great camp (yekhe Agolhvi). Is this an easy task?" Here, "yekhe" means great, and "Agolhvi" means camp, logistics, or rear area.

### **2.2.2 Burhan Khaldun**

In *The Secret History of the Mongols*, another "homeland" is Burhan Khaldun (Kentei Mountain), where Temujin (Genghis Khan) escaped the Merkit tribe's attack. Section 103 records that after Borte was kidnapped by the Merkits, Temujin and a few others hid in the deep forests of Burhan Khaldun to escape. Temujin made a vow to Burhan Khaldun, saying: "Following the hoofprints of the deer, treading over rugged paths, staying in a small willow hut, my life was saved by Burhan Khaldun. When enemies came, like sparrows fleeing from eagles, following the deer hoofprints, traversing treacherous paths, we took refuge in the embrace of Burhan Khaldun, building willow huts, preserving our lives. Burhan Khaldun, you with your dense forests, protected my frail life, and my body remained unharmed. You, the noble Burhan Khaldun, saved us from our enemies. For your heavenly grace, I will worship you daily and monthly, and it will be passed down through generations!" In this narrative, Burhan Khaldun serves as a sanctuary where Genghis Khan, along with his companions, built temporary willow huts in the lush, majestic forest, evading the Merkits' pursuit and preserving their lives.<sup>[4]</sup>

## **3 Interpretation**

The concept of "homeland" for the Mongolian people extends from the specific dwelling—the yurt (ger)—to the expansive nomadic pastures, residential areas, territories, and landscapes that span hundreds to thousands of kilometers. These include mountains, basins, deserts, beaches, oases, grasslands, forests, rivers, and lakes. The abstract notion of "homeland" is represented by places like Bomba in *Jangar* and names such as "Altai Khangai" and "Urgunotaga" found in folk songs.

Renowned scholar You Xilin stated, "Home (Homeland) has its basis in the social science meaning of the family prototype, such as the bedroom, yard, and home experiences. It is through real family life that the humanistic experiential meaning of 'homeland' is accumulated: a resting place for the body and soul, a safe haven, warm, comfortable, relaxed, a place for free self-expression, and where one can unguardedly share pain and joy. These humanistic experiences further elevate to the cultural concept of 'homeland,' which is more abstract and universal, thus differing from the social science meaning of the family: a harmonious and intimate workgroup is not a family but can be a 'homeland.' This is a fact that can be realized in religious, political, or similar spiritual groups." He points out that "homeland," as a concept in humanistic sciences, has undergone a transformation from a concrete family concept to an abstract spiritual dwelling. The Mongolian consciousness of "homeland" has similarly evolved. Initially,

it referred to concrete living spaces, pastures, and the broader nomadic spaces for grazing. It then encompassed symbolic place names such as "Bomba," "Altai Khangai," "Xilamulun," and "Xing'anling."

Many places named after geographical features, like Altai and Khangai, reflect this connection. For instance, there are places named Altai in both Mongolia and Xinjiang, China, such as Altai Province in Mongolia and Altay City in Xinjiang. In Mongolian, "Khangai" refers to areas rich in water and grass, with mountains, rivers, forests, and grasslands.<sup>[5]</sup>

In *Jangar*, the palace Bomba, located on the western slopes of "Togus Altai," is depicted as a beautiful place where spring lasts all year round, with gentle breezes, soft rains, and perpetual youthfulness. It embodies an idealized society free from environmental pollution, overcoming global warming, and achieving a high standard of social development akin to advanced civilizations. Other heroes' residences in *Jangar*, like those of Honggor, Mingyan, and Sanar, are also described as paradisiacal. These heroes, originally princes of powerful khanates, admired Jangar's governance and renowned reputation, leading them to pledge allegiance. Analyzing *Jangar* reveals a deep concern for "ecology, species conservation, and the sustainable development of the homeland."

The consciousness of homeland, as an inherent part of human survival, is reflected both explicitly and implicitly in the literary histories of various cultures. People find security and comfort in their place of residence, fostering gratitude toward their homeland. Even when living in foreign lands, nostalgia for one's homeland provides immense solace. This gratitude and longing for the homeland have been passed down through generations, forming a psychological accumulation of homeland consciousness.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Conclusion

Homeland is an ancient topic that signifies the relationship between humans and nature, territory, and land. The connection between homeland and people encompasses the attachment to home, the praise for one's hometown, gratitude towards one's birthplace, the longing for, seeking, and returning to the homeland.

By analyzing the concept of "homeland" in Mongolian literature and examining its construction process through ecological psychology and ecolinguistics, we can identify the diverse origins, varied expressions, and multiple forms of existence of this theme. From an ecolinguistic perspective, external factors influencing the formation of "homeland" include geographical features, climate, the nomadic lifestyle and production methods of the Mongolian people, as well as the dialects, vernaculars, and cultural customs of various Mongolian tribes. The ecolinguistic construction is rich in "humanistic care, equality towards humans, nature, and all living things, and narration from the perspective of animals."

The natural environment consists of both unaltered nature and human-altered nature. The ecological civilization concept of "green mountains and clear waters are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver" reflects the interrelationship between the natural environment and social wealth. This process is not only about harmonizing the relationship between humans and nature but also about shaping the relationships among people, elucidating the complete connotation of ecological civilization.

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