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Hulun Buir Grassland: An Amazing Place!

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Cover Page Footnote

Zhihe Wang, Ph.D. is a visiting scholar at Scripps College, Claremont, CA and director of the Institute for Postmodern Development of China. He was born in Beijing and received his Ph.D in Philosophy from Claremont Graduate University. His areas of specialty include process philosophy, constructive postmodernism, ecological civilization, and second enlightenment.

Hulun Buir Grassland: An Amazing Place!

Zhihe Wang, PhD.¹

Hulun Buir Grassland (呼伦贝尔大草原), located in the northeast of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is known as one of the most unsullied grasslands in the world.

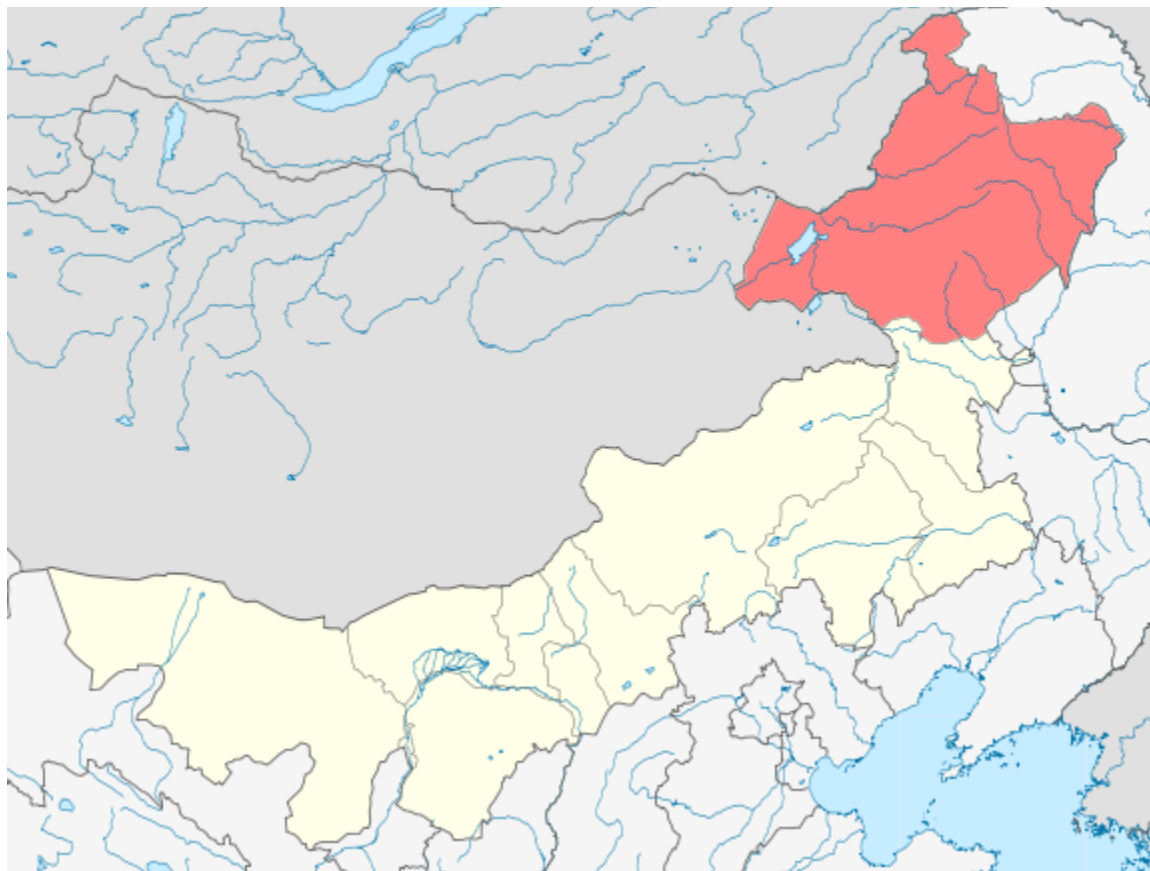


Fig. 1: Map of the Hulun Buir Prefecture within Inner Mongolia, WikiCommons

Thanks to EnviroLab Asia, which sponsored our “Nature and Spirituality in China and Bali” research program, I was able to visit Hulun Buir in the summer of 2019 with Prof. Hao Huang of Scripps College and Prof. Joti Rockwell of Pomona College.

Even though we anticipated the region’s sweeping beauty, we still were amazed by Hulun Buir’s stunning natural scenery. No one could take their eyes off the magnificent sight of Hulun Buir. The boundless prairie, the many lakes scattered all over the land like stars in the sky, the zigzagging rivers, the foraging cattle and sheep, especially the cute baby goats and sheep,

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the running horses, the blooming wildflowers: all of these constitute a beautiful picture scroll. Hulun Buir is indeed worthy of the title as the best and the most beautiful grassland in China.



Fig. 2: Hulun Buir Grassland; WikiCommons

The breath-taking beauty of Hulun Buir, however, is more than a gift of nature, it is also a result of the active efforts of 31 ethnic minorities. Each ethnic minority has its own faith and culture. Shamans are one of them. We were so lucky to meet one of the most important and most open Shaman across the whole Hulun Buir Grassland: Hude Shaman. We were told that almost all of other Shamans in Hulun Buir are either his disciples or followers. Although running into serious challenges from modernity, as the believers of one of the oldest religions in the world Shamans still stick to animism. They believe that nature is alive, and all creatures including plants and animals, rocks and mountains, winds and waters, the Sun, Moon and stars, are sacred beings. The Shamans' job is to help their people to live in harmony with nature. Hude Shaman told us that Shamans always challenge people who have had bad things happen to them to seek the root cause in their intimate relationships within nature. The Aobaos heaped stones for worshipping heaven, earth and sentient beings are scattered around the grassland. One can regard them as a sign of such a faith.

It is apparent that such a spiritual tradition has played an important role in preserving Hulun Buir's ecological integrity. This also may be one of the secrets why Hulun Buir has become "one of the most beautiful, largest and unpolluted grasslands in the world."

Of course, it is not an easy task to preserve the environment especially facing the surging waves of modernization and various "growthisms." It requires the gut to go against the stream. A former government official, who was in charge of Hulun Buir, used to laugh at what he thought

was the indigenous people's "laziness." He questioned: "Are you out of mind? The gold lies there, you guys just don't dig for it." Yes, it is easy money to sell a piece of grassland or exploit a mine. But the herders have their own philosophy. To them, grasslands are not just a "resource," they are sacred and alive, having their own intrinsic value. The grasslands are not only their home, but also the home to wildlife plants and animals. We were told that, in the Mongolian language, the original meaning of the term "river" is "artery." Needless to say, building a dam on a river is like blocking the flow of blood.



Fig. 3: Pomona College Professor Joti Rockwell and some friends; Zhihe Wang, 2019

Stepping on the soft grassland and enjoying the natural beauty, I was amazed by the beauty of the ecological wisdom that flows in the blood of the indigenous people. I feel touched by the deep love of Hulun Buir people for their grasslands. It is the love that made Ms. Uren Sende, our tour guide, return to Hulun Buir from Beijing after getting her Master's degree from China's Conservatory of Music. It is the love that made Mr. Songlin Meng, an Oroqen expert on

Mongolian studies, former Minister of United Work Front Department of Hulun Buir, and president of Hulun Buir Environment Protection Association, to make every effort he can to protect Hulun Lake from pollution, including writing letter to the Central Government. Due to the efforts of Mr. Meng and his colleagues, the area of Hulun lake has expanded 90 square kilometers. Today, with the support from Chinese government, various river chiefs and lake chiefs have been established in Hulun Buir.² I am convinced that tomorrow's Hulun Buir will be even more beautiful and more charming. We hope we can go back to enjoy its beauty again.

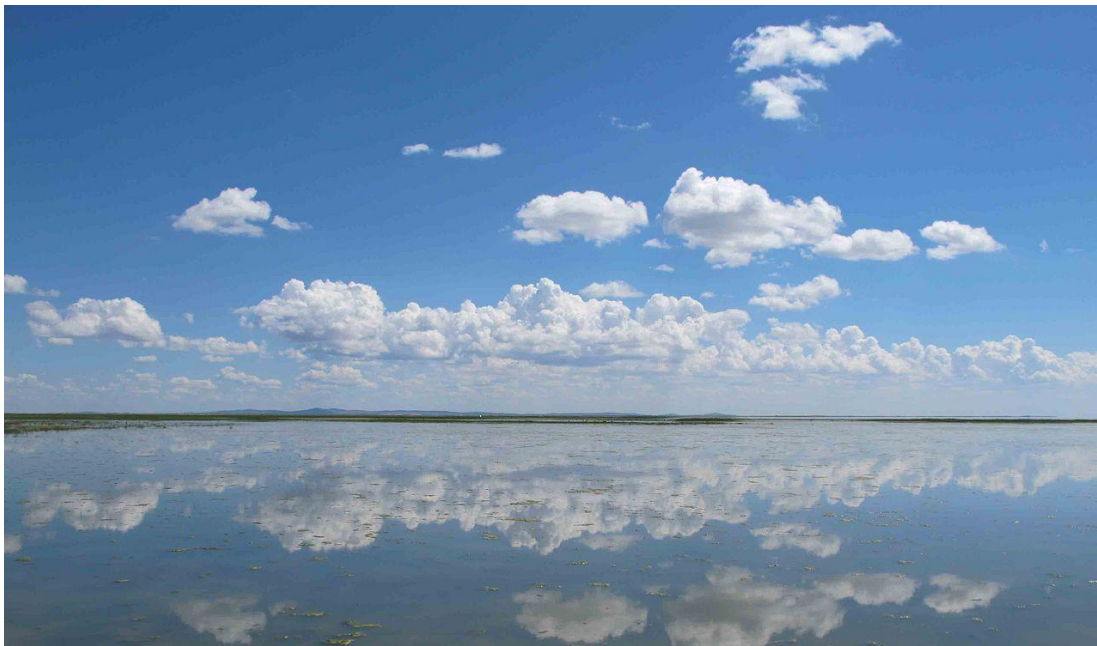


Fig. 4: Hulun Lake, WikiCommons

² Chinese government appoints local government heads as river chiefs and lake chiefs to clean up and protect local water resources.