

Mt. Arbus and Chingis Khan — Connection between Academic Work and Cultural Restoration Movement

YANG Haiying

Chingis Khan has been a symbol of ethnic unity for Mongolian and Turkish nomads for centuries. During the 20th century, however, when ideology became an important component of society as a clearly defined value, many nomads in northern and central Asia were incorporated into the state structure of China and the USSR. In the light of their values, Chingis Khan was criticised and ousted as an abominable invader against the people. Especially in China, extremely stringent restrictions were imposed upon Mongolian rituals, festivities, ancient ruins and relics by the authorities, who thought that the retention of these traditions could provoke nationalism among these ethnic groups. In recent years, however, given the progress of reform policy in Chinese politics, we have witnessed certain changes in the government approach to ethnic minorities.

In the meantime, Mongolian people have long cherished and nurtured respect for learning in their culture. Their interest in academic work has been all the more strengthened because of the political situation in which their traditional culture has been sacrificed under the strict control of China. For example, in Inner Mongolia, research work, which aims to identify the historic location of Chingis Khan's final expedition and activities towards the end of his life, has triggered a contention among people. The debate was provoked by a notion propounded by some researchers, who claimed that "Arbuqa" and "Chorqad" in *The Secret History of the Mongols* were Mt. Arbus in Ordus, Inner Mongolia, and the Arjai Cave, respectively. Furthermore, another notion, which interprets the two murals in the Arjai Cave to represent the scenes of "*Worshipping Chingis Khan, the Imperial harem and princes*" and "*Mongolian cortège*", has drawn keen attention from Mongolians.

As more people became familiar with the outcome of such research, some came to believe that Chingis Khan was buried somewhere in Mt. Arbus. As a matter of

fact, based on the faith that Mt. Arbus was closely related to the history of the ancient ruler, a traditional festival was restored in 1996 after an interval of 40 years. The climax of this festivity is the presentation of horse milk (*kumis*) to the deity of Mt. Arbus. In addition, the worship of the *Alay Sülde* (speckled standard), the regimental colours of Chingis Khan's army, has also been restored since 1998. It would be fair to say that part of the Mongolian ethos is clearly reflected in the phenomenon that a variety of academic treatises concerning Chingis Khan have been launched one after another to form a cultural restoration movement in society.