

Modernization of Ethnic Minorities: Spatial Game and Reconfiguration

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“Ewenki” (Эвенки) is a nomadic group scattered in Northeast Asia, who spent their hunting-gathering life peacefully in the forest for generations since they resettled at the right bank of Argun River. However, the geopolitics of East Asia has changed dramatically last century, an ancient world with blurred borders was reaffirmed as a sovereignty with clear boundaries, a feudal dynasty transformed into a new nation-state. The Argun River happened to be identified as the Sino-Russian border river. Thus, the Ewenki was officially recognized as an ethnic minority and the area where they inhabited has experienced a series of spatial reconfiguration in the next decades promoted by local government, designed to bring modern life and development to the tribe. The paper will explore these spatial games and representations including the construction and re-shape of the border, interpret the displacement, transition, and new lifestyle that the Ewenki experienced, and finally, reflect on the discourse of development.

Keywords: Ewenki, border, reconfiguration, modernization

Introduction

Human has been intertwined with nature since the first day of their living; moreover, their interactions have constructed splendid histories and diverse cultures.

However, we must remain vigilant about the epistemological shortcomings brought out by this binary opposition, and also the traps may essentialize and simplify the complex reality. “Human” and “nature” are never self-explanatory, pure, and static concepts and subjects, both connotations need to be distinguished and explained in specific cultural construction with limited time and space ranges. Only in the particular time-space structure, can we historicize and materialize our exploration and make our analysis more concrete. On the one hand, the paper aims to explore how “human” has become a positive subject with the inherent ability to cognize, transform, even reproduce “nature”. On the other hand, the paper tries to specify how “nature” has been constructed and educated as a negative object, a pure “other” of human that can be recognized as “landscapes” can be gazed, “resources” can be grabbed, “wild” can be civilized, and “land” can be colonized. Meanwhile, all attempts to essentialize the concepts, simplify the relations, and abstract the connotations of these two, even then derive and produce discourses that consolidate specific power relationship, are worth our reflection of these intentions behind it.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is not to rationalize and legalize the logic that has been repeated unintentionally for too long: their differentiated essence determines the fixed power relationship. We want to

deconstruct rather than consolidate the stereotypes mentioned above. Arguments will concentrate on the whole “process” of how human and nature coexist, shape, and transform each other. As the concept of “kino-politics” put forward by Thomas Nail indicates, society is not a static whole composed by fixed members but a continuous circulation and social movement. “Motion”, in his opinion, is the essential feature of social life¹ (Nail, 2015). Therefore, all the relations addressed by society are not only decided by their essential characteristics, but more determined and represented by movements. This idea also inspired our discussion related to humans and nature.

Further, the paper will focus all those concerns on one spot: how the relationship is keeping represented on “border”. Through the example below, we can see the border is not only generated naturally but also constructed artificially. The process of shaping, rewriting, distorting, breaking, and deconstructing, is driven by political concerns or economic demands, rather than random autogenetic. “Border” itself is also not self-explanatory but requires further distinguish (Nail, 2016) of different forms, horizontally and vertically. The example will imply how a primitive ethnic group struggled with nation-state border and living on the border between modern cities and virgin forests.

Case Study: Minority at the Border

The Construction of Border

Integration: Nation-state as frame work. “Ewenki” (Эвенки) is a nomadic and hunter-gatherer group scattered in Northeast Asia, especially in Siberia Region. Three hundred years ago, a handful of Ewenkis, herding their reindeers from the upper reaches of the Lena River in Siberia, moved south to the northeastern frontier of China. They finally got rid of the war and resettled at the northern foot of the Greater Xing’an Mountains, a region of primeval forest on the right bank of the Argun River. The Ewenki people belonged to Altaic languages—Tungusic and believed in shamanism. In China, the group is divided into three branches: the Sauron tribe, the Tunguska tribe, and the Yakut tribe (also called Aoluguya). The case we will take here is the story of Aoluguya² (Chi & Humes, 2013).

The Ewenki people in the Aoluguya tribe have spent their hunting-gathering life peacefully with nature for generations since they resettled, while at the same time, out of the forests, the geopolitics in East Asia has changed dramatically. The era in mainland China has gone from the demise of Qing dynasty, the establishment of the Republic of China (1912), the dogfights of warlords (1912-1949), the invasion of Japan (1931-1945), the civil war (1945-1949), and turned to the People’s Republic of China today. The point is, with the end of the feudal dynasty, the nation-state as a new form was finally established, an ancient world with blurred border has been reaffirmed as clear boundaries of sovereignty. The Argun River happened to be identified as the Sino-Russian border river. Thus, the right bank that inhabited by the Ewenki became a part of PRC, and since then, under the central sovereignty. Ewenki people have entered into the range of nation-state temporally and spatially and were absorbed into the big family by being officially recognized as one of the 56 ethnic minorities. Therefore, on the one hand, they are under specific central-local powers’ control; on the other hand, they will

¹ He argues that societies are not static entities with fixed subjects and objects, but continuous circulations of metastable flows and junctions, thus there are no specific definitions that a movement is good or bad, just everything moves, that is the question.

² Chi Zijian, a famous Chinese writer, wrote the novel *The Right Bank of Argun River* based on the story of Aoluguya tribe, and won the 7th Mao Dun Literature Award.

oscillate together with the rest within the power. These two aspects and the nation-state as a framework will be the vital premises for our following discussion.

Redistricting: Dichotomy between nature and city. Although just like flows into the sea, the group has been integrated into a new nation-state, they still retained a traditional nomadic lifestyle in the closed primeval forest, which was completely different from the agricultural and urban lifestyle. The 1200-kilometer stretch of the Xing'an Mountains is a natural barrier, and the abundant animal and plant resources make these hunter-gathers self-sufficient and have little dependence on the outside world. Gradually, a natural border was formed between independent natural systems in the mountains and towns in the plains.

More importantly, different spatial patterns also foster different characteristics on both sides of the border, which laid multiple challenges for future interactions. As mentioned above, compared to the Han people's traditional agricultural settlement life, the Ewenki people kept their nomadic lifestyle. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, "nomadic" means "roaming about from place to place aimlessly, frequently, or without a fixed pattern of movement", usually accompanied by herding animals, wandering for grazing and "distribution"³ in certain areas. They domesticated the reindeers around their camp, the so-called "forest boats", as a means of transportation, traveled among the vast forest, and hunted animals, such as bears, moose, foxes, and rabbits. Compared to the centralized "allocation" and planning in agricultural civilization⁴ (Nail, 2015, p. 131), this pattern, described as "Pedesis" (Nail, 2015, p. 125)⁵ by Thomas in his book, signifies its self-motion and irregular trait. However, he also emphasized, it does not mean that it is "random"⁶ (Nail, 2015, p. 126), it seems to be intangible only in the eyes of people who do not understand the laws of nature or cannot identify those decisive factors. They lived the flows of nature, strictly followed the "rhythm" and rules, and created the most adaptable, harmonious symbiosis with nature. Likewise, it does not mean that there is no form of social organization or assembly; it is just different from the industrial cities and social motions based on modernity time⁷ (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 152).

Therefore, generally, two common misconceptions emerged. One is that people take nomadic as "move randomly", so their life could be resettled arbitrarily anywhere else; the other is to compare the nomadic culture with industrial cities, then identify the differences as the "primitive stage" according to the "historical stage theory" of Marxist philosophy⁸, "poverty, backwardness, and underdevelopment that requires improvements".

³ French historian Emmanuel Laroche traced the Greek origins of the word "nomad" in his book *Histoire de la racine nem-en grec ancien (nemō, nemesis, nomos, nomizō) (Études et commentaires; 6)*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck. In his arguments, the word from the root (nem) emphasizes more "distribution" (moyen de distribution) rather than "allocation" (partage).

⁴ "Nomadism oscillates continually by following the earth's flows wherever they may go, without centripetal capture or accumulation... While the aim of agriculturalism is to slow them down and accumulate the surplus of their mobility by conjoining it... Nomads follow the flows of the flock, while agriculturalists conjoin a flock from the flows."

⁵ "Pedesis", "as a social force of motion, it is defined by its autonomy and self-motion. It is different from the social forces of centripetal, centrifugal, tensional, and elastic power because it has neither center nor surplus. Instead, its movement is irregular and unpredictable."

⁶ "But it is not random. Specific movements appear random only from the perspective of those who do not understand or see the enormous number of complex collisions and vectors that determine a given motion. From the perspective of those who do not hear the music, the dancers appear insane."

⁷ "In primitive societies there is no time... Time there is nothing but the rhythm of repeated collective activities (the ritual of work and of feasting). It cannot be dissociated from these activities and projected into the future, or planned and manipulated... It merges with the verbs of exchanging, with the cycle of men and nature."

⁸ From the perspective of Historical Materialism and Marxist Stage Theory, the modes and stages of historical development can be identified generally as "primitive communism", "slave society", "feudalism", "mercantilism", "capitalism", "socialism", and "communism", according to different ways people interacted with nature, production, and distribution. The classification was various slightly from different periods.

These misunderstandings are precisely the source of subsequent contradictions, especially triggered fueled by power intervention.

The Re-shape of the Border

Displacement: Political intervention. As mentioned above, the distinction between mountain and plain, nature and towns, nomadic and agricultural, has gradually formed a blurred “border”. However, at the same time, this natural separation has always been challenged and modified by various forces. The most significant one is the interference of political forces with the government as an intermediary and agency. In this case, the initial displacement of the border was out of political concerns: the nation-state’s security. In 1965, due to the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, military conflicts on the frontier were on the verge. Therefore, the Chinese government decided to move the Ewenki people from the border slightly inland, away from the front line, relocated them to Aoluguya riverside, and established “Aoluguya Ewenki Hunter Village”. Besides, since 1957, the local government already considered building “MuKeDen”, a Russian style wooden house with a stone foundation for Ewenki’s resettlement. Thus, with the relocation, some Ewenki people began to leave the birch bark tents in the mountain camps, moved down to the wooden house, whereas they still need to hunt for fur and graze reindeers in the forests. As a result, many Ewenki people started a “dualistic life”: move between the hunter spot uphill and the residential house downhill. With this, the border of natural divisions has moved, driven by political considerations and power. The range of ethnic minority activities has expanded to other regions, and the previous self-sufficiency within nature has also remodeled. They gradually build more and more relations with towns, partly rewritten by modern production relations. For example, the local government planned to help with their closed business channel and to purchase Ewenki’s reindeer by-product regularly, such as antlers, to increase their income, which has become their most significant income. However, the dependence of outside urban commerce and government grant has also rapidly increased during the interaction, which is also an essential reason for their future awkward “intermediate state”.

Transition: Economic driving. More profound changes, also the core contradictions, in this case, are no longer the politically oriented “displacement” in small-scale, but rather the “transformation” further driven by economic development concerns, which may lead to conflicts between government dominance and ethnic traditions.

The government project titled “Ecological Migration”, then implemented in August 2003, caused a fundamental change in Ewenki’s life. This project built a brand-new village for the Aoluguya tribe, only five kilometers away from downtown. The infrastructure equipped with office buildings, museums, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and 62 brick houses for hunters with unified painting and heating for the freezing winter, entirely constructed according to the standard “modern town”. Besides, there are two striking highlights of this over 11 million RMB-investment-project. One is that not only hunters were resettled, but their reindeers got 48 individual huts as home. Another one is that the guns used by daily hunting were confiscated by the government formally. These two arrangements end the dualistic life mentioned above, even completely desist the nomadic life in nature: because there are no guns for hunting and no need to graze. The lifestyle of the Ewenki people has been transformed into a standard urban settlement lifestyle. The border was totally smashed and disappeared.

Although facing many questions and uncertainties, the government’s starting point was at least a good one, no doubt. They keenly hoped the marginalized group could live a “better”, in their perspective, a modern urban

life with electricity and the internet outside the forests. From primitive to modern, from nomadism to settlement, from nature to urban life, a “Great Leap Forward” is achievable, especially with the financial and policy support from the central government as a part of the “well-off”⁹ and “the grand western development program”.¹⁰ It is, indeed, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the leap.

Therefore, holding with the same beautiful wishes, the first batch of 11 hunters, 37 people, and 260 reindeer still took 12 vehicles, chose to farewell their forest, and moved to the new village on August 10th, 2003. The People’s Daily, the mouthpiece of the Chinese party media, described this on the first page of the “Important” column that day: “After the country implemented the strategy of developing the western region and the natural forest protection project, the Ewenki hunters ushered in another good opportunity for development.”¹¹

Space-in-between: “Flâneur”. From the natural formation to its artificial division, from displacement to transformation, even the fusion in modernity, historical interactions clearly represented on the border.

However, the story does not always follow the expected direction linearly. Back to the case, just as local officials and the media nationwide were applauding for this border breaking, witnessed the efforts to modernize and urbanize ethnic minorities, a dramatic scene happened. Soon after moving to the modern village, some Ewenki people, driving their reindeer, traveled long distances returning to the “primitive” camp life in the wood. There are three main reasons for this. First, the reindeer died massively due to their inability to adapt to captivity, so hunters suddenly suffered substantial economic losses. Second, they were facing increasing living expenses, such as water, electricity, gas, heating fees, which brought them additional economic pressure compared to camp life. The most important one, hunters without guns, had nothing to do; modern life without echo with nature, had lost their aura and dreams. The government subsidy was planned to help their re-employment but was used by most hunters to buy alcohol and relieve their homesickness. Numbers of people even lost their lives due to drunkenness.¹²

⁹ “Implement the ‘moderate prosperity’ program in an well-rounded way, opening up new vistas for the China-specific socialist cause.” “A well-off society” is a concept proposed by Deng Xiaoping, the supreme leader who presided over China’s reform and opening up, while thinking about the realization of the four modernization goals at the end of the 20th century: “Our goal, the first step is to build a well-off society by the year 2000. This means that on the basis of food and clothing, the quality of life is further improved, and sufficient food and clothing are achieved.” Deng Xiaoping: *China’s goal of this century is to achieve a well-off life* (December 6, 1979), *Anthology of Deng Xiaoping* (Volume 2), People’s Publishing House, 1994 edition, 237-238. Hu Jintao, the successor state leader after Deng, reported at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, stated that the goal of the China Democracy Party is to “ensure the full construction of a moderately prosperous society by 2020.” Xi Jinping, China’s current national leader, further proposed two 100-year timetables within which, the well-off society would be achieved. China Communist Party also stated, “In the new century and new era, the strategic objective of economic and social development is to build a well-off society in an all-round way by the 100th anniversary of the party.”

¹⁰ “The grand western development program” was the overall strategy for regional coordinated development of the People’s Republic of China. It was proposed by the then General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Jiang Zemin, in 1999, aiming to narrow the economic development gap between the eastern and western regions and enhance the central and western regions through policy tilts and financial investment. The provinces and regions that implement the policy included Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Ningxia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Tibet, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Guangxi, accounting for 71.4% of the country’s total land area.

¹¹ “Speed post: The Last Hunting Tribe Steps Out of the Mountain and Moves to New Residence”. *People’s Daily*, August 10, 2003, First Edition (Important) column.

¹² Documentary director Gu Tao’s three works *Aoluguya Aoluguya* (2003), *Hugo’s Holiday* (2010), *The Last Moose of Aoluguya* (2013) traced and recorded the whole story mentioned above of this tribe. His father, Gu Deqing, an anthropology photographer, shot and recorded the hunting life of the Ewenki people, and published as *The Diary of the Hunter’s Life in Xing’an Mountains, 1982-1995*.

Urbanization was failed on Ewenki people. However, things have not ended here; the consequences of this border destruction and the penetration of modernity are irreversible. Returning to the forest will not reduce their confusion, especially some had already been fascinated by the wonderful modern life. More practically, as mentioned above, they were already economically dependent, the power and city had become the “absent presence” in their daily life. Although their bodies returned to nature, their minds were still attracted by cities and had no intention to live a primitive life anymore. At the same time, shotguns were taken away, making them neither had no income from hunting nor defend themselves from bear attacks and losses caused by reindeer poaching. Many Ewenki people were depressed and chose to be drunk in memories, becoming a “flâneur” (Benjamin, 1983) and created “refugee” between nature and cities, neither settler nor nomadic. They were the exceptions of both sides’ production relations and social frameworks. These border issues signified the value of our further critical thinking addressed by the relation between humans and nature.

Discourse of Development

Is the story above merely a particular case? Are these construction, breakthrough, displacement, and transformation of borders elsewhere just unrelated and independent? When we try to explore in a more macro-region and broader structure, we may find that the answer is already underlying in the story. Therefore, the following discussion will also continue these two main axes: the power of the nation-state from central to local, and the dualistic opposition between nature and city. Hence, power along these two axes would consistently reproduce, rewrite, and represent space within their scope. The border, herewith, is the representation of this whole process.

“The master plan”. First of all, the spatial rewrite that ultimately caused border changes is based on land ownership (the concepts and relationship between land and law could refer to: Schmitt & Ulmen, 2003). In China, lands as state property rather than private property make it accessible for unified management and reconfiguration. Thus, the allocation of space is directly associated with the redistribution of power. Let’s take the Lake District in England as a comparative example. Although Wordsworth has advocated “landscape” as “national property”, this aesthetic concept has been challenged in terms of specific laws. In England, “commons” do not always mean “common property”, the Lake District National Park is not as conserved as in the United States but is inhabited. Thus, even as a part of the “national” park, the land can still be privately owned (the detailed example of the Lake District could refer to: Darby, 2000). The rights of the state’s management enter for economic activities, and private ownership is facing complex disputes on specific issues. Compared to this, the situation is much simpler in China as a socialist country. The government has absolute control over the land; that is why we can see its large-scale infrastructure construction can be built nationwide at an alarming rate over the years. Back to the case, this is also the underlying logic of diverse spatial rearrangements.

Especially “development” has been the top priority since China’s reform and opening up (1978), which provided perpetual goals and motivation for the exercise of this absolute power. Under this logic, in order to provide sustainable power and broader space for non-stop demands for rapid economic growth and pressure for accelerated rates of social transformation, and to face the ever-increasing global climate challenges, “land”, just like other positive elements across the vast terrain, should be effectively managed and deployed by the power to maximize the efficiency. The proposing of “National Principal Function Zoning Plan” (2010) is the best

embodiment of the above intentions. After nearly a decade¹³ (Shue & Thornton, 2017, pp. 102-105), from an initiative to a master plan at the national level, the central power has maximized to cover “all” national territory, “all” land, “all” water sources, into their scope¹⁴ (Shue & Thornton, 2017, p. 85). At the same time, land, as an object under control and ownership, was classified by the “role” it can play in the future. “The PFZ Plan stipulated that all China’s land and all its territorial waters would be classified into categories, according to the main function each area is deemed to perform.” Further speed, degree, range of development will be determined by this “function”.

These categorical zoning assignments are, in turn, to determine the speed, the extent to which, and the guidelines according to which each zoned space, and any of the valuable resources that lie within it, may (or may not) be utilized for future development. (Shue & Thornton, 2017, p. 84)

The three types of principal functions are “urban/industrial functions”, “rural/agricultural functions”, “ecological functions”. Hence, specific actions can be identified as “Optimized”, “Prioritized”, “Restricted”, and “Prohibited”. Here we may find what was said was used to describe the hegemony of power:

It is not a question of a directly imposed regime of conformity in the correspondence between contemporary United States cultural discourse and United States policy in the subordinate, non-Western world. Rather, it is a system of pressure and constraints by which the whole cultural corpus retains its essentially imperial identity and its direction. This is why it is accurate to say that mainstream culture has a certain regularity, integrity, or predictability over time. (Said, 1993, p. 323)

The regions involved in our case, hereby, were gradually woven into and pushed by the macro spatial planning like this, in the decade of unprecedented growth in national space awareness¹⁵.

Framing: Complementary relationship between nature and city. If the local spatial arrangements strictly followed the unified and state-led plans, where did those contradictions on the border we discussed above come from?

As indicated in the plan, the problem is that a region could obtain two or more functions at the same time. “Even these critical zones, sometimes referred to as ‘environmental security areas’, are to be allowed some mixed uses, including mining and other forms of resource extraction utilizing cleaner technologies.” (Shue & Thornton, 2017, p. 86). As shown above, precise action should be taken into dealing with a specific functioning zone, respectively. But how about zones with mixed functions? Consequently, contradictions, in our case, may get explained from this perspective.

According to the definition, the Xing’an Mountain area¹⁶ inhabited by the Ewenki people should belong to “ecological functions”. On the one hand, this region with abundant forests resource should be the object of “restricted” even “prohibited”, which means to reduce excess populations by migrations into other areas planned for urban development. It is precisely the goal that “ecological immigrants” wanted to achieve in the

¹³ From 2002, the document entitled “Opinions on Several Issues regarding the Reform of the Planning System”; 2007, the document entitled “Opinions regarding the Making of the PFZ Plan”; 2008, the first draft of the PFZ proposal was made; to 2010, the final release of the Master Plan.

¹⁴ “National Principal Function Zoning Plan-the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) first-ever strategic plan intended to govern the development and use of the WHOLE of the national territory, ALL its land, and ALL its waters.”

¹⁵ In addition to the gradually improved national spatial planning, there are also regional and local plans, such as “the grand western development program”, “development policies for minority autonomous regions”, and “support policies for poor areas”.

¹⁶ Demarcation of China’s environmentally critical areas as indicated on the map of “Key-point Ecological Function Zones”.

case. However, on the other hand, as a region full of precious mineral and timber resources with low development level, it also meets the requirements of “vigorous development” and “prioritized”, which means it is potential for future green tourism, material, and energy development. Therefore, the Ewenki people are residents that need to be relocated out of the forest for ecological protection, making the forestry bureau responsible for the area; at the same time, the Ewenki people as a part of and also with nature together, constituted the object of tourism consumption, which should be “reserved” even required “further development”. Here, we could find contradictory but not unreasonable starting points from different perspectives. This is why there are unexpected but reasonable problems that arose when resettling the Ewenki peoples. At this moment, the border, rooted in and co-oscillated with the overall spatial rewriting, became the focus of the battle between protection rights and development rights.

Nevertheless, whether it is “protection” or “development”, this mode of thinking just placed “nature” roughly on the opposition of the city. Nature, as a complementary element to the modern city life, even a subsidiary for its development, is an object that can grab resources and be leisurely gazed. The Ewenki people, likewise, are either gazed and consumed as part of nature or removed from land as a hindrance to the development. In conclusion, nature itself and people on the land are never respected as subjects. The ideal of re-planning the space for a better future precisely cut the natural relationship between humans and nature, residents and their homeland. This is exactly what human geographer Yifu-Tuan called “Topophilia” (Tuan, 1990), including the perception, attitudes, values, environment, and culture, which emphasize the hard-to-ignore emotional bond between residents and their “nature”, even interdependence. Hence, he signified two perspectives as methods. One is understanding the environment from human consciousness; the other one is using the specific environment as a starting point to understand the particular lifestyle, which is “existence perspective” and “situation perspective”, respectively. Another scholar also summarized them as “situation of reference” and human’s subjective “partial space” (Ley, 2013).

They all emphasized an “experiential” (Related research: Tuan, 1975; 1977; 2008; 2013) rather than pure rationality or ideal perspective to think space and border (Related research: Bachelard & Jolas, 2014), because they are never as objective as lines and symbols imagined in the national master plans and digital maps.

In this case, the characteristics of the relationship between the Ewenki people and nature/land require more understanding by taking “topophilia” as a method. Abandoning the simplified dualistic city-nature framework, we need to respect and highlight the connections between the Ewenki people and nature, even though they are not always being identified by “modern” civilizations. Just as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emphasized, nomadism does not mean immigration at all.

Inspiration from “pleat”: The hidden part of development. Back to our case, why would such a “development” path with goodwill encounter embarrassment and problems?

Baudrillard once noticed a kind of “accounting illusions”, that is, according to the rational standards of the economy, only the visible positive elements could be included in the scope of calculation. “Nothing enters into these except factors which are visible and measurable by the criteria of economic rationality, and that indeed is the central principle of the magic.” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 41). Thus, two problems are arising from this. First, theoretical problems and subjects that cannot speak are hidden and ignored by these calculations, such as ethnic minorities, their culture, and nature in our case. Second, all the irrational elements and negative effects are not considered, such as the fragmentation of human-land relations, the destruction of culture caused by the

ecological migration, the loss of minorities' lifestyle as historical legacies, the city's disrespect, and the consumption of nature¹⁷ (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 41).

These hidden and negative results are precisely the main characters that another kind of "modernity" mentioned above, paid more attention to. "Aesthetic modernity" rarely praised vigorously on the bright sides of political and economic "progress" and "development", typically like Baudelaire, instead, discovered the decadent, romantic, sentimental, and depressed feelings. Various movies, novels, poems, and paintings depicting ethnic minority areas and natural scenery have shown similar nostalgic emotions. Because compared to the "progressive modernity", these issues were considered as a secondary or derivative figure, even can be sacrificed for the sake of development. They are labeled and put in the position of "primitive", "backward", and "underdeveloped" on the stage chain; they are treated as minorities, marginalized, silent, and passive objects in spatial relations. Their unique factors and heterogeneity are often considered unrecognizable, let alone appreciate and cherish their complexity and diversity. However, it is precisely these factors lurking in space that have the potential to constitute the counter-power, even a counter-history of the grand narrative.

Establishing a New "Spatial Interpretation": Reflection on the Historical Epistemology

In addition to reflecting on the political, economic, and rational framework from a humanistic and experiential perspective, we also need to think critically about the modernity framework rooted in the time mentioned above.

The "border" in our case provides us with the possibility of looking deeper into the wound under the perfect planning, and also reminds us of "space" as a subordinated element that is often suppressed by the master-narrative dominated by "time". At this moment, "space" has become the key to re-establishing a new critical thinking model. Edward Soja once pointed out a long-dominant "historical epistemology" in the past historical narrative and social theories.

An essentially historical epistemology continues to pervade the critical consciousness of modern social theory. It still comprehends the world primarily through the dynamics arising from the emplacement of social being and becoming in the interpretive contexts of time: in what Kant called *nacheinander* and Marx defined so trans-figuratively as the contingently constrained 'making of history'. This enduring epistemological presence has preserved a privileged place for the 'historical imagination' in defining the very nature of critical insight and interpretation. (Soja, 1989, p. 10)

As Edward Soja sorted out in his book, after the subordination of space in social theory, the despatialization of human geography and historical geography, linguistic turn and spatial turn in academia, post-modern geography need an urge to get rid of the shackles of historical determinism, try a new kind of "spatial interpretation", not only pay attention to the time sequences but also notice a variety of simultaneity, taking our world as a map, rather than a linear story. Soja also particularly emphasized, when he introduced Foucault's spatial thinking, that being inspired by structuralism does not mean "anti-history", but trying to re-discuss history with a different kind, which Soja used to describe Foucault's method, an "integrative path". "He takes an integrative rather than deconstructive path, holding on to his history but adding to it the crucial nexus that would flow through all his work: the linkage between space, knowledge, and power." (Soja, 1989, p. 20). He believed that the relationship between space and power of history could only be figured out as a structure of "space-time":

¹⁷ "Moreover, like dreams, they have no conception of the negative and lump together everything-nuisances and positive elements-in the most total (though by no means innocent) illogicality."

A whole history remains to be written of spaces- which would at the same time be the history of powers (both of these terms in the plural)—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.¹⁸ (Foucault & Gordon, 1980)

Only by adding this post-modern spatial perspective, the stories of the Ewenki people in our case, as well as events in other places, can be better understood and criticized. “These ‘life-stories’ have a geography too; they have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacement which affect thought and action.” (Soja, 1989, p. 14). Furthermore, it not only points to a “utopia” in a linear historical narrative but also explores other possibilities in space, such as what Foucault (Refer to Foucault’s books: Foucault, 1988; Foucault & Hurley, 1988; two interviews: Crampton, 2007; Foucault, 1986) argued as “heterotopias”, as “‘history unfolds’ in its adherent spatiality” with varied forms over time.

Eventually, we may let the critical thinking, generated from the continuous digging and theoretical explorations of this case, reach out to the deconstruction, reconstruction, and re-theorization of history, geography, and modernity. As Soja suggested,

new possibilities are being generated from this creative commingling, possibilities for a simultaneously historical and geographical materialism, a triple dialectic of space, time and social being; a transformative re-theorization of the relations between history, geography, and modernity. (Soja, 1989, p. 12)

a more flexible and balanced critical theory that re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies. (Soja, 1989, p. 11)

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