### Anthropological Filmmaking

# On Music-In-Cultural-Context among the Horqin Mongols of Eastern Inner Mongolia, China

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This article will discuss the author's anthropological research and anthropological filmmaking on traditional music among the Horqin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia, China. The article will be divided into four parts: (1) an introduction to the anthropological filmmaking project on the musical performances of the Horqin Mongols, (2) an introduction to the traditional music of the Horqin Mongols, (3) a discussion of the rationale for and the procedures used in the video and sound recordings during the production and post-production phases of this project, and (4) some concluding remarks about the process of anthropological filmmaking, the anthropology of music, and recording visuals and sound in field research.

Reference will be made in this article to the DVD set I produced entitled "Song of the Grasslands: Ethnicity, Identity, Culture Change, Economic Development, and Music Among the Horqin Mongols of Eastern Inner Mongolia, China" which resulted from this anthropological research. This DVD set may be consulted to expand the understanding of Horqin Mongolian musical performances, to exemplify an anthropological filmmaking project on music, and to provide examples of the various components of the project referred to in this article. This DVD set is available in two versions: (1) the full version, which is included on a multiple disk double layer DVD set, and (2) a "limited edition", playable as one standard double layer DVD. The limited edition provides (a) two examples of the introductions, (b) six musical performances, plus one story, and one dance, (c) one constructed film, (d) one life story by one of the performers, and (e) one interview with a social scientist, all drawn from the materials in the full version.

### Introduction to the Anthropological Filmmaking Project

My professional career as a sociocultural anthropologist has been heavily invested

in the elaboration of the concept of anthropological filmmaking (see Rollwagen 1988a, 1988b, 1992). When I began work in the area of anthropological filmmaking, the majority of the articles and books that I read were ultimately (in my view) about ethnographic filmmaking, not anthropological filmmaking as I imagined it. I hoped to help develop anthropological filmmaking as a subdiscipline within anthropology, and to use some of the major concepts that define anthropology as a discipline in my anthropological filmmaking. These concepts would stand in contrast to ethnographic filmmaking by non-anthropologists, and would include: a comparative approach in which any particular fieldwork (including anthropological filmmaking) regarded that particular fieldwork conceptually within the range of anthropological research on similar topics; a holistic approach to particular fieldwork such that any chosen topic in fieldwork (such as musical performance) would be seen within a larger framework that supplied context for that research and its questions; and the use of anthropological theory and methods and the corpus of anthropological writings as they apply to the processes of any particular field research project. These concepts were to be used both in the production of any anthropological films, and in the elucidation of the anthropological filmmaking process in written works and in discussing the anthropological filmmaking process in public. I felt that utilizing these concepts in my filmmaking would serve to differentiate anthropological filmmaking from ethnographic filmmaking, whether done by anthropologists or non-anthropologists because of the breadth of its approach, and the anthropological knowledge of the filmmaker.

Not long after I received my Ph.D. in anthropology, I completed an M.A. degree in the Humanities, with a concentration in documentary filmmaking. Although the training was more general than I would have hoped for to prepare me for anthropological filmmaking, it was rather typical of the training in the documentary filmmaking of the late 1970s. However, it served to emphasize the contrast between the visions of documentary filmmakers in general and the kind of anthropological filmmaking that I hoped to help develop. It was thus a stimulus to my own thinking about anthropological filmmaking. In the following years, I taught courses on documentary filmmakers, ethnographic filmmakers, and anthropologists. Mostly, however, I realized that if I were to proclaim myself an anthropological filmmaker and be accepted as one, I would have to demonstrate my approach by

## EthnoScripts

making anthropological films in the manner that I thought anthropological filmmaking should be made. I thus undertook in recent years, the production of two series of films: (1) a series of films on China (of which "Song Of The Grasslands" discussed below is one example), and (2) a series of films on an American village (the DVD series "Life In An American Village"). The overall organization of these film series illustrates one anthropologist's approach to anthropological filmmaking, and demonstrates how (1) a comparative approach using anthropological case studies and ethnological conclusions based on them must be a consideration in providing the context for anthropological filmmaking about any particular culture or cultural system, (2) a holistic approach to that culture or cultural system is essential in the understanding of the music of that culture, and (3) anthropological theory and methods can be incorporated into the production of anthropological films. This article will discuss the DVD "Song Of The Grasslands: Ethnicity, Identity, Culture Change, And Economic Development Among The Horqin Mongols Of Eastern Inner Mongolia, China," its conceptual framework, its conclusions about traditional Horqin Mongolian music, and its value toward the evolution of a subdiscipline of anthropological filmmaking.

### Introduction to the Horqin Mongols and Their Traditional Music

I first visited China in the summer of 1988. At that time, I accompanied a joint People's Republic of China and French research team to San Men Po township on Hainan Island. Up to that time, research by American anthropologists in China had been extremely rare because China had been reluctant to have Americans doing research there. During that short field trip, I added personal ethnographic experience to the extensive readings that I had done on the anthropology and political economy of China, and on China's culture, ethnicity, agriculture, economic development, and on China's position within the World System framework. (See Rollwagen 1980 for a suggestion about the value of a cultural systems and the World System framework in anthropological research.)

I returned to China as a Fulbright Teaching Fellow in 1998-1999 to the Institute for American Studies at Shandong University in central China. During that year, I met a Han Chinese student in the M.A. program in American Studies who had been born in a village near the city of Ulanhot, Inner Mongolia. Not long after, my wife (also an anthropologist) and I accompanied that Chinese student to her home village in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR). While there, I was introduced to Horqin Mongolian music.

The Horqin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia, China, are one of five major groupings of Mongols in Inner Mongolia. The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was incorporated into the country of China in 1947, when the then Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China divided the then country of Mongolia between them. China received the majority of the Mongolian population of the former country of Mongolia in that division, and arguably some of the best lands. Since that time, that portion which had been annexed by the Soviet Union has been liberated and now forms the contemporary country of Mongolia.

Inner Mongolia (*Nei Mongol* in Chinese) is China's third largest province. The eastern portion of Inner Mongolia is much wetter than the western portion. This allows the Horqin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia to practice a quite different set of livelihoods than the Mongols of western Inner Mongolia. Those Horqin Mongols who are agriculturalists are able to practice a sedentary agricultural lifestyle, incorporating field crops and sedentary pastoralism in contrast to the more migratory traditional pastoral subsistence patterns characteristic of western Inner Mongolia. Many Horqin Mongols, however, now live in towns and cities in eastern Inner Mongolia, of which the cities of Tong Liao and Ulanhot are two of the largest in eastern Inner Mongolia. My research in eastern Inner Mongolia was centered in and around these two cities.

Horqin Mongolian traditional musical performance incorporates elements that are common to Mongolian music, and elements particular to eastern Inner Mongolia. The elements that are common to Mongolian music in general are (1) the musical instruments, (2) the Mongolian language (regardless of dialectical and orthographic variations), and (3) the celebration of Mongolian culture and history. The elements that are particular to the Horqin Mongols are the incorporation of references to local elements in musical performance: songs about local heroes and villains, songs about love of local places, and stories about love between local people, including mention of the local places where the stories embodied in these songs took place.

For all practical purposes, there are three major traditional Mongolian stringed musical instruments (all called *huur* or included conceptually within the

### EthnoScripts

category of *huur* whether they are actually referred to as huur or not): the *morin huur* (the horsehead fiddle, called *matouqin* in Chinese), the high tone and low tone *sihu*; and the *chuur*. In addition to these instruments, contemporary Horqin Mongolian musicians also play other traditional and modern instruments when performing traditional Mongolian music. These include, for example, flutes, *sanjirs* (an instrument something like a banjo), accordions, and nowadays electronic keyboards.

Although there are major dialectical differences (a) between Mongolian dialects spoken in Inner Mongolia, and (b) between the dialects spoken by the Mongols of Inner Mongolia and the Mongols of the country of Mongolia, all Mongols celebrate a common generalized Mongolian culture and a shared Mongolian history. This is so even if many younger Horqin Mongols now speak only Chinese. This pride in Mongolian culture is evident in the traditional music that Horqin Mongols continue to perform and continue to create. Indeed, the music of the Horqin Mongols celebrates a mythic Mongolian past that serves to bind together Mongolians regardless of what language they speak, and also serves to maintain their discreteness from the myths and reality of the Chinese society in which they live.

Traditional Horqin Mongolian musical performance can be said to incorporate a number of kinds of songs. First, traditional songs, such as love songs, hero songs, banquet songs, folk songs, songs that express a love of a particular place, humorous songs, songs about the love of relatives, songs about love between a monk and a woman, and songs about horses, among others. These songs tend to be shorter, and are accompanied by complex and beautiful music. Musical performances can, of course, at times be only instrumental.

Second, storytelling, in which the narrative is the focus of performance, but the singer of tales most frequently also plays a musical instrument. These stories can be quite short, completed in 5 to 15 minutes, or quite long, with performances of several hours, and sometimes performances for several hours a day extending over many days and even weeks. In the past, in rural villages, villagers would invite a story teller (a *huurqi*, a singer of tales, one who plays a *huur* and sings a story) to perform for several hours each day over the period of a week to ten days. They also might invite him back again to tell another, different story at a later date. The stories might be ancient, as in the case of *tul* stories (stories about superheroes who fought monsters), or (more generally) *ulger* (narrative) songs about historical or more contemporary events. The skill of the storyteller in embellishing these stories is key to his success. John Miles Foley's discussion (Foley 1988, 1995) of the storyteller and his art is valuable in understanding the art of Horqin Mongolian storytelling.

Third, *holboos*, contemporary sung musical performances which, among the contemporary Horqin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia, China, link together the pride of the Mongols in their Mongolian mythic past with expressions of pride about the economic and political progress of the province of Inner Mongolia and the country of China under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party. I group these kinds of performances as "traditional" because holboos are a traditional *form* of song even though the *content* of contemporary holboos may relate to current events.

Given the above, in the process of producing the materials included on the full version of this DVD, I organized the materials into five categories: (1) a set of introductions to the materials; (2) a set of performances exemplifying some of the kinds of musical performances and some of the songs that I included in this anthropological filmmaking project; (3) a set of "constructed films" with scripts written by me; (4) a set of life stories of some of the individuals whose performances are included on the full version of this DVD; and (5) a set of interviews with academic analysts who have conducted research on Mongols in China or on topics related directly to their research. Examples of each of these categories are included on the "limited edition" of "The Song Of The Grasslands" DVD.

In order to introduce the anthropological study of the musical performances of the Horqin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia, China, to those who know nothing about Horqin Mongols, who might know little about the anthropological study of such peoples, who perhaps know little about China and its "national minority" peoples, or who know little about ethnomusicology as practiced by social scientists, I decided to provide (1) an overview introduction to this DVD; (2) an introduction to the political economic study of eastern Inner Mongolia and the Horqin Mongols who live there; and (3) an introduction to the ethnomusicological study of the Horqin Mongols as practiced by this anthropologist. These three introductions comprise the first category on the full DVD.

The second, and central category of the full DVD, is a set of musical performances. These performances were intended to provide some examples of Horqin

### EthnoScripts

Mongol musical performances. In deciding what kinds of musical performances that I would record in the overall project, I tried to collect sample performances by choosing songs in the following ways: (1) traditional versus non-traditional songs, attempting to record only *traditional* songs from the Horqin Mongol area wherever possible; (2) selecting a variety of *kinds* of traditional songs, as described above; (3) recording musical performances to a great extent that were put forward by the musicians themselves, rather than by my asking that certain songs be performed; (4) recording events that were specifically organized for me by the performers in their entirety, and only then selecting performances from that collection that were appropriate to the purposes of my research; (5) traveling to various places in and around the two cities of Tong Liao and Ulanhot to sample musical performances from various rural and urban locations and various musical performers or groups; and (6) setting out to record performances by performers of various ages, by performers of both sexes, by performers who performed to a large extent in local venues where they lived and worked (in various occupations) as well as by performers who were professional performers performing in a variety of venues for the public.

The third category of the DVD is a set of "constructed films" which, like the three introductions, serve to expand and particularize one aspect of the approach to the lives of the Horqin Mongols and their music. One of those films "Symbolic Expressions of Horqin Mongolian Ethnic Identity" explores some of the symbolism that suffuses the lives of the Horqin Mongols and their music. A second film "The Mongolian Folk Singer" provides an insight into the life of one of the performers with his rural village as backdrop.

The fourth category of the DVD provides life stories by eight of the performers (six males and two females), ranging from some who are farmers by occupation, to some who are professional performers by occupation.

The fifth category of the DVD contains analyses by six academic analysts about their research on Mongolian life and culture in various parts of Inner Mongolia. Three of these are Americans (one of whom is of Chinese descent) and three are Horqin Mongols. The three Americans consist of two cultural anthropologists (Dee Williams and Bill Jankowiak) and a cultural geographer (Hong Jiang). The three Mongols include an anthropologist (Naran Bilik), a specialist in Mongolian literature and music (Buyuntogtahu), and an agricultural scientist (Zhang Yuxia) who discusses agriculture in the Horqin grasslands. Their comments explore a variety of aspects of the lives of Mongols in Inner Mongolia, China and about scientific research there, and also expand the context for the discussion of the Horqin Mongols. The richness of the materials of this full version of the DVD and the fact that it is a menu-driven DVD allows viewers to choose the way that they wish to proceed in examining the diversity of materials on this DVD.

### The Rationale for Anthropological Recordings of Music

Anthropologists approach the study of cultures and cultural systems (cf. Rollwagen 1986) using a holistic approach, that is assuming that the cultures or cultural systems are integrated wholes any part of which can be studied only within the context of the whole. The anthropological study of the music of any culture or cultural system necessitates some exploration of the history of that people, the symbols which they find compelling, the myths that they call upon to encourage and maintain unity among the members of that culture or cultural systems, the values that they promulgate to their children, their desires to maintain cultural cohesion, and so forth. My research on the Horqin Mongols suggests strongly to me that all of these elements are to a great extent incorporated into their traditional musical performances. If anthropology is to claim that it studies all peoples, and the changes that take place in these cultures or cultural systems over time, particularly in the face of culture change brought about by economic development and globalization, then the study of music may provide one of the best venues by which to study those aspects of a culture or cultural system. If some anthropologists choose to study music-incultural-context, recording that music and its context as one means to present that culture or cultural system to others, then the anthropological study of music is certainly valuable, possibly interesting and even pleasing. Recent advances in technology have made the recording of music-in-context and its editing much more available to social scientists who work in remote areas, and the expense of doing a high quality recording is no longer prohibitive. The following discussion provides an example of one set of equipment and procedures for recording and editing music in its cultural context.



### Equipment and Procedures for Anthropological Filmmaking Production in the Field and Post Production

The intent of my research was to provide a broad and holistic approach to the anthropological study of the music of the Horgin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia, China, and to orient this research to the production of what I envisioned as "anthropological film." I began initially with the vision of producing several short "films" about the Horqin Mongols, including some examples of Horqin Mongolian musical performances in a set of "constructed" films. As the research project expanded, however, I began to recognize the value and the necessity of including a number of different components that I would incorporate into those films. As any anthropologist knows, it is impossible to conduct research on all aspects of the culture of a "cultural system," regardless of how much research time is expended. Social anthropology taught American anthropology the necessity of research being oriented around one particular topic (in this case music) or research question; the holistic approach characteristic of American anthropology indicated the importance of linking any particular topic to the cultural whole as necessary to explain what that particular topic means; the political economic approach common in anthropology in general (often not given the credit it deserves) suggests that researchers set aside the limitations of any particular discipline in the pursuit of their research.

In recording the musical performances of the Horqin Mongols, and (for the larger purposes described above) of other visual and auditory recordings related to the goals of this project, I carefully chose a set of equipment and practices based on my many years of previous filmmaking experiences. Throughout my professional career in publishing the journal "Urban Anthropology And Studies Of Cultural Systems And World Economic Development" (which I founded in 1972, and have edited and published since that time), I have worked on Macintosh computers and have utilized various kinds of software available for that computer that are also useful in filmmaking. Beyond those, there is also a variety of software pertinent specifically to filmmaking (including the recording and editing of sound in musical performances). The ownership of this equipment and software depends, however, to a great extent on the filmmaker's ability to purchase it. (I recommend purchasing equip-

ment and software because the owner knows by experience whether the equipment is in working order before going to the field. That is not always the case with equipment not owned by the filmmaker, often with tragic results.) In my case, I have serviceable but not always the latest or most expensive equipment, or the latest versions of software. I also do all of my own production and post-production work, both creative and drudge work, since I do not have sufficient funds to employ others to help me. However, I do hire associates in Inner Mongolia to help me in my field research.

In the production part of anthropological filmmaking, I own and have used in the production of this DVD set a Canon GL2 standard definition digital camcorder. The major advantages of this camcorder are: (1) that it is relatively small, and can be carried in one small bag onto an airplane; (2) that it records onto a magnetic tape, which at the beginning of this project was the best and most economical means of storing the large quantity of shots generated in several weeks of daily recording; (3) that it records both time code and color bars, each of which is essential in post-production; and (4) that it has a 20 power lens, which is invaluable in recording interviews and performances, and in supplementing the performance and interview shots with contextual shots.

For the purposes of anthropological filmmaking, I have dispensed with the cardioid microphone that came with the GL2 and replaced it with a Canon DM50 directional stereo shotgun microphone. The shotgun microphone records much more narrowly than a cardioid microphone, and thus reduces to a great degree the extraneous sounds that invariably occur in field recordings. (The use of wireless microphones is prohibited in China. Thus, I could not use a wireless lavaliere microphone; and using a wired lavaliere microphone, particularly in performances in public settings, is of course nearly impossible.)

The Canon GL2 camera, the microphone, four lithium ion batteries for the GL2, a Canon CA-920 battery charger, and a 3-wire audio/video cable (for connection to a television set) all fit into a PortaBrace carrying case that fits under the seat of most commercial airplanes or in the overhead compartment. I also include in this carrying case 6-8 mini-cassettes and one or two photographic release forms, translated into Chinese. Thirty to forty additional tapes for three to four weeks of field recordings are carried in another suitcase.

To complete the camera production equipment, I take with me to China a Vel-

bon DF50 tripod, which is light in weight but stable enough to use in the field. However, I do not carry that tripod on board with the other production equipment. I pack that tripod carefully into one of the suitcases that are shipped in the storage area of the airplane.

For my most recent visit to Inner Mongolia, I also took a Sony GV-HD700 digital HD videocassette recorder. This allowed me to not only review the video footage and check the quality of the sound the day that I recorded them on a monitor larger than the camera screen, but it also allowed me to export the audio track of interviews to an ageing Macintosh PowerBook computer so that I could burn that audio onto DVD disks to have them translated daily while I was in the field by one of my field associates. It also allows me to work with the time codes that are burned on the tapes, since time codes on the tapes are visible on the GV-HD700 screen.

The Canon GL2 in its PortaBrace carrying case and all of the associated equipment mentioned above (except the tripod), the GV-HD700, a digital still camera (a Canon SX10 IS with a 20 power zoom lens), a Macintosh PowerBook G4 computer, and a cardboard box holding 30 tapes all fit into a 20" suitcase with wheels which I can take onboard an airplane and stow in the overhead compartment or beneath the seat.

### **Equipment for Post Production**

In post production, the emphasis shifts from equipment to software. The three categories of software that are important are: (1) an all inclusive video editing and DVD production software; (2) sound editing software; (3) database software; (4) graphic production software; and (5) the other-than-above but still important supporting software. Beyond software, it is also necessary to have several hard drives with sufficient capacity to store QuickTime video. Digitized video, even standard definition video, takes up enormous space on a hard drive. Since the price of 1 TB hard drives has fallen greatly in recent months, I bought several 1 TB hard drives; one for the recording of the master QuickTime files, and a second as offline backup storage in case the hard drive with the original clips on it is damaged.

For post production, I use a now somewhat outdated version of Apple's suite of software called Final Cut Studio, which contains both Final Cut Pro for video editing, DVD Studio Pro for organizing the materials for DVD production, and Apple's Compressor to convert the film edited in Final Cut Pro into a form useable in DVD Studio Pro. Clips from field tapes can be captured using Final Cut Pro and stored as QuickTime files on a computer's hard disk drive.

For sound editing on the Macintosh when I need something beyond the sound editing capabilities of Final Cut Pro, I use Bias's Peak and Sound Soap (rather than Apple's Sound Track Pro, which is included in the Final Cut Studio suite). Clips that have objectionable and extraneous sounds can be "cleaned" in SoundSoap; and audio extracted from field recordings can be prepared as Quicktime files for importing as music over titles and credits.

Using a database to organize the shots recorded in the field for a major project is, in my opinion, absolutely essential for a long-term filmmaking project. Each tape must be viewed and time codes must be recorded in the database to one extent or another, or for one purpose or another. The choice of which field footage to time code is up to the filmmaker. In my case, after extensive experience for the kind of filmmaking that I do, I can go through a 60 minute videotape and do a triage of the materials on that tape such that I identify what I think are the clips that I will use, write down the beginning and end points of that selected footage, and generate the other elements that are necessary to provide a discrete set of characters to find that information in the database. A sample of the information that is entered into one record of the database to reference the shot might be, for example:

IM 7230 ECT SONG: Wan Li 00:41:50;00 00:44:12;00.

The "IM7230" is the number of the tape (IM for "Inner Mongolia" and 7230 as the number of the particular tape in the sequence of tapes on Inner Mongolia). "ECT" is my code to identify the locale in which this shot was recorded ("ECT" is my abbreviation for Erden Chalun Tob, a village in the City Prefecture of Tong Liao). (Another set of abbreviations might be used in the case of an abbreviation of a person's name.) "SONG: Wan Li" identifies the content of that clip and allows a search through that database for all of the songs with that title. The numbers following the song title are the time codes for the beginning and ending of the clip. I like and have used the database software for the Macintosh by ProVue called "Panorama" for many years, but there are of course others that would serve.

In order to produce a variety of graphics for titles (beyond that which can be

produced in the Final Cut Studio itself), and for the creation of DVD covers and the artwork for DVD labeling, I find that Adobe's Illustrator and Photoshop are essential in addition to the titling software within Final Cut Pro. In the preparation of menus for inclusion in DVD Studio Pro, Illustrator creates graphics that can be imported as menus. Frames from field tapes, stored as QuickTime files, can be exported ("movie to picture," uncompressed) using Apple's QuickTime software, and imported into Adobe Photoshop, manipulated if necessary, and exported as TIFF images, which look very nice when imported into Illustrator as photographs for the DVD menus.

After field tapes have been time coded and entered into a database, as described above, those components form the bases for the edit decision lists (EDLs) that are to be used in editing the film. A list of shots from a database can be exported as a text document but before it can be imported into Final Cut Pro, it must be converted into a .txt format to be recognized by Final Cut Pro. Microsoft Word can open text documents generated by a database, which can then be saved as a .txt file ready for importation into Final Cut Pro. Various other softwares can be used for other procedures common to film editing, but the choice of those is up to the individual filmmaker.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The relationship between anthropology as a discipline, with all of its theory, methods, practice, and written works on the one hand, and any particular anthropologist making a film on the other, is not only complex but experienced by each individual anthropologist differently. Each anthropologist, like everyone else, pursues his/her own interests and opportunities, and brings his/her own inclinations to any filmmaking experience. In my anthropological filmmaking work in Inner Mongolia, China, I developed a project on the traditional music of the Horqin Mongols of eastern Inner Mongolia that was rich and satisfying to me, both in the field experience (production) and the editing (post production) phases. The DVDs that I produced are valuable sources of information about the Horqin Mongols and their traditional music, but they are only one anthropological filmmaker's vision of what might be done with that topic, or with comparable investigations.

The anthropological filmmaking project "Song Of The Grasslands: Ethnicity,

Identity, Culture Change, And Economic Development Among The Horqin Mongols Of Eastern Inner Mongolia, China" illustrates how camcorder recordings of sound and music can be integrated into a much larger framework using a holistic anthropological and political economic approach. Those interested in seeing a short sample of one of the constructed films from this DVD can go to: http://www.the-institute-ny.com/WEB%20PAGES/DVDs/CHINA%20ODYSSEY/chinaodyssey.htm.<sup>1</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Institute, Inc. is the current name of a closely-held corporation that I founded in 1974 as "The Institute for the Study of Man, Inc." to publish the journal "Urban Anthropology." Since volume 14, the journal has also changed its name to "Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development." The above website for "The Institute, Inc." provides information for the journal and also for the two series of films discussed in this paper.

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