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**THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING
CHINGGIS KHAAN:
DISMEMBERING THE REMEMBERING***

Since the democratic revolution in 1990, Chinggis Khaan's image and name have appeared everywhere in Mongolia.¹ Whether through naming of goods (in particular alcohol) and restaurants, or the evocation of the Chinggisid period more generally in celebrations and political imagery, Chinggis Khaan is an inescapable presence in post-socialist Mongolia. This, we are repeatedly assured, by both Mongolians and Westerners alike, is in marked contrast to the socialist period, when it was forbidden to speak

* Numerous people provided feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and helped clarify readings and identify references in the old Mongolian script, as well as commented on translations. Thanks are due to Christopher Atwood, Gerelt Bayantur, Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn, Loretta Kim, Ellen McGill, Onon Perenlei, David Sneath, and Bayartsetseg Terbish.

¹ Throughout this article, I have chosen to transcribe the title more commonly known as Genghis Khaan, among many other variants, as Chinggis Khan. Although a blend of transcriptions, it is a not uncommon attempt to remain faithful to the Mongolian version of his name, yet in a form that will be recognizable to most readers. "Chinggis" is a fairly straightforward transcription of the Mongolian, while "Khaan" is one way of transliterating the Cyrillic form of the term written in the old Mongolian script as "Qaghan," often roughly glossed as "Great Khaan" or "Khaan of Khaans." This brings the spelling closer to the form most people will be familiar with, while keeping it in line with how he is actually referred to in Mongolia, which is the key concern of this article.

about Chinggis Khaan in public and he was only spoken of in private with hushed whispers among trusted friends, if at all.² “His name was forbidden and banished to oblivion” is how one Mongolian researcher describes the situation prior to 1990.³

This image of Chinggis Khaan’s banishment under socialism is, in its own way, an appealing one. It heightens the contrast between the socialist period and the contemporary one. Repression and erasure of national history under socialism is replaced by the flowering acknowledgement of the “true” past. Identities are reborn. The Sleeping Beauty that is the Mongolian national identity is awakened. To paraphrase Thomas Huxley, however, this is a beautiful image destroyed by an ugly fact. The banishment did not happen. If not the presence he is today, Chinggis Khaan was not consigned to oblivion for the entire socialist period either. Public presentations of Chinggis were proscribed under socialism, but only severely so in specific time periods. Under later socialism (the 1970s and 1980s), Chinggis Khaan was often described as having played an “altogether reactionary” role in history.⁴ The unified state he created was ascribed a distinctive feudal characteristic that protected the interests of the nobility.⁵ Yet even this was not the uniform understanding and portrayal of Chinggis Khaan through the entire socialist period, and even this accounting is amenable to multiple interpretations.⁶ The portrayal of Chinggis shifted with the changing ideological winds. But this underscores one important fact: almost any socialist-era history book includes a section on Chinggis Khaan. Articles related to Chinggis Khaan and his time appeared in scholarly publications, and research into Chinggis Khaan was even at first encouraged under socialism.⁷ Clearly, writing and talking about Chinggis Khaan during the social-

ist period did take place, contrary to what people now “remember” to have been the case. When people say that Chinggis Khaan was banished from public discourse and memory, this is not strictly true in a literal sense. They are “remembering” a forced forgetting that did not take place. What people are referring to instead of an actual forgetting is the fact that they could not talk about Chinggis Khaan as they wished. This is a vital distinction. Chinggis Khaan was present, but not always as people may have wished. Then, as now, the image of Chinggis Khaan functioned as a political barometer, indicating shifting ideological patterns and the limits of acceptable discourse.

The disjuncture between recalled (by people in the present) and documented (in texts of the period) pasts raises important questions. If Chinggis Khaan was written and talked about under socialism more often than is now acknowledged, why is this so? Why don’t people “remember” this? What has led to the current view of what took place during the socialist period? What can we learn about contemporary politics and identity in Mongolia by examining the “forgetting” of Chinggis Khaan under socialism? These are the questions I explore in this paper, drawing on over a decade of research and fieldwork in Mongolia. In doing so, I will show that although memories of the socialist period now presented conflict with the documented past, they do so for specific, understandable reasons and that these reasons are intimately bound up with the current political climate. I will also trace – as far as possible – the social life of some of the texts and events of the socialist period. In tracing these events, texts, and recollections, I demonstrate that we need to keep in mind the various spheres of discourse present in any society. Much like today, during socialism, and in memories of socialism, some spheres of discourse about Chinggis Khaan are seen as more relevant than others.

In this paper, I seek to reposition the place of “forgetting” in history, memory, and cultural processes more generally. Silences and mis-rememberings form as integral a part of identity as do “positive” narratives. Tradition, history, and identity cannot be invented without displacement of something else. While I am here dealing with memory, I am not particularly concerned with remembering, as it is normally understood in the literature.⁸ Nor

² I am focusing on Mongolians and their attitudes toward Chinggis Khaan here. Nonetheless, since Western authors draw ultimately upon Mongolian sources for their understanding of the socialist period, I occasionally will cite them when they prove illuminating.

³ Ts. Tsetsenbileg. Chinggis Khaan in Visions of Modern Mongols // The Chinggis Khaan Symposium in Memory of Gombojav Hangin. Ulaanbaatar, 2001. P. 184.

⁴ Sh. Bira and L. Bat-Ochir (Eds.). *Bügd Nairamdah Mongol Ard Ulsyn tüüh* [History of the Mongolian People’s Republic]. Ulaanbaatar, 1987. P. 65.

⁵ *Ibid.* P. 54.

⁶ See Christopher Kaplonski. *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: the Memory of Heroes*. London, 2004.

⁷ The Second Party Congress of MAHN (Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party) in 1923 called for further research into Chinggis Khaan, although I have not myself seen the actual documents. I am indebted to Christopher Atwood for bringing this point to my attention.

⁸ For fairly typical examples of the now wide-ranging field, see James Fentress and Chris Wickham. *Social memory*. Oxford, 1992; John Gillis (Ed.). *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*. Princeton, 1994; Yael Zerubavel. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago, 1995.

am I looking at Trouillot's silences of omission,⁹ or elisions of commemoration,¹⁰ although my contribution here contributes to the understanding of these issues as well. I explore the concept of "forgetting" as a form of remembering. This is not the collective amnesia of a post-authoritarian society seeking to forget the disappearances or their own complicity. Instead, "forgetting" is an integral, continuous part of the discourses of memory. Remembering, whether public or private, is ultimately a form of discourse. Remembering takes place through, and as a result of, negotiation, disruption, and reconstruction. Even our innermost private memories are bounded by cultural expectations and experiences. It is with this understanding that I turn to how people now remember the socialist period.

The Story

"Chinggis Khan – the man who for over 50 years was banished from Mongolia's consciousness and history books."¹¹ "I wasn't taught anything [about Chinggis Khaan]. People were afraid to speak about him."¹² These are fairly typical examples of how many Mongolians and non-Mongolians now view the place Chinggis Khaan was accorded during the socialist period. "Is it our fault we have forgotten our history?" asks the lyrics of a Mongolian rock song.¹³ Similar views were echoed in many conversations over the years.¹⁴ Chinggis Khaan, we are told, was a topic to be brought up only in the strictest secrecy, among trusted friends.

In more general terms, the story, as it is now recounted, is that the socialist government was deeply opposed to history and tradition. History and tradition were nationalist and backward, and antithetical to all that so-

⁹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, 1995.

¹⁰ James Young. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven, 1993.

¹¹ Alicia Campi. *The Rise of Nationalism in the Mongolian People's Republic as Reflected in Language Reform, Religion and the Cult of Chinggis Khan // Bulletin of the International Association for Mongolian Studies*. 1991. Vol. 8. P. 10.

¹² Questionnaire response in 1993 from a twenty-year-old cleaning woman.

¹³ Quoted in Jack Weatherford. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. New York, 2004. P. 266.

¹⁴ Perhaps because it seems so obvious to them, books on Chinggis Khaan in the post-socialist period do not make the claim of banishment so strongly. They tend rather to talk more generally about reviving tradition and correcting mistakes, taking a positive rather than negative approach to the topic.

cialism stood for. They needed to be swept away. Starting with the replacement of the old Mongolian script with Cyrillic in the 1940s, the "national intellectual tradition" began to be destroyed and "Mongolians were separated from their own original history."¹⁵ It was only with the "glimmerings" of democracy and freedom that tradition could take its rightful place, and the truth about history be known.¹⁶ Others write of reviving traditions and the "reawakening of the national consciousness" following the collapse of socialism.¹⁷ One can only reawaken that which has been sleeping, or – as it is more likely seen in this case – anaesthetized. Socialist rule had denied Mongolians their true essence.

There is much truth in this picture of attitudes towards history and tradition during the socialist period, particularly from the 1950s on.¹⁸ The government seized the opportunity to ban the traditional lunar New Year, *Tsaagaan Sar*, when Mongolia's leader H. Choibalsan died on that date in 1952. (The ban was eventually softened in the countryside, where "The Herder's Holiday" was allowed, but in Ulaanbaatar, Party meetings were timed to disrupt preparations for the holiday well into the 1980s.) Also starting in the 1950s, the *deel* – the national costume – was often looked upon as a symbol of backwardness and was to be avoided.¹⁹ The 1950s, which in later socialist history books were often characterized by phrases such as "the victory of the socialist relations of production,"²⁰ are now often referred to as the time of Mongolia's cultural revolution, indicating the in-

¹⁵ N. Nyam-Osor. XIII – XIV зууны Монголын төр улс, төрт Yosny Högliin Tüühen Sudlal [Historical Studies on the Development of the Mongolian State and Statehood in the 13th – 14th centuries.]. Ulaanbaatar, 2003. Pp. 20-21. The term in Mongolian, *eh tiiih*, is linked to the concept of original or primary history, but also carries connotations of truth and greatness, which are not conveyed in the English translation "original history".

¹⁶ N. Nyam-Osor. P. 21.

¹⁷ T. Mandir. *Horin negen hörög [Twenty-One Portraits]*. Ulaanbaatar, 1990. P. 5; see also Damba et al. (Eds.). *Chingis Haan: Mongolchuudyn ündesni baharhal, sür süld [Chinggis Khaan: The National Pride and Splendor of Mongolians]*. Ulaanbaatar, 2002. P. 3.

¹⁸ Despite the great repressions and killings of the late 1930s, history writing, as we will see, did not become fully socialist until much later.

¹⁹ While most people I talked to said that wearing a *deel* and even taking snuff (part of a traditional greeting between men) or smoking traditional Mongolian pipes were banned or prohibited, a few people said that this was not an outright ban. Rather, such practices were equated with nationalism, and to be accused of nationalism could have dire consequences.

²⁰ Sh. Bira and L. Bat-Ochir (Eds.) *Bügd Nairamdah Mongol Ard Ulsyn tüüh*. P. 367.

creasing emphasis on the instillation of social precepts and ideology at the time.

Over the course of the socialist period, the production and interpretation of knowledge were increasingly guided by Marxist-Leninist principles. Soviet “advisors” were present to make sure the party line was followed, although Mongolian embracing of the socialist cause must not be overlooked. As Caroline Humphrey has observed, “Soviet ideology was taken up almost more sincerely, more naively, more brutally than in the USSR itself.”²¹ Some of the academics I interviewed in the 1990s still viewed socialism as a noble, if failed, goal. Whatever the case, as socialism wore on, and particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, historians and other academics were persecuted for using the “wrong” (i.e. Chinese) sources.²² Deviations were often rewarded with imprisonment or exile, although it wasn’t always clear until after the fact what would qualify as a deviation (a point I return to below). History writing, and discourse more generally, was anything but open and free. Attitudes were not only about history, but politics as well, more than one academic told me. “The issue of Chinggis Khaan was not only a scientific one, but a political one,” was how a prominent historian put it. Shirendev, the noted Mongolian historian, explained in an interview that when he and his colleagues wanted to write the history of Mongolia in the 1950s, they were warned that they might get their history “wrong” since they didn’t know Marxism well enough. The result was the one-volume *History of the Mongolian People’s Republic* (1955), a work jointly authored by the Mongolian and Soviet Academies of Science.²³

Probably the most famous example of ideology guiding academia – and in this instance, views on Chinggis Khaan himself – was the celebration of the 800th anniversary of his birth in 1962.²⁴ Early in the year, plans were made by the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MAHN) to commemorate Chinggis Khaan’s birth. A statue was erected near his birthplace

²¹ Caroline Humphrey. *The Moral Authority of the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia* // *Religion, State and Society*. 1992. Vol. 20. No. 3-4. P. 375.

²² D. Dashpurev and S. K. Soni. *Reign of Terror in Mongolia, 1920-1990*. New Delhi, 1992. P. 72

²³ *Bügd Nairamdah Mongol Ard Ulsyn tüüh* [History of the Mongolian People’s Republic] / Mongolian and Soviet Academies of Science. Ulaanbaatar, 1955. This remained a standard work, going through at least two more editions, in 1966 and 1984.

²⁴ For a fuller account and analysis of this see J. Boldbaatar. *The Eight-Hundredth Anniversary of Chinggis Khan: The Revival and Suppression of Mongolian National Consciousness* // S. Kotkin and B. Elleman (Eds.). *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan*. Armonk, NY, 1999.

in Hentei *aimag* (province), and a conference was held at the State Library in Ulaanbaatar. Although no one from the Politburo attended, the room the conference was held in was overflowing, and people gathered in the halls to hear the presentations.²⁵ Articles and even poems were published in various newspapers. The celebration and conference, which had been sponsored by the Academy of Science, however, were soon criticized for what was said to be their overly nationalistic stance. The papers from the conference were never published, although some accompanying articles appeared in the Party newspaper, *Ünen* (*Truth*). By the fall, academics were forced to engage in self-criticism, renouncing their earlier positions,²⁶ and D. Tömör-Ochir, a secretary of the Central Committee was forced out of the Party for his nationalistic tendencies, which contradicted Party policy. “[T]o deny the reactionary qualities of Chinggis Khaan’s deeds or to gloss over these characteristics is to deviate from fundamental Party policy, and indeed is to encourage nationalism” ran part of the official announcement.²⁷ Yet it is important to realize that this celebration was not a grassroots effort. MAHN had issued a resolution in February of 1962 authorizing the commemoration.²⁸ Political contingencies, and in particular, the larger Sino-Soviet context of deteriorating relations, not a deep-rooted antipathy to Chinggis Khaan or history as such, brought about the backlash.²⁹

In short, public discourse and presentations of history were indeed circumscribed at times under socialism, and became increasingly so as the decades progressed. There clearly were official lines to follow, even if they

²⁵ A. Myagmarjav. Chingis haany 800 jiliin oig Mongold temdegleesen tuhai dursamj [“Reminiscences about the Commemoration of Chinggis Khaan’s 800th Anniversary in Mongolia”] // G. Damba et al. (Eds.). *Chingis Haan: Mongolchudyn ündesnii baharhal, sür süld*. Ulaanbaatar, 2002. P. 308.

²⁶ See *Üндсөрхөх үзлийн аливаа илрелтэй шийдвэртэй тэмтс’гэе: BNMAU-ын шинжлэх ухааны академиин намын хорооны бүх гийшүүдийн хурал* [Let’s Resolutely Struggle Against All Aspects of Nationalism: The Academy of Science of the MPR’s Party Committee’s All-Member Meeting] // *Ünen*. 1962. 27 October. No. 300 (8407). Pp. 1, 2.

²⁷ MAHN-yn төв хорооны III бүгд хурлын дачин шийдвэр бол пролетариин интернационализмын зарчмын биел мөн [“The Firm Decision of the MAHN Central Committee’s Third Plenum is a Fulfillment of the Principles of Proletarian Internationalism”] // *Ünen*. 1962. 18 October. No. 291 (8398). P. 2.

²⁸ “Намын эсрэг явууллагын” тухай [About the “Anti-Party Activities”] // *Ünen*. 1990. 24 February. No. 47 (17577). P. 2.

²⁹ This is not to deny the severity of the backlash, or the effect it had on people’s lives. My argument here is that while the backlash was instigated by the government, it was also in response to an event that had, at least originally, government support.

changed swiftly and at times capriciously, and to breach these was done at one's own peril. But the question we must ask at this point is whether such incidents demonstrate that Chinggis Khaan was systemically erased from cultural memory. In other words, if the received wisdom outlined above makes for good press and confirms people's suspicions and affirms their attitudes toward socialism, was this what really happened? How does it correspond to the documentary evidence? And how did the received wisdom come about?

The Documented Past

To answer some of these questions briefly and anticipate my argument: Rather than showing that Chinggis Khaan was "banished to oblivion," an examination of the socialist period reveals a much more complex picture. It reveals – both in the socialist period and in the present – a strategic remembering that follows the contours of political and cultural expediencies. In other words, Chinggis Khaan was not forgotten under socialism. Yet, at least with the clarity of hindsight, we should be surprised if the received wisdom was anything but what it is now. Memory – both collective and personal – is not simply recall. The past can only be known through the vantage point of the present.³⁰ Memory is the reconstruction of the past, a remembering that is in large part hostage to the present. The answers to the questions of the past often lie in the present.

A starting point for understanding the disjuncture between the recalled and documented pasts is the simple fact that most people uncritically collapse all of the socialist period (1921 to 1990) into one undifferentiated expanse. This is encouraged in part through phrases such as "the socialist period" itself, as indeed I have done even here. (The phrase and its relatives are common in Mongolian as well as English.) This collapsing invites violence to history when people assign the entire period the characteristics particular to late socialism (the 1970s and 1980s). The tendencies and habits of the final decades of socialist rule are projected backwards over the entire 70 years. The ideological control of the period is assumed to have held sway over the previous years as well. This, however, is far from what was actually the case. The government's – and by extensions, socialism's – hold on Mongolia was tenuous at times. Most telling, perhaps, was the rebellion against the socialist government in the early 1930s, spearheaded

in large part by the Buddhist church, that had to be put down with Soviet aid. Spurred in large part by attempts to instill socialist practices, including the collectivization of herds and confiscation of property in the countryside, the revolt was a clear indication of the tenuousness of the government's hold and resulted in the adoption of a more liberal policy, at least for a short while.

The years of socialism were characterized by shifts in ideology and attempts at totalizing control, often through brutal and violent means. This, however, was not uniform. While the later 1930s in particular saw the rampages and ravages of repression, and one cannot underestimate the destruction and lasting fear they brought, this destruction of the old was not necessarily replaced by something new. The civil war of a few years before taught the Party the danger of too much change too quickly. What was new was not necessarily as socialist as the socialists would have liked. Even in the 1950s, at least a few Party members were secretly practicing religion and the provincial offices of the security apparatus were at times making due with less than ideal conditions.³¹ The government and security apparatus may have destroyed the old and instilled fear in the population, but the accomplishment of more constructive (from a socialist point of view) deeds would take longer.

It is with this world in mind, a world of destruction, attempts at construction, fear and government oppression and backtracking that we need to place what was actually being said and written about Chinggis Khaan during the socialist period. What follows is not an exhaustive survey of the materials available, but will amply demonstrate the continuing presence and shifting fortunes of Chinggis Khaan. I will sketch out some of the different publications to highlight how Chinggis was written about during the various times under socialism. As will be seen, far from being forbidden, Chinggis Khaan was actively studied and written about for much of the time. A bibliography published in the journal *Manai Mongol (Our Mongolia)* in 2002 shows that books touching on Chinggis Khaan were published throughout the early socialist years.³² One of these, *Chingis Bogdyn dursgalyn tiiiver (A collection of memories of Holy Chinggis)*, by turns verse mixed with prose, was first published in 1924 (the very year Mongolia was

³¹ For the former, see the State Central Historical Archives. F-1. T-5. H/N-214. P. 2, and for the latter F-1. T-5. H/N-124. Pp. 125-127.

³² Odhüü. Ezen Bodg Chingis Haany am'dral, üil ajillagaatai holbootoi zarim nom züi jagsaalt [A Partial Bibliography of Holy Lord Chinggis Khaan's Life and Works] // *Manai Mongol*. 2002. Nos. 1, 2 (13, 14). Pp. 134-147.

³⁰ R. G. Collingwood. *The Idea of History*. Oxford, 1946. P. 174.

declared a People's Republic) and then republished in 1926.³³ This work is based largely on, and closely follows, Rashipuntsag's *Bolor Erike* (*Crystal Rosary*) of the late eighteenth century, which in turn is based upon both earlier Mongolian chronicles and Chinese-language sources.³⁴

Other works were published throughout the 1920s and 1930s, including a copy of the seventeenth-century Mongolian chronicle *Altan Tobci* published in two volumes, one in 1927 and one in 1937. For the sections touching on Chinggis Khaan, the *Altan Tobci* (*Golden Summary*) largely parallels the thirteenth-century Mongolian chronicle, the *Secret History* (which it draws upon), while adding a particularly Buddhist coloring. To cite just one example, in the *Secret History*, Chinggis Khaan "was born with his destiny ordained from Heaven above."³⁵ In contrast, in the *Altan Tobci*, "wise and holy Chinggis" is sent by a command of Buddha into a world with twelve evil kings and in which all living creatures are suffering greatly to bring about an end to such tribulations.³⁶ Clearly in neither of these works is anything like a socialist reading of Chinggis Khaan present.

All of the books from the first decades of socialism that I have been able to check indicate no apparent concern with rendering a properly Marxist account of Mongolian history. One text published in 1928, *Monggol ulus-un erten-ece ulamjilan iregesen-i tobcihan temdeglegesen bichig* (*A Brief History of Mongolia from the Earliest Times*), notes that "Taizu Chinggis Khaan, in his great knowledge, thoughts and use of the military was like a *hubilgan* [reincarnation]."³⁷ A comparison, even if metaphorical to a "living god," is not what the received wisdom has led us to expect in a socialist-era text. The text, which draws upon some of the same sources as the *Bolor*

³³ I have not imposed a uniform system of transliteration on works cited here. Where the original (or version I consulted) was in *Mongol bichig* (the old script), I have transliterated accordingly. Otherwise, and where a book originally in *Mongol bichig* is available to me in Cyrillic Mongolian, spellings and transliterations are from the Cyrillic form in use today.

³⁴ E. Pürevjav. Chingis Bogdyn dursgalyn tüüver (A Collection of Memories of Holy Chinggis). Ulaanbaatar, 2000 [1924].

³⁵ U. Onon. *The Secret History of the Mongolia: the Life and Times of Chinggis Khan*. Richmond, UK, 2001. P. 37

³⁶ Luvsandanzan. *Altan tovch* [Golden Summary]. Ulaanbaatar, 1990. P. 20.

³⁷ Ch. Bat-Ochir. *Monggol ulus-un erten-ece ulamjilan iregesen-i tobcihan temdeglegesen bichig* [A Summary of the History of Mongolia from the Earliest Times]. Ulaanbaatar, 1928. P. 49. A *hubilgan* (*huvilgaan* in Cyrillic) is a Buddhist reincarnation, although Mongolian colleagues tell me the term can be used more expansively to denote great wisdom.

Erike,³⁸ is largely laudatory, going on to note: "Because of this, 40 great states were destroyed, Xi Xia was pacified, and the 55 states of Xiyu [the Western Regions] were established. His [Chinggis Khaan's] marvelous affairs were many, although it is a pity that they were not all recorded."³⁹ The date of publication of this work is particularly noteworthy, as it preceded by only a few months the sharp leftward turn in government and Party policy that would lead to the Buddhist-led revolts of the early 1930s.

The publication of Bat-Ochir's history is in keeping with the approach to Chinggis Khaan we find throughout the 1920s. The evidence suggests a positive view of, and active interest in, Chinggis Khaan during the early days of socialism. As already noted, the first MAHN Party Congress (later relabeled the Second Congress), held in 1923, actually called for greater study of Chinggis Khaan.⁴⁰ The call was evidently taken up, for the ethnographer Badamhatan mentions the existence in the 1920s of a "Commission to determine the birth and burial place [*nutag*] of Chinggis Khaan."⁴¹ Among other things, the committee apparently was responsible for deciding that Dadal *sum* in Hentei *aimag* was to be recognized as Chinggis's birthplace, publishing in 1928 an article by O. Jamyan, the head of the precursor of the Academy of Sciences on his research into Delüün Boldog, Chinggis Khaan's birthplace.⁴² Again, we should note the publication was just prior to the leftward turn of 1929. Clearly, the attempts to instill socialist thought, as well as actions that were about to be launched, were not yet in the air or were not seen as clashing with an interest in history and Chinggis Khaan.

Amar's *Mongolyn Tovch Tüüh* (*A Brief History of Mongolia*) was published in 1934, during the liberalization known as the New Turn that followed the Left Turn of 1929-1932. Amar, who served as a prime minister of Mongolia (and eventually executed by the Soviets), was noteworthy for drawing upon Western research and accounts in writing his history. His

³⁸ Ch. Bat-Ochir. P. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.* P. 49.

⁴⁰ I have been unable to find this decision in the copy of the documents available to me, but this is not surprising. Published in 1966, they are clearly edited. Yet it is clearly in keeping with other decisions made at the Congress, including a call to translate the key Buddhist texts, the *Tanjur* and *Ganjur*. *Mongol ardyn huv'sgalt namyn tüühend holbogдох баримт бичгүүд 1940-1960 он* [Documents Related to the History of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, 1920-1940]. Ulaanbaatar, 1966. P. 66.

⁴¹ S. Badamhatan. Chingis Khaan: "end bi noirsono" [Chinggis Khaan: "I Will Sleep Here"]. Ulaanbaatar, 1997. P. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Brief History renders a largely sympathetic view of Chinggis and his accomplishments, noting, for example, “In the center of the Mongol nation’s great land, from the land of the Hentei mountains, and the Onon, Herlen and Tuul rivers, Mongolia’s son Chinggis Khaan was born of a marvelous, heroic man. He united those near and far, made [Mongolia] famous throughout the world, and raised all of the great Mongolian nation into a great, historic state.”⁴³ Perhaps, though, in the context of representations of Chinggis Khaan under socialism, the text is most remarkable for the terms it uses, rather than the content. In reading the text, I have been unable to find the term “feudal,” which was to become the classic Marxist-Leninist term of reference for Mongolian society under Chinggis Khaan. Perhaps even more remarkable is Amar’s introduction to the book. First, he does not shy away from drawing parallels between Chinggis’s accomplishments and the present, socialist state, noting that when he was writing “the Mongolian state was again flourishing anew.”⁴⁴ The context of the “again... anew” makes it quite clear that the first flourishing took place under Chinggis Khaan. But perhaps even more remarkable is the closing lines: “Written in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar in the seven-hundred-and-seventy-third year of Chinggis and the twenty-fourth year of the Mongolian state [1934].”⁴⁵ Not only does Amar feel free to link the official time-reckoning to Chinggis, but he awards it secondary importance.⁴⁶

Books and scholarly articles continued to be published on Chinggis Khaan and related topics as the socialist period progressed. The 1940s saw the publication of a Mongolian translation of a Russian work, *Chinggis Qaghan-u üi-e-yin Monggol güren* (*The Mongolian Empire in the Time of Chinggis Khaan*),⁴⁷ as well as articles in the journal *Sinejelekui Uqaghan* (*Science*) throughout the 1940s dealing with such subjects as “An explanation of the term Burhan Khaldun [Chinggis’s birthplace].”⁴⁸ Most significant of all,

⁴³ A. Amar. *Mongolyn товч түүх* [A Brief History of Mongolia]. Ulaanbaatar, 1989 [1934]. P. 101.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* P. 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Also worthy of comment is the practice, maintained throughout at least the mid-1930s, of dating the existence of the Mongolian state to 1911, when independence was declared from a collapsing China. This in itself is not remarkable. What is, however, is the socialist use of a date that led to the elevation of a “Living Buddha” as Emperor of Mongolia.

⁴⁷ N. N. Pozdnyakov. *Chinggis Qaghan-u üi-e-yin Monggol güren* [The Mongol Empire in the Time of Chinggis Khaan] / Transl. Ts. Damdinsüren. Ulaanbaatar, 1941.

⁴⁸ B. Rinchin. *Burqan Qaldun gegci üge-ü tayilbari* // *Sinejelekui Uqaghan*. 1944. No. 7. Pp. 28-29.

perhaps, the *Secret History of the Mongols* itself – the epic chronicle roughly contemporaneous with Chinggis Khaan – first appeared in print in Mongolia in 1947, and was reprinted at least once (in 1957) during the socialist period. (Various other epics and chronicles would be published during the socialist period, usually in *Mongol bichig*.)

Yet the 1940s also saw a shift in the depictions of Chinggis Khaan, much as they saw an attempt to impose a greater degree of socialist control in other spheres as well. The vertical script officially began to be replaced with the Cyrillic alphabet in 1941, although the conversion took about a decade to complete. The late 1940s would see a greater emphasis on Marxist content in literature and history as well. It is in this context that the 1941 translation of Pozdnyakov’s *The Mongol Empire in the time of Chinggis Khaan* moves us toward what would become a fairly standard socialist interpretation of Chinggis Khaan. Mongolian society of the time is labeled “feudal”⁴⁹ and other standard Marxist terms like “relations of production” begin to appear in the text. Marx himself is referenced,⁵⁰ as are a number of Soviet scholars. A critical attitude to the Mongol conquests is adopted: “The secret intention of the Mongolian conquests was to plunder the material and cultural aspects of the more developed, cultured countries of the east and the west and thus strengthen the *bokir* Mongolian state.”⁵¹ The tone of writing adopted toward Chinggis Khaan had begun to shift. It is important to note, however, that it does so in a translation of a Russian text, rather than a Mongolian-authored one. More important, although published views on Chinggis Khaan may have begun to shift, they did not do so decisively. Nor did they yet indicate an exclusion of Chinggis Khaan from the public consciousness.

What is usually described as Mongolia’s first textbook, the *Ardyn Unshih Bichig* (*The People’s Textbook*) was published in 1948 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.⁵² The textbook included a history section that, while not offering an unequivocally favorable view Chinggis Khaan, led to the book being recalled shortly after its publication, in one of the first official claims that history and literature in Mongolia were not sufficiently Marxist in content.⁵³ A few months after it appeared, it was

⁴⁹ N. N. Pozdnyakov. P. 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* P. 46.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* P. 46. *Bokir* most literally means “dirty,” although in this context it can be read as “amoral” or “inhuman.”

⁵² G. Jamsranjav. *Ardyn Unshih Bichig* [The People’s Textbook]. Ulaanbaatar, 1948.

⁵³ The textbook was also criticized for its biographies of various figures, including Lenin. In an interview, the historian Shirendev told me that several people lost their jobs or were otherwise punished for their involvement in the production of the book.

recalled for not giving a Marxist appraisal to Chinggis Khaan's deeds.⁵⁴ Yet the book was not gushing in its evaluation of Chinggis Khaan. It notes that Chinggis "struggled for 17 years to unite the Mongolians"⁵⁵ and that "Chinggis's time was the time of the flowering of Mongolian feudalism," as it saw the development of Mongolian culture and arts.⁵⁶ This was the positive aspect of Chinggis's rule. Yet the text also goes on to note "The blood of the children of honest Mongolian herders flowed to support Mongolian feudal privilege, despotism, and rule. In this Chinggis was not honest, and this is the shameful side of history."⁵⁷ The text, authored by a Mongolian, is in some ways a step back from the stronger Marxist stance of Pozdnyakov.

The Politburo resolution condemning the *People's Textbook*, which also accused the book of "praising" Chinggis Khaan's "campaign of pillaging,"⁵⁸ was followed a short time later by another one: "About the situation of the teaching of the history of the Mongolian People's Republic and literature in our schools."⁵⁹ This resolution noted the need to affirm the socialist content of literature and history. These two resolutions can be seen as a key turning point in the public representations of Chinggis Khaan. While he was by no means banished from memory even after 1949, presentations acquired the characteristics that would become increasingly familiar over the following decades, presenting him as a person who may have helped social development by representing a necessary stage in Marxist evolution, but was otherwise a reactionary in intent and effect. The publications, however, continued. Badamhatan lists a number of other works published throughout the 1950-70s.⁶⁰ While many of these dealt with tangential topics, such as names of geographical sites mentioned in the *Secret History* and issues surrounding burial rites,⁶¹ their mere presence is telling. As already noted, Chinggis Khaan also merited a place in the official histories

published by the Academy of Science in conjunction with their Soviet counterparts. In other words, contrary to the popular view, there was a steady stream (sometimes more of a trickle) of research and publishing being undertaken on Chinggis Khaan during the socialist period. This did not mean that there was complete freedom to write about Chinggis Khaan as one wished. But even a limited ability to write about a figure is a far cry from a blanket prohibition, and, importantly, allows for not only official positions, but unofficial ones as well.⁶² If a historical figure is called to attention only to be castigated, the act still calls the figure to peoples' minds and invites greater reflection. Indeed, the need to condemn someone itself indicates their importance. Those already consigned to historical obscurity are no threat to the present, and can continue to be ignored.

If Chinggis Khaan was indeed written about by scholars during socialism, perhaps then the received wisdom refers to how he was taught (or not taught) in the schools. After all, what is written by and for academics is not always read by the larger public. It turns out, however, that this does not account for the received wisdom completely either. (Although, as we shall see shortly, it may offer a partial explanation.) School textbooks – which had to be approved by the Ministry of Education – teach about Chinggis Khaan. Even in 1962 – the year Tömör-Ochir was expelled from the Party for his role in the Chinggis Khaan commemoration and "anti-party" activities – Chinggis Khaan is discussed in the textbooks. In Erdembeleg's history text for fourth-grade students published that year, the condemnation of Chinggis Khaan and his accomplishments is harsh. We read that the "feudal state" (*fyeodal tör*) created at the beginning of the thirteenth century was a state that "only protected feudal interests."⁶³ This account of Chinggis Khaan is one of the more critical ones that I have encountered in a textbook. But the fact remains that Chinggis Khaan is still present in the book, and he would continue to appear in school texts published right up until the fall of the socialist government. Another text, published in 1987 – and thus as economic reforms were beginning – credits Chinggis with accomplishments such as uniting the Mongols. Yet it also decides, in the end, that he must be judged to be "completely tyrannical/reactionary" (*büheldee*

⁵⁴ Mongol ardyn huv'sgalt namyn tüühend holbogdoh barimt bichgüüd 1940-1960 on [Documents Related to the History of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, 1940-1960]. Ulaanbaatar, 1967. P. 327.

⁵⁵ G. Jamsranjav. Ardyn Unshih Bichig [The People's Textbook]. P. 55.

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mongol ardyn huv'sgalt namyn tüühend holbogdoh barimt bichgüüd 1940-1960 on [Documents Related to the History of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, 1940-1960]. Ulaanbaatar, 1967. P. 327.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Pp. 328-330.

⁶⁰ See S. Badamhatan. Pp. 5-6.

⁶¹ Ibid. P. 5.

⁶² Christopher Kaplonski. Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: the Memory of Heroes. London, 2004. Chap. One.

⁶³ G. Erdembeleg. Bügd Nairamdah Mongol Ard Ulsyn Tüüh [The History of the Mongolian People's Republic]. Ulaanbaatar, 1962. P. 16. My copy of this book is missing the page that would indicate when in 1962 it was published, so it is not clear if it came out before the clampdown on the celebration of Chinggis's anniversary or not.

hargis).⁶⁴ This is typical. A harsh judgement is rendered, but nonetheless, Chinggis Khaan is still written about. In school texts, as in history books, we are thus forced to conclude that Chinggis Khaan was clearly not erased from the Mongolian past.

I have been talking here of the existence of history texts and other publications that deal with Chinggis Khaan. As we have seen, if not always plentiful, they clearly existed throughout the entire socialist period. We cannot assume, however, that the presence of a figure in a textbook ensures him or her a place in the curriculum. Including something in a textbook does not mean it will necessarily be taught. Other factors enter into the equation, including time allocated in the actual classroom, and possible self-censorship through fear of reprisals. Indeed, this is what the one quote at the beginning suggests: “I wasn’t taught anything him. People were afraid to speak about him.” In many instances, pre-Revolutionary history was given short shrift, particularly in the Russian schools attended by many of the children of the elite. One result of this was that people thus received relatively little education in Mongolian history, or even language. Many of these same people pursued higher education elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. Most of my friends and colleagues who attended such schools reported receiving only one or two hours a week of Mongolian history for a few years. Particularly in the early 1990s, more than a few of the cultural and intellectual elites of Mongolia were more at home speaking Russian than Mongolian, and possessed minimal knowledge of Mongolian history. While I cannot be certain, it seems probable that such people – consciously or otherwise – have generalized their own experiences. A lack of exposure in a particular educational setting becomes generalized to a larger experience. An educational *didn’t* becomes a more inclusive *couldn’t* and serves to reinforce the story we have been hearing.

It is not possible here to fully reconstruct the social lives of the texts I have been examining. We cannot say with full certainty who read what and what their reactions were. A few points can be made, however. The first is to reiterate the simple fact that the works were published in the first place. The second is that given the push toward greater education and social development undertaken by the socialist government, it would not be surpris-

⁶⁴ Sh. Bira and L. Bat-Ochir (Eds.). *Bügd Nairamdah Mongol Ard Ulsyn tüüh* (History of the Mongolian People’s Republic). Ulaanbaatar, 1987. P. 65. Intriguingly, the judgement rendered in the textbooks of late socialism differ more in degree than kind from that of the criticized *People’s Textbook*.

ing to find even some of the more academic works finding a wider readership than would be expected from a similar text in the US or Europe. The dynamics of reading and education are not those we are familiar with. “Red Corners” with reading material were set up around the country to promote socialism and education. While most of the material would have been more overtly political and socialist in nature, other writings, including literature, were disseminated as well. While not approaching the print runs enjoyed by speeches of top Party officials, which ran to ten or twenty thousand copies in some instances, Podznyakov’s *The Mongol Empire in the time of Chinggis Khaan* was printed in 5000 copies, which was a fairly large run at the time. The journal *Sinejelekui Uqaghan* (*Science*) was published in print runs of 2500 in the 1940s, a number too large to have been intended for a purely academic audience.⁶⁵ (Mongolia’s first university did not open until 1942.) While such numbers are not conclusive, nor do they tell us if people actually read the publications, they do appear to indicate a larger intended audience than we might otherwise suspect.

In the end, a simple fact remains. Chinggis Khaan appears in publications throughout the socialist era, contrary to the received wisdom, and not until the late 1940s and early 1950s do we find what was to become a standard socialist interpretation appearing as official policy. There were no systematic attempts to erase him from either social memory or the historical timeline. In other, smaller-scale instances, history was changed or elided. Names of early revolutionaries judged to be ideologically suspect were left out of texts, and their deeds attributed to others. Even if it unrealistic to expect an entire period of history to be simply ignored (although this was often done with the centuries between the Yuan dynasty and the Manchu period), Chinggis did not have to be given the relative prominence he was. To argue against someone is still to call attention to them. In taking the effort to deny that Chinggis Khaan had redeeming qualities, one ends up making sure he is noticed. Revolutionaries (socialist or otherwise) are only revolutionaries so long as there is something or someone (preferably important) to be *against*. This point is underlined by the 1962 commemoration of Chinggis Khaan’s birth and the subsequent backlash. While most people rightly focus on the backlash and its implications, they overlook an obvious, but critical, point. That the conference and other goings-on were

⁶⁵ Although the Table of Contents is printed in Russian as well as Mongol bichig, the text itself is in bichig only. This effectively precludes the relatively large print run from being intended for international consumption.

planned at all – and took place with Party approval – is ample evidence that Chinggis Khaan was still very much on the minds of people, even those in power. It is only because this was the case that the celebration met with the eventual reaction it did.

This leads us to ask: If the received wisdom is wrong in regard to the documented past, why is it the received wisdom? Are people simply ignorant of recent history and texts, or is there something else at work here? This is the subject I turn to next.

Chinggis Khaan in Contemporary Memory

While the conventional view is wrong with regards to the documented past, it is so for understandable reasons. As I noted above, particularly with the clarity of hindsight, it would be surprising if the recalled past, reflected in the conventional view of Chinggis Khaan under socialism, was anything other than what it is. What the received wisdom shows us is not what was true, but what *needs* to be true. In her study of identity among Hutu refugees, Liisa Malkki uses the term “mythico-history” to describe Hutu historical narratives.⁶⁶ She writes that she uses this term not to judge the narratives untrue, but because they were:

concerned with *order* in a fundamental, cosmological sense. That is the key. [They were] concerned with the ordering and reordering of social and political categories, with the defining of self in distinction to other, with good and evil.⁶⁷

A similar process has led to the received wisdom in the case of Chinggis Khaan. The re-remembering of how Chinggis Khaan was presented under socialism is intimately linked to the construction of the post-socialist world; to the “reordering of social and political categories.” There are a number of mutually reinforcing reasons why the received wisdom is what it is, but they can and should be placed squarely in the post-socialist realm, not under socialism itself. Although I have shown that the recalled past is in some sense “false” when compared to the documented past, this is not really my concern. I seek not to judge, but to understand the discrepancy between versions of the past. The much more interesting and important question is not “which past is true,” but rather why this is so: Why are there multiple

past? Why are contemporary recollections of Chinggis Khaan “mythico-historic” in Malkki’s terms?

The first thing that needs to be clarified is that when people say that Chinggis Khaan was banished from public discourse and memory, this is not strictly true in a literal sense. What they are referring to is the fact that people could not talk about him as they wished. Narratives about the past were not banned, but they were delimited, much as they are today. Public presentations were bounded, although the boundaries changed over time. This is an important distinction, and is the key to unraveling the persistence of the conventional wisdom. The conventional wisdom is not so much a recitation of the memory of actual circumstances as it is a reconstruction of a social sphere. There were indeed times and places in which Chinggis, if not banished, was at least made unwelcome. One could not walk the streets of Ulaanbaatar or Öndörhaan loudly proclaiming the virtues of Chinggis Khaan in the 1970s or 1980s. People did suffer consequences for their participation in the 1962 conference. Such incidents provide the starting point for an elaboration of the recalled past. Through remembering Chinggis Khaan in particular ways, Mongolians construct the present through reconstructing the past.

With the collapse of socialism in 1990, more than a political system came to an end. At the core of socialism was an attempt to build not only a specific economic or political system, but to create a new identity as well. Socialism “saw itself as and, to a certain extent, really was the embodiment of a utopia.”⁶⁸ Utopia, however, requires rebirth. Before utopia could be achieved, the “new socialist man” (and, one presumes, woman) had to be created. This is not a uniquely socialist phenomenon. (Recall Massimo d’Azeglio’s famous observation after the unification of Italy: “We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.” The sequence is reversed, but the point remains the same.)

Socialists, however, seem to have taken to the project in a more enthusiastic and heavy-handed manner than many others. Thus the economic and later social reforms of the late 1980s that culminated in the democratic revolution of 1989-1990 did more than bring down an economic or political system. They undermined the official basis for thinking about what it meant to be a Mongolian. The old exaltations to strive ceaselessly for the good of the motherland might still have been valid, but it was no longer

⁶⁶ Liisa Malkki. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago, 1995. P. 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* P. 55.

⁶⁸ G. M. Tamas. *Victory Defeated // Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Eds.). Democracy after Communism*. Baltimore, 2002. P. 128.

clear what one was striving for or toward. While the socialist basis had not enjoyed universal support, there is no doubt that people subscribed to it. Some bought into it whole-heartedly, while others simply accepted it as the way things were.

The collapse of socialism thus rendered a new identity both desirable and necessary. Socialism had lost its legitimacy for most people, and such a loss necessitated a new identity. The obvious place to turn for a new identity was the past.⁶⁹ To be truly Mongolian was no longer to be socialist, but rather, to be “traditional.” A government minister explained to me in 1993:

So a lot of Mongolians now think that the independence and survival of a country, especially a country which is like Mongolia, is the question not only of the army, it is the question of finding our identity. To be different from the Chinese, and at the same time to be different from the Russians. To keep our identity. In this sense, it is very necessary for us to turn to our traditional culture. And that’s why, you know, culture is also becoming a factor of independence in this country.

Custom and tradition were thus to form the basis for a new identity, although one – as is evident from his use of the verb “to keep” – that is already being cognized as extant. New identities can be challenged. Existing ones are more resilient. The wording also suggests that it was the socialist identity that was artificial, not really “Mongolian.” The minister returned to the topic a few minutes later using a more biological image:

I’m talking about a kind of mental immune system, or spiritual immune system. And which will help keep our identity, help keep it different from the Russians and the Chinese. So, each custom helps to make up a kind of immune system, in this figurative meaning... So we have to find out what kind of custom is necessary for us to develop our immune system and what kind of is not so necessary to keep.

This biological metaphor is particularly telling. It suggests not only an organic unity, but a purity as well. As with other organic metaphors, such as those drawing on blood,⁷⁰ that which is foreign is threatening and dan-

⁶⁹ Others, including many of the early democratic leaders, turned to more Western models, arguing for an identity based on civic nationalism, but they were often condemned for being “fake” Mongols. The ultra-nationalist poet and politician O. Dashbalbar, for example, in an interview in 1997 said the leaders of the democratic movement were not “real” Mongols since they had been educated abroad and were now looking to the West for models for laws.

⁷⁰ See, for example Uli Linke. *Blood and Nation: the European Aesthetics of Race*. Philadelphia, 1999.

gerous. The past, incarnated as custom and tradition, serves to protect what is “truly” Mongolian and keep it pure.

I spoke with the minister at a time of great change and uncertainty in Mongolia. As he made clear, one of the few things people agreed upon was the importance of tradition, even if what this meant was often less than clear. Quite what tradition dated from when was far from agreed upon. But figuring that out was not the point. Something did not have to be true or accurate, it just had to be traditional. At a time when the economy was still in freefall, numerous books (re)introducing Mongolians to their customs and traditions were being published. In these books and countless articles, debates, discussions, and consultations with aged relatives, pre-socialist history was largely jumbled together into an amorphous, ahistorical period that provided justification for the new identity. The past, as long as it was not socialist, was equally past. No matter how it was presented, this was not so much a reclaiming or rediscovery of the past, but the construction of a new history, a mythico-historic scaffolding on which to construct an identity. Through this new history “social and political categories” were being rethought and refashioned.

Nationalist and other constructions of identity are usually framed in opposition to an external “Other.” We are not Them. Canadians are not Americans, nor are the Welsh English. Mongolians are not Russians and they are most emphatically are not Chinese. This is one aspect of identity in post-socialist Mongolia. But if this is a necessary identity in terms of demarcation, to establish boundaries, it is not a sufficient one. There needs to be a positive aspect. We may know who we are not, but that does not satisfactorily tell us who we are, or how to be who we are. In many, if not most, places and times the answer is provided through the past and traditions, even if they need to be invented first.⁷¹ This answer is provided in the Mongolian case both through contrast with and appropriation of the past. The socialist past is rendered Other: a foreign imposition (by the Soviets) and to be Mongolian is to reject this past, and adopt the past of the pre-socialist era. The process is logically carried a step further, through what is largely an inversion. What was good under socialism becomes bad, and what is good now must, logically, have been bad then. In particular, the representations of Chinggis Khaan that blossomed in the post-socialist environment were presented as being – at last – the “true” history, which was set against the distortions of the socialist period. Not all has been inverted,

⁷¹ For the classic formulation see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Eds.). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, 1983.

however. If under later socialism, presentations of Chinggis were delimited, so too are they now. While in theory one can still call Chinggis a reactionary tyrant, social and political expediencies ensure that the vast majority of people do not do so.⁷² If the socialists thought he was bad, then the only possible “truth” about Chinggis is that he is good. Indeed, he is now so good and important – sacred, even – that at intervals, talk arises of either banning or limiting the use of his name for commercial purposes.⁷³

There are multiple reasons why Chinggis Khaan makes – retrospectively – an almost ideal choice as a slate upon which to rewrite the past. Perhaps the polysemic historical figure *par excellence* in the Mongolian case, Chinggis offers something for just about everyone. He is far enough removed in time, and original sources few enough, that many interpretations can be sustained, if not convincingly. Some Mongolians saw (and still see) him as the founder of the Mongolian state; some saw him as a strong leader for a time of uncertainty; others saw him as a law-giver and bringer of order while others still saw him as an embodiment of “Mongolness,” left further undefined. Few if any of these meanings attached to Chinggis Khaan are held alone apart from others. Most people held – and still hold – a cornucopia of ideas and images about Chinggis Khaan. Even if a few are ultimately contradictory – Chinggis as source of legitimization for the new democracy and Chinggis as a strong leader able to take control and provide direction in a time of uncertainty – this does not stop people from believing both. The very ability of Chinggis Khaan as a symbol to weather such contradictions indicates his strength.

Such meanings now attributed to Chinggis Khaan are portrayed as telling the truth about history, set against the “distortions” of the socialist period. However, in setting up set such an opposition, people fall prey to some of the same distortions they now “remember” as being symptomatic of the socialist era. To underline Chinggis’s contemporary role, it becomes important to highlight the negative aspects of socialism to further heighten the contrast. There is a simple arithmetic at work here, where black now equals white and vice versa. If the documented past indicates that history was perhaps more gray than black, it nonetheless is remembered as black to suit the binary opposition being constructed. White is a revolution against black. Against gray it is arguably only an evolution.

⁷² O. Dashbalbar did lump Chinggis with history’s tyrants and dictators in at least one interview (1997), but some people I talked to thought most of his more provocative comments were largely grandstanding, rather than strongly held beliefs.

⁷³ A draft law was introduced in late 2004 dealing with this topic, but was later withdrawn.

This use of the past has much in common with Johann Gottfried von Herder’s eighteenth-century invocations of a Golden Time in Germany’s distant past. The way forward for the German nation was through a return to the past, and a rejection of things foreign. Through adopting foreign languages and manners – particularly from the French – the German nation had lost its soul. So too with Mongolia. By adopting the ways and language of socialism, which were those of the Soviet Union, Mongolia had lost her way.⁷⁴ It was to the glorious past that Germans (and Mongolians) must return to regain their national pride:

The voice of your fathers has faded and lies silent in the dust. Nation of heroic customs, of noble virtues and language, you have no impressions of your soul from the past?

Without doubt they once existed and perchance still do, but they lie under the mire, unrecognized and despised.⁷⁵

Herder, a Romantic, was, in calling for a return to the past, arguing for a rejection of the Enlightenment and its overbearing (to him) emphasis on rationality. There are important parallels between Herder’s reaction to the Enlightenment and Mongolians’ rejection of socialism. Both the Enlightenment and the socialist project are paeans to rationality. Socialism can be seen as the Enlightenment carried to its logical conclusion, and indeed finds its intellectual origins there. One need only recall Marx’s use of the phrase “scientific socialism,” and the legacy of models of social evolution he was building on, stretching back to at least August Comte and his explicit trajectory placing science at the top of the scale. A rejection of the Enlightenment (by Herder) and socialism (by Mongolians) is a rejection of rationality (although this is far from explicit in the Mongolian case). It is also an appeal to something presented as more primal, more *real*. In both cases, this is to be found in the (pre-rational) national past.

Yet the appeal to Chinggis Khaan as part of the traditional past also touches on something that seemingly contradicts this rejection of socialist rationality. The particular emphases given to Chinggis Khaan in contemporary Mongolia make him a paradigm of rationalization and rationality. Al-

⁷⁴ Although never an official language in Mongolia, as already noted, it was not uncommon for intellectuals and others – especially if educated abroad – to speak Russian as well, if not better than, Mongolian. Socialist holidays and other celebrations were imported into Mongolia wholesale as well.

⁷⁵ Quoted in William Wilson. Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism // *The Journal of Popular Culture*. 1973. Vol. 6. No. 3. P. 828.

though himself a charismatic figure, Chinggis becomes important to a large extent because he is seen as a giver of laws. He brings law, order, and rationality out of the chaos of the steppe. In the *Secret History*, he tells Shigi-Qutuqu to keep a written list of legal precedents.⁷⁶ He not only unifies the scattered tribes, but creates a state. The thirteenth-century Persian chronicler Juvaini's words come to mind. Prior to the rise of Chinggis Khaan, he wrote, the Mongols "clothing was of the skins of dogs and mice, and their food was the flesh of those animals and other dead things."⁷⁷ With the advent of Chinggis, things improved markedly: "and so it has come to pass that the present world is the paradise of that people."⁷⁸

Although this passage is not often quoted by contemporary Mongolians and other fans of Chinggis Khaan, the sentiment was clear in discussions about him. The Mongolians owe their existence, and Mongolia owes its existence as a state, to Chinggis Khaan. "If it weren't for Chinggis Khaan, we wouldn't be here today," one academic remarked to me. He was not alone in this view. It was a common, almost universal sentiment in the early 1990s, and remains so today. Although the academic did not spell it out, the implication is clear. Chinggis is responsible for the existence of the Mongol state, and by extension, the Mongolian nation. It is the political system that ensures the survival of the people. Yet he is also responsible for more than this. In particular, Chinggis Khaan is credited with the creation of laws. Images of him – particularly in the early 1990s – often placed Chinggis in Buddha-like poses, holding scrolls or otherwise alluding to his role as bringer of laws. Although his talents and genius, military and otherwise, brought about the creation of the Mongol state, Chinggis went beyond such beginnings to create a system of governance. He is credited not only for creating the Mongol state, but for systematizing and regularizing it. While his position and use in the (re)remembering of the past thus argues for understanding Chinggis Khaan as a Romantic figure, the actual interpretation renders him *both* a Romantic figure and at the same time, a continuation of socialist views.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Onon. *The Secret History of the Mongolia: the Life and Times of Chinggis Khaan*. P. 193.

⁷⁷ A. M. Juvaini. *History of the World Conqueror* / Transl. J. A. Boyle. Manchester, 1958. P. 21.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* P. 22.

⁷⁹ It was, I have argued elsewhere, the socialist period that, in recent times at least, emphasized and stabilized Chinggis's image as a *national* figure for Mongolians, in contrast to earlier understandings of him as an ancestral figure. Cf. Christopher Kaplonski.

Through his characteristics and accomplishments as now portrayed, Chinggis Khaan (and pre-socialist history more generally) is used to provide legitimacy to the current period. The emphasis on laws finds resonance in the (at least nominal) shift to the rule of law in the post-socialist world. Democracy was never a traditional Mongolian political system, but by reading back democratic tendencies into Chinggis Khaan's rule, it becomes one. By misreading the *quriltai* of Chinggis's time as an electoral and decision-making body in the modern sense, legitimacy is provided to the current *Ih Hural* (Great Hural, the Mongolian Parliament). This allies the present with the past, skipping over the now-problematic socialist period, which had its own *Ardyn Ih Hural* (People's Great Hural). The present, said to be drawing upon previous tradition, is thus portrayed as more authentic and more "Mongol" than socialism ever was. In other words, current interpretations of Chinggis Khaan are politically and socially bounded, just as they were under socialism. The truth falls prey to the needs of the moment. Chinggis becomes mythico-historic to provide legitimacy to the present. We cannot forget the fundamental difference – one does not face arrest or exile for a politically inexpedient viewpoint – but that does not change the basic issue. There are still boundaries of expected behavior and interpretation. Much as had happened under socialism, the post-socialist period in Mongolia is concerned not just with the creation of a political system, but with the establishment of a new identity. One of the myriad of books on Mongolian customs that were published in the early 1990s notes unequivocally "If you forget your rituals, you will lose your Mongolness."⁸⁰ The implication is clear. Under socialism, when many rituals and customs were discouraged, if not banned outright, "Mongolness" was lost. The collapse of socialism allowed the resurrection of "true" Mongolian identity, one that drew upon the past. The nation, and its true identity, has awoken. The trend continues today. Now, at a time when the Mongolian national consciousness is being revived (*sergeeh*), one recent publication tells us, "it is important to live and work by thoughtfully combining both tradition and modernity" and thus, a publication that deals with Chinggis's teachings is "particularly important and useful."⁸¹ In this context, it is particularly telling that the poet and member of Parliament, O. Dashbalbar, when he

Creating National Identity in Socialist Mongolia // *Central Asian Survey*. 1998. Vol. 17. No. 1. Pp. 35-49.

⁸⁰ Ch. Av'yasüren and H. Nyambuu. *Mongol yos zanshlyn ih tailbar tol'*. Ulaanbaatar, 1992. P. 3.

⁸¹ Damba et al. (Eds.). *Chingis Haan*. P. 3.

wanted to provide a shock, would label Chinggis Khaan a dictator, not a democrat. But even he turned to history for salvation, implying people should embrace Chinggis's authoritarian streak, since it was what made the country strong.⁸² He used the past in his own style, but even he recognized its potency.

This remembered past, even if different from the documented past, serves not only to tell people who they are, but it also tells them who they were. It makes opposition to socialism heroic, as well as everyday life lived under it. We should not forget for a moment the hardships and dangers people faced as part of life under socialist rule. And we must remember that at various points, history and tradition and their proponents were targets of the socialist government. Yet we also should not forget that many people did not see themselves as oppressed, and believed deeply in the socialist ideals. Such a viewpoint, however, is less fashionable in the post-socialist setting. The elision of Chinggis Khaan from the socialist world serves to heighten the contrast between then and now. Forgetting, or misremembering, that Chinggis Khaan was indeed remembered, is an integral part of Mongolian identity formation. There is a necessity for a certain amount of amnesia to create a past that all can look to. As Ernest Renan taught us, part of being a nation (or any other group) is getting our history wrong. And in many contexts, this is just not a matter of forgetting in a negative sense, but misremembering in a more active, positive sense. What I have shown here is how and why this happened in Mongolia, but the theoretical lesson is more broadly applicable. The reinvention of Chinggis Khaan in the present is ultimately the key to understanding the misremembering of how he was portrayed in the socialist period. Chinggis Khaan, when all is said and done, was not "banished to oblivion" because the socialists needed him to be. Rather, he was and is banished from the recalled past because post-socialist Mongolia needs him to be now.

SUMMARY

Автор статьи о "забытом" Чингисхане указывает на то, что вопреки расхожему мнению, Чингисхан вовсе не был фигурой умолчания в социалистической Монголии. На самом деле ограничены были лишь рамки возможной интерпретации и оценки значения этого исторического деятеля. Статья посвящена исследованию того, почему же коллективная память в постсоциалистической Монголии настаивает на лишь недавнем возвращении фигуры Чингисхана из "забвения". Реконструируя реальное положение вещей, автор отмечает, что в начале социалистического периода количество публикаций о Чингисхане было значительным, а его изображение – позитивным. Несмотря на продолжавшиеся публикации документальных источников, в 1940-е годы в исторических работах стала усиливаться партийная догма. Тем не менее, монгольские историки симпатизировали Чингисхану больше, чем их советские коллеги. Вмешательство партийных органов и соответствующие резолюции Политбюро в 1967 г., требовавшие применения критического марксистского подхода, стали поворотным пунктом в освещении фигуры Чингисхана. Несмотря на то, что Чингисхан не исчез со страниц научных изданий и учебников, оценка его деятельности стала основываться на концепции "феодалного государства" и марксистских штампах. Падение социалистического режима породило период растерянности и привело к активным процессам "поиска идентичности", представлявших дореволюционный период в истории Монголии как золотой век. Чингисхан являлся центральной фигурой этого периода как основатель государства и родоначальник нации. Даже демократический режим постсоциалистического периода находил свои историко-правовые корни в "народоправии" курултая Чингисхана. Логика эпохи "национального возрождения" 1990-х годов толкала к тотальному отрицанию всего, связанного с социалистическим периодом, и раз Чингисхан оказывался символом нового этапа истории Монголии, в недавнем прошлом, когда "настоящая" монгольская идентичность была подавлена, и фигура Чингисхана неминуемо должна была находиться под запретом.

⁸² O. Dashbalbar. "O Dashbalbar: Bi Saddam Husein, Jirinovskii hoyert shine jileer bayaryn tsahilgaan yavyylna" ["I Will Send a New Year's Telegram to Saddam Hussein and Zhirinovskii"] / Interview with D. Tsendjav // *Önөөдөр*. 1997. 30 October. No. 213 (251). Pp. 2.