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POLITICS, MEMORY AND IDENTITY

In the thirteenth century, Chinggis Khaan and his immediate successors established the largest contiguous land empire ever. For accomplishing what Napoleon only dreamed of, Chinggis Khaan (more commonly known in the West as Genghis Khan) was rewarded in Europe with such titles as "The Scourge of God" and "World Conqueror."[1] The Mongolian armies were thought by some to be a punishment sent by God. The medieval Europeans were never quite sure how to react to the Mongols who were rumored to be some sort of fantastic monsters, but could perhaps prove an ally against the infidel Muslims during the Crusades. They defeated the best European military forces of the time, famously affected fish prices in England and Columbus was spurred on by tales of the great wealth of the Mongol rulers of China.[2]

The intervening centuries have not been much kinder to the Mongols than the initial impressions in Western eyes. Our perceptions of Chinggis Khaan and the Mongols gives lie to the dictum that history is written by the winners. In this case, our view of the Mongols is shaped by the fact that every time the Mongols encountered Europeans, the Europeans lost, and usually lost badly. A grudging admiration for their military skills is linked to repulsion at the often brutal, but effective, tactics employed. Chinggis Khaan is invoked as the epitome of brutality.

If we look to Mongolia itself, the image of Chinggis Khaan changes dramatically.[3] Mongols, of course, are aware of Chinggis Khaan's military campaigns, and take pride in them. Yet in the years immediately after the democratic revolution of 1990, this was not the main focus of interest. In contemporary Mongolian literature and thought, Chinggis Khaan emerges as a far-sighted founder of the Mongolian state, one responsible for bringing law and order to Mongolia. Some go so far as to attribute to him democratic tendencies. Only somewhat incidentally, it seems, did he conquer a good part of the world.

In this book, I explore the ways and reasons the perceptions of Chinggis Khaan in Mongolia are what they are. Mongols and Westerners both like to portray Chinggis's new prominence as a sort of birth. In effect, they

argue, the memory of him was prohibited and died under socialism and was reborn with the fall of the socialist government. Yet rather than a death and rebirth, we should view what took place in 1989–90 as a second birth, a metamorphosis. While the post-socialist view of Chinggis is not brand new, the socialist view of him has not really died any more than a caterpillar dies when it becomes a butterfly.

Yet this book is not simply a work on literary and popular conceptions of historical figures in Mongolia. In examining the shifting images of Chinggis Khaan and two other key figures from Mongolian history (D. Sühbaatar, "Mongolia's Lenin," active in the early twentieth century, and G. Zanabazar, a "living Buddha" of the seventeenth century), I explore the larger issues of the relationship between politics, the uses of history and the construction of identity. In particular, I look at the role of historical imagery in both reflecting and shaping public opinion in the democratic revolution of 1990.

Before we can understand how perceptions of Chinggis Khaan and others changed in late twentieth century Mongolia, we need to understand why this matters. Let us therefore take a step backward for a moment, and turn to how history was written under socialism. It is only by understanding how history was portrayed during the socialist period (1921–90) that we can come to fully appreciate not only how significant the changes that have taken place are, but also how interpretations of history were contested, and identity constructed, under socialism and why we should care. As we shall see, it is simultaneously with and against the views of official socialist historiography that post-socialist understandings of history and identity are constructed. As is always the case, history was more than an accounting of what happened to whom when.

Marxist social and political theory, as generally understood in what was the Soviet bloc, including the then-Mongolian People's Republic, was predicated on a model of unilineal cultural evolution. Societies, it was held, follow a pre-ordained course, moving from primitive communism through a number of intermediate stages marked by economically driven social conflict, ultimately reaching the utopia of communism. This socio-economic change was explained in terms of progress, each stage arising from, and necessarily supplanting, the previous one.

One of the implications of this model of society and politics is that under Soviet-style socialism the writing of history became much more than an academic exercise.[4] History was a key element in the justification of socialist regimes, suggesting that they were inevitable and desirable. The past existed solely to lead up to and legitimate the present. The ruling party claimed its authority to lead the people on the basis of "scientific" laws that model and predict social evolution. It follows from such an approach to history that accounts of history can be used to legitimize, or contest, the existing political system, and therefore must be controlled. As

Rubie Watson has put it, "In such an environment, incorrect understandings [of history] are judged not only to be wrongheaded but also treasonous; they are by definition antiparty and therefore antistate" (Watson 1994a: 2). We shall see, however, that in Mongolia the control was far from as total as the Party hoped for.

It should not be surprising then that in the Mongolian People's Republic, as in the Soviet Union, the openness and reform begun by the head of the state and Party, J. Batmönh (following Gorbachev's lead), in the mid-1980s was accompanied by a new level of public debate concerning history.[5] The "truth" about history became an issue discussed by both historians and the population at large. Although presented and often viewed as a debate about the correspondence of writing about history with an objective reality, it was and continues to be much more than that. The "truth" in some ways is ultimately irrelevant. As was true in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, "the debate about history is a debate about politics" (Davies 1989: 187).

Although the debate about truth in history is a political one, it would be an oversimplification, however tempting, to draw quick and easy parallels equating the old socialism with "bad" (i.e. "false") history and the new democracy with "good" (i.e. "true") history. As one Soviet historian noted, "[I]t would be a profound misapprehension to reduce our new tasks to a simple arithmetical operation – the elementary substitution of minuses for pluses (or vice versa) in evaluating the past" (Kozlov 1989: 35). The actual relationship, at both the public and the private levels, is far more complex. History was, and continues to be, a battleground. This is much more than an academic exercise, however. Views of history are often mobilized for political (and other) ends. This mobilization is a global phenomenon. In other parts of the world, one thinks of the debates sparked by Daniel Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996), on the role of "ordinary" Germans in the Holocaust. Discussions on Japanese militarism in Asia, "comfort women" in the Second World War, and the dropping of the atomic bombs by the US are also part of this phenomenon. Understanding the process by which this happens will help us understand the reasons it happens as well.

The question this book asks and seeks to answer, put most simply, is: what is this relationship between politics, history and identity? In this form, the question is not new. The fact that there is some sort of relation is beyond dispute. "To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies" (Le Goff 1992: 54). Edward Said has put it rather more bluntly: "the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for

each person to possess and contain" (2000: 179). Said reminds us of an important point here – the processes we are talking about are undertaken not only by historians and other intellectuals, who are our main focus in the Mongolian case, but by people who might appear to have less of a tangible interest in such issues. Yet he errs in attributing this solely to the modern world, if by this he intends the twentieth century and after. Although nineteenth-century (and earlier) historians may have pursued a belief in an objective history, Ernest Renan noted that nation-making depended in part on getting history "wrong" (Renan 1995: 145). In other words, perhaps there was an objective history, but at times it was not the most convenient one for the needs at hand.

To expand upon this observation, this study maps out the relationship between perceptions of history and the political changes linked to the democratic movement of 1989–90 in Mongolia and its aftermath. What can we learn about the ways in which public and private discourses on a topic (in this case history) are influenced by and in turn influence political change? The conventional wisdom holds that with the democratic changes came new historical knowledge. People were free to talk about Chinggis Khaan and others in new ways. "His name was forbidden and banished to oblivion" was how one Mongolian researcher recently described the socialist period (Tsetsenbileg 2001: 184). We must ask, however, if the socialists were successful in imposing their view of history, where was this new historical knowledge to come from? Was it unearthed in secret archives? Was it invented? Was it imported? Or perhaps had it actually been present in official accounts all along?

I argue that the major shift was not in the overall stock of historical knowledge itself, but rather in the public presentation of and debate about such knowledge. In other words, what was presented as new knowledge wasn't really that new. It is not so much that the equivalents of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* instituted at MAHN's (*Mongol Ardyn Huv'sgalt Nam* – The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party) Nineteenth Party Congress in 1986 paved the way for a radical re-visioning of history.[6] It would be more accurate to suggest that the changes allowed for the public admissibility of people's private knowledge of history.[7]

This argument implies an interesting twist on Vaclav Havel's by-now famous dictum that under state socialism, all were to some extent both complicit in the maintenance of the system and victims of it (1991). The writing (and understanding) of history in Mongolia further suggests that while all may have been to a degree complicit, many also resisted the system (or had the opportunity to do so) through their readings of history. This, of course, could and did include the writers of history themselves.

We must be careful not to go too far in how we interpret unofficial readings of history. As Rubie Watson has noted, "it is important that we do not credit the socialist state and its agents with too much power or its citizens with too much boldness" (Watson 1994a: 2). While opposition and resistance did take place, and people held private opinions, many if not most people simply went about their lives. There were few people in Mongolia who could be clearly labeled dissidents, as Havel or Sakharov were elsewhere. Those that are now often seen as dissidents, such as Ts. Damdinsüren, B. Rinchen and even D. Tömör-Ochir, were at times also establishment figures.[8] Their dissent seems largely to have been in being outspoken and criticizing certain policies, rather than an active and willful opposition to socialism *per se*. As I shall return to below, samizdat – literature produced and distributed underground, relatively common in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe – was rare before the end of the 1980s in Mongolia. A balance must be sought between downplaying and overemphasizing issues of resistance and unofficial viewpoints.

It is clear that the degree to which the images of the figures considered have changed (or failed to) from the period of "the victory of socialist relations of production in the Mongolian People's Republic" (1954–60)[9] to the late 1990s speaks to certain conceptions of Mongolian identity, which in turn are closely linked to the collapse of the socialist regime. Writing on the post-socialist situation in what was then Czechoslovakia, Ladislav Holy has observed that

> references to Czech history recur not only in much political commentary, but also in everyday political discourse. By constantly referring in this way to their history, the Czechs tell themselves who they are. They do so by projecting contemporary ideas and values into their narratives of the past, thus creating myths which are then in turn invoked for legitimation purposes.
> (Holy 1993: 210)

I extend Holy's argument by examining historical imagery not only within the context of political discourse, but in daily life more generally. The influence of politics on thinking about history (and *vice versa*) is not limited to campaign speeches or political debates. Rather, " 'regressive modernisation,' the political journey into the future by detour through the past" (Linke 1995: 2), must be seen as a widespread phenomenon in any society. Political discourse may highlight the topic, but it permeates the public sphere in other areas as well. This was true throughout the 1990s and continues to be so today, but the debates have become less prominent as time goes by. This is not because they have declined in importance, but rather because the issues and figures argued about have assumed a certain taken-for-grantedness, if not always a specific place, in the Mongolian imagination. People agree that Chinggis Khaan is important without necessarily agreeing upon precisely why he is so. In Sherry Ortner's terms, Chinggis Khaan has become a key symbol for Mongols (Ortner 1973).

Often, "the social dimensions of memory [and history] are more important than the need to verify accuracy ... What is important is that the memory be authentic for the person at the moment of construction, not that it be an accurate depiction of a past incident" (Thelen 1989: 1122–1123). In other words, truth can be highly malleable. What is true is largely what one *needs* to be true. This does not mean that history and the truth can be interpreted in any way whatsoever. Even disregarding epistemological questions on the nature of truth, what is seen as "true" within a certain group must answer to various social constraints. One is ultimately free to claim anything as true, but such claims must invoke larger resonances to be accepted more generally. For example, the nineteenth-century Japanese claim that Chinggis Khaan was a Japanese samurai who emigrated to Mongolia, is known by some Mongolian scholars, but universally ignored (see Suyematz 1879). It simply conflicts too much with other historical "truths."

Truth, as generally understood within a particular group, is collectively negotiated. In making this statement, I am adopting a stance that parallels what is known as the pragmatic theory of truth, which "focuses ... on what problems are resolved by a particular knowledge claim" (Borofsky 1987: 17). (What is gained by seeing Chinggis Khaan as an expounder of democratic principles?) Ultimately, when we, as outsiders looking in, attempt to judge such claims, we fall back on a coherence theory of truth, which attempts to examine and evaluate different sets of evidence against each other (Borofsky 1987:16–17). (How well – if at all – does the evidence support such a contention?) Although throughout this book, I shall at times compare Mongolian interpretations of past events with what other sources or scholars tell us, I am not interested in being judgmental about such claims to truth. What is of key interest and importance is how and why the statements that are made are, in fact, made. External reference points help to bring the issues into sharper relief.[10]

This point is driven home in a MAHN Politburo resolution from 21 July 1949. In it, the Politburo discusses the need to recall a recently published textbook, noting that "In [*The People's Textbook*] the history section about Mongolian feudalism not only does not give a Marxist appraisal of the class nature of the campaign of pillaging carried out by Chinggis Khaan, but even praises it. This affair shows that some backward elements [*heseg*] of our intelligentsia are still mired in nationalist egoism" (Party History Institute 1967: 327). Oddly enough, while the textbook in question does have words of praise for Chinggis, the section concludes by noting "The blood of the children of honest Mongolian herders flowed to support [lit.: *tölöö*] Mongolian feudal privilege, despotism, and rule. In this Chinggis was not honest, and this is the shameful side of history" (Jamsranjav 1948: 56). It may not have been a Marxist reading of history, but it was far from overly laudatory. In this case, as in many others, the

political needs of the moment (what needs to be true) override any other discussion about possible historical truths.[11] Although this is perhaps a particularly egregious example, it must be emphasized that I am by no means arguing such revaluations of history occurred only under socialism. If not always as blatantly, similar influences on the writing of history were to recur throughout the pre- and post-socialist periods as well, as they continue to occur throughout all parts of the world.

In Mongolia in the 1990s, the historical images reflected the key tendency to construct a concept of "being Mongol" in opposition to being Chinese or Russian. Although most immediately apparent after the collapse of socialism in 1990, this tendency was present, if less pronounced, in the later 1990s. In the early 1990s, the construction of this identity hinged in large part upon the exclusion of the socialist period from what was seen as legitimate Mongolian history. It was being brought back into the discussion by the late 1990s, as particular versions of the non-socialist past became more widely established and offered a platform on which to base new concepts of "being Mongol," and intellectuals and others could deal more directly with the legacy of socialism. (For one such issue, see Kaplonski 1999, 2002.)

Despite this initial amnesia concerning the history of the socialist period, a substantial element of the current interpretations of history remain influenced by socialist constructions. Furthermore, although newly public in the post-socialist period, this "identity-centered" reading of history also existed under socialism as an unofficial, and usually oral, history. It is this identity-centered reading of history that is now in the process of being incorporated into textualized historical knowledge, and will be influential in shaping the direction of future scholarship as well as popular writings. As Chapters 6 and 7 show, this identity-centered view of history could also be found in the officially sanctioned version of the past, if not explicitly so.

As a rough and ready guide, it would not be too far from the mark to see this identity-centered history and the official socialist history as the two main currents of thinking and writing about history over the past several decades. Throughout the socialist period, they were involved in a dance, each contesting yet influencing the other. Which one was to lead the dance may be impossible to decide. It is possible to fully separate them only in theory. As the resolution quoted above clearly indicates, the official socialist history was also designed as an identity-centered version of history. *Its* identity, however, was the properly socialist one, and it is this basic fact that put it at odds with other interpretations, and often led to it being at least partially disregarded.

As the socialist era progressed, the government attempted to strengthen its control over history. This, however, was only partially successful. "As the official writing of history became increasingly doctrinaire and realist,

it acquired a supratruth value. It was not to be faulted or criticized ... but somehow it lost contact with 'the truth.' Few people openly acknowledged the change, but everyone knew it" (Humphrey 1994: 38). The facts, as Caroline Humphrey also notes, might not be open to dispute.[12] But the particular emphasis given to them could be contested. In essence, the two versions of history drifted apart and this would result in one of them – usually the official version – being called into question. In many ways, the two main currents of historiography were dependent upon each other.

I must at this point contextualize this study further. It should be kept in mind that the topics discussed here are to be located within the often chaotic situation of post-socialist Mongolia. Writing in 1992, Caroline Humphrey noted that in Mongolia, the "present ... is an era in the way that a roller-coaster is a place" (1992: 377). The initial fieldwork for this project took place in 1993, when the economic crisis following the collapse of socialism was at its peak. I have followed the topic through repeated visits from 1997 until the present. While I will refer to the entire post-socialist period, the bulk of the discussion and analysis will focus on the turbulent and intellectually fascinating and challenging early 1990s.

Opinions and thoughts about Chinggis Khaan and other historical figures are (or were) relatively easy to come across in Mongolia. This, however, does not mean they were necessarily an overriding concern during the entire period that this book covers. At times important, the debates over history often took a back seat to more immediate issues of politics and the problems of daily life. Yet the role of history often came into focus time and again, most often during discussions on the future of the country and what it meant to be a Mongolian. At other times, the very non-issue of history spoke volumes.

Such taken-for-grantedness pervaded much of my research, often to a much greater degree than I had expected. While many people – intellectuals especially – thought long and hard about issues of history, others didn't. Standing in a queue for bread one day in 1993 (a frequent and necessary past-time during that period), an old man behind me asked me what I was doing in Mongolia. "Studying history – the relationship between history and politics," I replied. "Yes, it's an important topic," he replied, and went back to ignoring me.

The importance became less explicit as the decade wore on, but this was due in part to the simple fact that it had once again been largely internalized. What was still new in 1993 was commonplace a few years later. Still, such conversations cropped up from time to time. As one woman explained to me: "You know, the fact is [the interest] has subsided ... But, still, there is something, in particular with the mass media people, who from time to time say 'Hey, Chinggis Khaan was such a hero,' and that sort of thing."[13] With such an explicit recognition of the role between

history and politics, we are surely justified in looking to issues of history in understanding identity in post-socialist Mongolia.

Social memory

My theoretical interests that ultimately led to this work are those of social memory and power–knowledge relations. Social (or collective) memory has been defined as "what remains of the past in the lived reality of groups, or what these groups make of the past" (Pierre Nora, quoted in Le Goff 1992: 95).[14]

Here I want to take a moment and argue against an elision of categories that seems to happen often – if not explicitly – in social memory studies. That is the collapsing of memory into history. As the French historian Jacques Le Goff has noted, "recent, naïve trends seem virtually to identify history with memory, and even to give preference in some sense to memory" (1992: xi). Although written over a decade ago, his observation still stands. While the two mutually influence each other, social memory is ultimately the more expansive category. Social memory includes acts of "commemoration, monuments, street names, definitions of self and other, etc."[15] History, as an attempt to understand, narrate or reconstruct the past, while dealing with some of these same topics, in this context serves social memory. It serves to provide source material and justification for remembering in a particular way. But the two are not the same. This will become clear as we examine different ways of writing and thinking about history in the larger context of social memory in Mongolia.

As noted earlier, state socialism is predicated upon a claim to authoritative knowledge. Marxism provided the blueprint for the development of society and the understanding of history. Dissent from the approved understanding was not just dissent about history or social theory. It was ultimately about the regime's right to rule. Hence public space and discussions needed to be controlled. The underlying claim to rule effectively precluded the possibility of wide-ranging debate on a number of issues, including history.

Geoffrey Hosking in particular sees the "distortion and suppression of historical truth" linked to the process of collectivization (1989: 120). Collectivization, which represents an intensifying attempt at political as well as economic control, was also accompanied by a shift in social memory. The Politburo resolution cited above (see p. 6) indicates that this shift actually occurred somewhat before successful collectivization in Mongolia (c. 1958–59), but during the implementation of the first five-year plan. Hosking's general point remains valid in this case, however, for both what we would see as the "distortion of historical truth" and collectivization were part of the larger "victory of the socialist relations of production." A new social order was being forged, along with a new

identity, and "proper" literature and history were to be as important as collectivized herds.[16]

Within this context, this present study makes two main contributions to the literature. First, I examine social memory at a period of greater change than has been the case previously. I return to this point later, to discuss some of the difficulties in doing so. This project is not concerned with social memory under a relatively stable socialist regime, but rather looks at it during the aftershocks of the fall of socialism. By focusing on such a period, we are better able to capture and understand the various dynamics involved in the attempt to co-opt history, politics and the "truth."

In doing so, we can begin to understand the mechanisms by which social history is transmitted and transformed, an area too often regarded as unproblematic. One of the goals of this work is to problematize the concept of the "social" in "social memory." This is a concept that also has too often been taken for granted, although this has been changing, particularly in the post-socialist context (see Watson 1994a, but also Nuttall and Coetzee 1998). More specifically, we need to take less for granted the availability of spaces and times in which social memory could be constructed.

The interaction necessary for construction of social memories collides with "the colonization of public and private space [which] is one of the hallmarks of state socialism" (Watson 1994a: 19). Not only was the official identity decreed from above, but it actively sought to eradicate all other identities. While this was often the case under colonialism (or at least was perceived to be), a greater autonomy existed under colonialism than socialism. Colonialism was predicated in part upon a difference between ruler and ruled (Chatterjee 1993: 16–18; see also Said 1978), and this difference allowed a certain degree of autonomy in the cultural sphere of the colonized, even while impacting it. Thus, although general patterns may be the same in socialist and non-socialist systems, the mechanisms of construction and transmission of social memory appear to differ.

The degree of difference between issues of social memory under socialist and non-socialist systems can at times be substantial. James Scott's work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), although not dealing explicitly with social memory, gives us an idea of the degree of difference. Scott claims that certain areas and/or times could be "cordoned off" from the public discourse, and serve as periods and places of resistance, resulting in what he terms "hidden transcripts" in which the dominant public discourse and the power relations inhered in it could be challenged. Scott warns that "power relations are not, alas, so straightforward that we can call what is said in power-laden contexts false and what is said offstage true" (1990: 5). But they are intended for separate audiences, and thus carry different messages. Scott also argues that both the dominated and the dominators had their own versions of "hidden transcripts," since

both were involved, albeit unequally, in performances in the public sphere. In the current context, however, we are more interested in the dominated, for even the political leaders in Mongolia were not at the top of the heap. They, too, had ultimately to answer to Moscow.[17] As Caroline Humphrey has put it, "the true, naked interests of both the dominators and dominated ... were known to everyone and found in virtually everyone" (1994: 23). No one, not even the Party bosses, were absolute power-holders in this context.

Humphrey has also noted that conditions in a socialist society are not sufficiently similar to a colonial or class-based antagonism to allow such hidden transcripts to be effective, if possible at all (Humphrey 1994: 25). Scott's examples (slavery, colonialism, class antagonism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain) all presume a conflict of cultures. This was not the case in Mongolia, nor in other socialist countries. Despite many of the decisions ultimately coming from Moscow, the people issuing the orders, and the face of the government, were still Mongolian or Hungarian or Czech. Both parties belong to a system the other is intimately familiar with. In effect, "everyone understands the arbitrariness of any individual's position in the hierarchy of power, and everyone knows, therefore, that morality rests elsewhere" (Humphrey 1994: 26). The opposition between dominated and dominator loses some, but not all, of its force. In is not that the opposition ceases to exist or matter. Rather, empathy of a sort becomes possible. Even the immediate dominators are, in a different context, dominated.

Humphrey suggests that rather than hidden transcripts, what existed under socialism were "evocative transcripts" (Humphrey 1994: 22). These are texts, oral and written, that are ambiguous and thus readable in such a manner that it is possible to recover oppositional as well as official meanings. They are deniable if need be, but also recognizable. This public nature of the evocative transcripts is necessary precisely because they were subject to scrutiny. They are hidden in plain view, as it were.

Scott also suggests that the "carriers [of hidden transcripts] are likely to be as socially marginal as the places where they gather" (1990: 123). It will become clear, however, that evocative transcripts, while not omnipresent, were quite common, and while anchored in certain ways (chiefly through texts), neither they nor their carriers were socially marginal.

This is a key theme of this book. In examining the relationship between history, politics and identity, I argue that it was certain key forms of evocative transcripts, to be found in official, approved narratives, that helped propagate and preserve unofficial histories. Social memory hitched a ride, as it were, on the back of the official party line. Some of these anchor points in the history books seem to have been intentional. Despite protestations of some Mongols to the contrary, the use of the title *Öndör Gegeen*

("Highest Holiness," or "Loft Brilliance" in another phrasing), a title of extreme respect, to refer to Zanabazar, the First Javzandamba Hutagt, in socialist era texts, where he was largely seen as a traitor as well as a deceiver of the masses, seems too jarring to be attributable to customary usage. Other linkages may have been less explicit (such as some of Chinggis Khaan's political accomplishments) but this does not make them any less powerful or valid.

While state socialism sought to possess a monopoly over interpretations of history and identity, and in fact was able to do so to a degree, it was not completely successful. The means by which people resisted the total domination of the state-favored identity was different from other non-socialist systems, but it was present nonetheless. In Duara's words, "The state is never able to eliminate alternative constructions of the nation" (1995: 9). This held true for the Mongolian case as well, although the state's attempts to do so must be taken into account for two reasons. The first is that the state's attempts to control history and identity affected unofficial views. The other, in some ways much more immediate, reason is simply that failure to take the state's attempts into account could and did have very real consequences for the people living with them. Insufficient commitment to the official view could result in anything ranging from a reprimand to exile or worse.

In addressing the concerns of the historian, Jacques Le Goff has written "the conditions under which the document was *produced* must be carefully studied ... The structures of power in a society include the power of certain social categories and dominant groups to voluntarily or involuntarily leave behind them testimony that can orient historiography in one direction or another" (1992: 183, emphasis in original). The Mongolian case again suggests a slightly different, more complex picture. Although ultimately guidance came from the Soviets, there was an active native Mongolian intelligentsia. While this intelligentsia, the "culture makers," to use Katherine Verdery's (1991) phrase, were the writers of the official histories, the histories they wrote often served double duty as evocative transcripts, and were amenable to multiple interpretations. They could and did contest the official messages they carried. As a result, the influence on historiography could not have been as uniform or unilineal as Le Goff suggests. Instead, we must be aware of multiple influences stemming from the same source, each one of which seeks to shape the writing and understanding of history in its own direction.

Others have begun to look at the important aspect of silence in memory. What is not said is often as important (or even more so) than what is said (Trouillot 1995). This silence can be imposed by the state or other powerful institutions and figures, or it can be the self-imposed silence of order and necessity. "We must always remember that memory is an active search for meaning. Sometimes social memory does not so much 'lose'

specific information as intentionally disregard it" (Fentress and Wickham 1992: 73). We must be aware, however, of "critical distinctions between 'not speaking of' and 'not remembering' the past" (Cohen 1997: 302).

In the Mongolian case, we can see this clearly with Chinggis Khaan. Chinggis Khaan was obviously remembered, and even taught about, during the socialist period. But there were certain understandings of him that were not spoken of openly. These would include more positive interpretations of his role in history. Other events had to be "not remembered." This holds true even in the post-socialist period. In seeing Chinggis Khaan as the creator of the first Mongolian state, it is "forgotten" that his methods in doing so included what would, by current standards, be considered genocide of other groups of nomads on the Mongolian steppe (see the *Secret History*, sections 153–154; Onon 1990: 67–68).[18]

One of the key concerns of memory studies has been with commemoration (Gillis 1994; Zerubavel 1995). This overlaps with a concern for spaciality that runs through many studies of memory, social and otherwise. This is understandable. Visible, accessible instantiations of memory often take place at specific sites – commemorations usually happen at monuments, for instance. This link of memory and location is not new. The ancient Greeks, and medieval Europeans, among others, used envisioned physical arrangements as memory aids (Yates 1992).

Mongolia represents an interesting twist on this aspect of social memory. At first, the Mongolian case seems to fit the standard model. Mongolian cultural and religious practices and beliefs place a great emphasis on sacred places, and even today countless *ovoo* – rock cairns to local *gazriin ezen* (lords of the earth or land) – dot the landscape. Some are even to be found in Ulaanbaatar itself, and few hills on the outskirts of the city are without them. This spills over into politics, as various government officials travel to certain sites at times of commemoration. Politicians will attend *tahilga* (prayer services) at sacred mountains, with ample press coverage to ensure their Mongolness is made amply evident (see, for example, Myagmarjav 2001).

Mongolian attitudes towards sacred spaces, however, are different from most attitudes towards space and place in social memory theory. I shall return to this in more detail in the Conclusion, but will note here that by and large it is the place *qua* place that is important, rather than as a site of commemoration. Physicality, where it does exist in social memory, appears largely (although not exclusively) to be the result of Chinese or Soviet influences. In Mongolia, rather, it is the historical (or mythical) individual who chiefly serves as a focal point for social memory. I shall return to this point in later chapters.

Ulaanbaatar is particularly interesting in regard to social memory. The city itself, where national politics are played out, and public portrayals of the past are largely shaped, is a relatively new city, and one that is devoid

of physical spaces that are associated with pre-twentieth-century history. This reinforces the peculiarities of social memory in Mongolia. Although the city originally was founded as a monastery for Zanabazar, the First Javzandamba Hutagt, there are no physical links with him. As a Buddhist city, Ulaanbaatar is linked more firmly with the Bogd Khaan, the Eighth Javzandamba Hutagt, and ruler of Mongolia from 1911 to 1921. Physical links to Chinggis Khaan are also absent. There are no monuments to or statues of Chinggis in Ulaanbaatar accessible to the public.[19] As a result, imagery and spectacle are co-opted, but they also follow socialist precedents. During *Naadam*, the national festival held in early July (the date commemorates the People's Revolution of 1921 that ushered in socialism), the *tug* – horsehair standards – of Chinggis Khaan are paraded into the stadium by a cavalry honor guard, wearing uniforms that are supposed to be reminiscent of the Chinggis period.[20] Yet the entire process – the parade itself (not to mention *Naadam*) – are holdovers from the socialist period, dressed in pre-socialist finery. Oddly enough, the parade itself built upon religious precursors from the time of the Bogd Khaan, thus carrying – at least for those who knew their history well enough – its own contestation.

Nationalism and Mongolia

The examination of the historical images and memories in Mongolia inevitably leads us to the concept of nationalism. Although never an unproblematical concept, the issue of nationalism seems to become especially murky in the Mongolian case. It is neither clearly and unambiguously fully ethnic nor political in either content or form.

Our best guide to understanding Mongolian nationalism may be to look for clues in the field of post-colonial studies, but even here caution must be exercised, for although much of the rhetoric of the post-socialist period paints the Soviets and their "advisors" as a colonial power, the democratic revolution of 1990 did not result in the establishment of a newly independent state. The parallels hold to a certain degree, but cannot be pushed too far.

Generally speaking, there are two broad variants of nationalism recognized by most scholars of the subject: nationalism as a political (and usually spatial) ideology and nationalism as an ideology motivated by ethnic/cultural concerns. These two broad categories or ways of viewing the nation – as politically and culturally oriented – are not necessarily mutually exclusive, although they may well collide in practice (see Brubaker 1994).[21]

The complicating factor in the Mongolian case is that both are present, but not necessarily in the ways that may be expected. The result has been a collision (although often a silent one) between contrasting views of what it means to be a Mongol, although the views are not always consistently

articulated as such. (For a fuller explication of these strains than what follows, see Kaplonski 2001.)

One of these views promotes an ethnic/cultural understanding of Mongolian identity. In its most political form, it is manifest in the concept of pan-Mongolism, which holds that all Mongolians, of Mongolia, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China and Buriats in Russia, should be united, at least culturally. This brand of nationalism has a long pedigree, appearing at various points in history as a political movement, particularly in the first part of the twentieth century. It is now largely relegated to the sphere of cultural exchanges, and is not generally seen as politically sensitive in Mongolia and has no political proponents.

Contrasted to pan-Mongolism is Halh-centrism. The Halh are the dominant ethnic group in Mongolia, constituting roughly 80 per cent of the population, and concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the country.[22] At its most extreme, it can be seen in the idea, bandied about in the early 1990s, that the presidency should be restricted to a Halh Mongol. Less radically, Halh-centrism can be associated with the collapse of the geopolitical nationalism associated with modern, independent Mongolia into an ethnically based national sentiment focused on the Halh Mongols alone.[23] To be Mongol, in this case, is to be Halh. Other groups may be nominally Mongol, but are not to be viewed as truly Mongol, and it is such Mongols that the strongest hostility of the Halh-centrists is reserved for. Ironically enough, one of the most vocal proponents of Halh-centrism throughout the 1990s, the poet (and later Member of Parliament) O. Dashbalbar, was himself not a Halh. Halh-centrism can be seen as a xenophobic form of nationalism, and is largely a conservative or reactionary phenomenon.

Then, just to make matters more interesting, there is a vague sort of general nationalism or chauvinism, which being based on history and tradition, one would expect to come close to pan-Mongolism (and in certain aspects does), but in fact remains centered on the state of Mongolia. It, however, is not necessarily limited to the Halh. It is in fact this nationalism which was perhaps the most prevalent in the early 1990s. I hesitate to simply term this patriotism, a love of country, which it certainly resembles in many respects. However, in the early 1990s this general nationalism was still constructed very much *against* non-Mongolian identities. Even this form of national sentiment was tinged with an attitude of superiority. It should not, however, be confused with civic nationalism. Although determined by territory and the modern state of Mongolia, it is not simply civic nationalism, as the main concern remains with an ethnically based identity.

All of these forms of nationalism are largely culturally or ethnically based. In contrast, certain Mongolian politicians and intellectuals have

called for civic nationalism, where one's allegiance to the state of Mongolia is all that matters. This, however, has largely fallen on deaf ears. It is not that civic nationalism is entirely absent from Mongolia. Rather, it is a voice that is more often than not drowned out in debates over identity and politics.

It is in this context that we can best understand a comment made to me by a Member of the Ih Hural (Parliament) in 1997. I had asked her a question about her opinions on nationalism. "It depends what you mean by a nationalist," she replied. "I consider myself a nationalist." She then went on, however, to talk of what she termed the "retrograde nationalists," the conservative proponents of Mongolian "tradition" and "customs" in the face of encroaching Western ideas and practices.

The term for nationalism itself has a loaded history in Mongolia. Nationalism – *ündesten üzel* – was viewed at best with suspicion under socialism and at worse was a cause for disciplinary actions. Patriotism (*eh oronch üzel*), allegiance to the motherland and its development, was something to be proud of and striven for. A good socialist could (and should) be a patriot, but not a nationalist. Civic nationalism thus parallels socialist-era patriotism, and this may well help account for its lack of prominence.

Yet another kind of nationalism is largely missing from the public arena. There is only one major non-Mongolian ethnic group in Mongolia, the Kazakhs, who are largely found in the western regions of the country, and make up just over 4 per cent of the population (National Statistical Office 2001: 50). One *aimag* (province), Bayan-Ölgii, is seen often as the "Kazakh aimag." In the rhetoric of many Mongols, the Kazakhs are seen as a nationality, while the various groups of Mongols are seen as ethnic groups, understood as "subdivisions" within nationalities.[24] Bulag reports mutual Kazakh-Mongol discontent in the early 1990s, but this has not been an overriding issue (1998: 101–103). There is not a national-level Kazakh political party. Nationalism on this level thus appears to be absent in Mongolia.[25] Ethnicity (as distinguished among the several groups of Mongols) at times does enter into politics, but I am unaware of any political parties explicitly claiming a minority ethnic basis.[26]

As previously noted, we are justified in suggesting that Mongolian nationalism has much in common with colonial and post-colonial nationalisms. After all, it is in large part in opposition to the Soviets/Russians that Mongolian identity was being asserted in the early 1990s, and the discourse used to describe the events of 1990 has much in common with that of post-colonial settings. This would seem to be the closest fit for modeling Mongolian nationalism, in at least some of its forms. Even here, however, we cannot push the parallel too closely. In the colonial and post-colonial cases, it is usually the nationalists who espouse not only traditional culture and beliefs, but who do so through a Western framework of modernization. The nationalists are both modernizers and

anti-colonialists at the same time. As Partha Chatterjee has observed of the Indian case,

> [T]he legal-institutional forms of political authority that nationalists subscribed to were entirely in conformity with the principles of a modern regime of power and were often modeled on specific examples supplied by Western Europe and North America. In this public sphere created by the political processes of the colonial state, therefore, the nationalist criticism was not that colonial rule was imposing alien institutions of state on indigenous society but rather that it was restricting and even violating the true principles of modern government.
>
> (1993: 74)

This is where the difference and complications of Mongolian nationalism lay. As we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, the demonstrators in 1990 in effect followed classic colonial form. They argued for Western forms of government, but harnessed images and figures from Mongolian history to do so. One can still find this strand in political discourse, among discussions of the democratic nature of Chinggis Khaan's rule, for example. The most "retrograde" of the nationalists have adopted a different stance altogether. It is the adoption of Western forms of government that they are protesting about. The problem with Mongolia, they claim, is precisely that the government has chosen to look to countries like America or Germany for models on which to base their laws. Only an adherence to Buddhism or similarly "traditional" precepts can save Mongolia.

This found resonance in the early 1990s in more general attitudes towards foreigners, many times associated with Russians (see Chapter 2). By 1997, however, this attitude had softened among most people.

This discussion has still left us without a working definition of nationalism, one of the key concepts of this work. For a shorter definition, we would do well to look to Richard Fox's slightly broader definition of "nationalist ideologies," which he takes to "refer to the production of conceptions of peoplehood" (Fox 1990: 3). It is these kinds of issues, rather than issues of who should be in charge – as in Gellner's (1983: 1) definition – that concerned most Mongolians, self-labeled nationalists and otherwise, in the early 1990s. Yet this does not mean we can disregard *in toto* the political elements of nationalist thought and discourse in Mongolia. The expression of a unique *cultural* identity in Mongolia is now being couched in reference to the (necessary) existence of a unique *political* identity (even if the latter is not explicitly in question). It is largely for this reason that I have elected to retain the rather problematical term of "nationalism" or "nationalist ideology" for certain aspects of the debate on the construction of identity and interpretations of history in Mongolia.

"What began as the deconstruction of History, turns into the familiar project of recovering the nation" (Duara 1995: 41). Yet in this case, recovering the nation has also meant (re)constructing the nation. While the Mongolian case has certain parallels with nationalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (for examples, see Hann 1998; Holy 1996; Verdery 1993), it diverges in several important aspects. This is due chiefly to the differing historical conditions in the two areas. Prior to the advent of socialism in Eastern Europe, there was a pre-existing period of "national awareness" of some temporal depth, which was modified under socialism. The influence of the Romantic nationalists, among others, was more strongly felt in Eastern Europe before the advent of socialism than in Mongolia during a similar period in its history. Although it would be a mistake to say these issues did not exist at all in pre-socialist Mongolia, they did not do so to the same extent as they did in Central and Eastern Europe, where many of the issues related to nationalism were thrashed out in the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Stargardt 1995).

Nationalist ideology or nationalism as a distinct form of identity does not appear to have been extant until just prior to the socialist period itself in Mongolia, and did not become widespread until the 1950s. Christopher Atwood has argued for the earlier existence of "country-consciousness" (1994: 70), and a certain equivalence for "country-consciousness" with nationalism; I remain unconvinced. What Atwood terms "country-consciousness" appears to be a form of general cultural identity, which may well lead to nationalism, but is not synonymous with it. Identity as nomads *contra* the sedentarists elsewhere was long present in Mongolia, as was religious-based identity after the introduction of Buddhism. Neither of these imply the recognition of an identity as a distinct nation.

Sechen Jagchid dates the penetration of nationalist sentiment to the population at large to the increasingly Sinicized Manchu policy towards Mongolia at the start of the twentieth century (Jagchid 1988a: 241; cf. Khan 1995). I would concur with this assessment, but add that Mongolian identity in Mongolia underwent a more substantial shift after the establishment of the socialist state. The early Mongolian socialists were more concerned with creating a sense of political/national unity, especially in regard to the inclusion of various groups of western Mongolia, than in immediately propagating Soviet-style socialism. Hence, the *widespread* propagation of, and subscription to, a national identity should only be dated to the later socialist period itself.

It should be noted at this point that I have opted to take certain concepts as relatively unproblematical, although recognizing they are not necessarily so. Key among these is the idea of "tradition," as embodied in the concept of "traditional culture," which although not dealt with in depth in this work, was very much a topic of discussion in Mongolia in the early 1990s (Humphrey 1992; Kaplonski 1995). By now the concept of

"tradition" has been thoroughly deconstructed, and should be approached with caution. When discussing "tradition" in the Mongolian case, however, I am more interested in the ways in which "traditional culture" is perceived and linked to history than in issues of authenticity itself (although, as we shall see, this was raised by some Mongols). Hence, I am going to take the term to be relatively unproblematical. If Mongols treat a concept or practice as traditional, then so shall I.

The *nutag* and the *uls*

Other issues and terms used in this book bear closer investigation. In particular, there are two terms that occur with considerable frequency in the research that need to be defined and discussed here: namely *nutag* and *uls*. Both terms are central to Mongolian conceptions of identity, and will be a key element in understanding how historical figures are represented in Mongolian social memory.

The first of these terms, *nutag*, means most commonly "birthplace" or "homeland"; it can also mean "pasture-land" in a more physical, material sense. As such, it usually refers to a smaller area of land than does *uls*. It can and is, however, abstracted to reference Mongolia as a whole. D. Natsagdorj's famous poem on Mongolia, variously translated as "My Motherland" (Mongolian Academy of Sciences 1990: 340) or "My Native Land" (Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 13), is titled *Minii Nutag* in the original Mongolian (Mongolian Academy of Sciences 1990: 341). This usage, referring to an area that one feels a particular attachment to or for, carries many of the same connotations as it does in English.

Nutag in general does not have the political connotations that, as we shall see, *uls* carries. It is rather a link to the land, a specific place, whether an *aimag* (province) or even a particular valley within the *aimag*. It is this link to the land as birthplace that is important to us. Mongols are explicit about the importance of this link. Many of my friends – young, well educated and fluent in English – wish to study or live abroad. Almost without exception, however, they feel that they could not be separated from their *nutag* (in this case, Mongolia more generally) for more than a few years.

In a discussion on illegal Mongolian immigrants to the US, I was told that this was ultimately a non-issue.[27] Mongols might stay longer than they should, one woman told me, but all Mongols would eventually return to Mongolia, their *nutag*. No self-respecting Mongol would risk dying in a foreign land, I was assured. It is this sense of attachment or belonging which is most important to understanding *nutag* in this case.

Uls is a more ambiguous word than *nutag*. It can mean not only either "country" or "state", but also "dynasty" and "people," the last being perhaps the oldest meaning. What is important about the term is that all of

the meanings are linked to political entities. Although it now largely means "state" (as in a political system; *Mongol uls* is the official name of Mongolia and *uls tör* means "politics"), it previously had a wider range of meanings (see Atwood 1994: 55–66). During the Chinggisid period (the thirteenth century), for example, the term referred to a personal territory granted to a noble, and included the people dwelling there, somewhat akin to a feudal fief (Barfield 1989: 212).

Uls also seems to have maintained a degree of its former meaning of "country-cum-nation-cum-nationality" (Atwood 1994: 57). It is this meaning that is important for us here. When discussing the three historical figures that I examine, it becomes clear that their roles in history are linked to the *uls*, a political construct tied to the Mongolian people. As I shall try to show, it is precisely because these three people are linked to the reassertion of political power in the region of what is now perceived as the *uls* (vaguely coterminous with Halh Mongolia) that they were perceived as they were in both official and unofficial discourses during socialism. It is also this same linkage which helps explain the prominence of these interpretations with the collapse of socialism.

An overview of the work

This book is divided into three main sections. The first part provides background and contextualization for understanding the data and analysis presented in the other two, which are concerned with the democratic revolution and case studies of historical figures, respectively. Along with the present chapter, the second chapter constitutes the first part of the book. Chapter 2, an ethnography of Ulaanbaatar, provides a sense of the city. I also use Ulaanbaatar as a background to examine issues of race, identity, economics and social networks through the mirror of doing fieldwork in Mongolia in the 1990s.

The second section consists of Chapters 3 and 4, which deal with the democratic revolution of 1989–90. The third chapter is an account of the democratic revolution itself. In looking at identity in Mongolia, the revolution often serves as a watershed, splitting discussions into pre- and post-1989. The actual situation, of course, is rather more complex. As Chapter 3 indicates, actual reforms and discussions on history started prior to the democratic movement. Yet, both the intensity and nature of these discussions were to change substantially after 1989. While Chapter 3 provides the first detailed chronology available in English, Chapter 4 discusses some of the issues surrounding the interpretations of the events of 1989–90, and in particular the use of language. In addition to studying the use of historical imagery in the protest movement itself, I examine the symbolic connections that are drawn between the democratic movement and events of the early twentieth century. Such connections, I argue, reveal

not only the use of historical precedents for constructing an interpretation of contemporary events, but serve to de-legitimate socialist rule, and thus further the process they seek to explain.

The third section consists of three case studies of historical figures. Chapter 5, the first in this section, discusses historiography in Mongolia over roughly the past 100 years. I have included this chapter for two main reasons: first, I hope it will offer further contextual depth to the case studies. This will enable the reader to see some of the larger trends at work. Second, I shall argue in this chapter that the modes in which history is being talked and written about after 1989 did not appear *de novo*. They are the continuance of traditions of writing about history that stretch back through the twentieth century in Mongolia. The democratic revolution enabled a rethinking of history, but it did not represent a total break with previous ways of doing so. The ideas presented in this chapter thus reappear in the case studies themselves.

Chapters 6 and 7 are concerned with the presentation and analysis of the images of three Mongolian historical figures in both the late socialist period and after the democratic movement. Chapter 6, "Chinggis Khaan: creating the *uls*," examines images of Chinggis Khaan. Officially reviled under socialism as a feudal oppressor, he was nonetheless credited with creating the first Mongolian state. His public image has probably undergone the most change of any of the people considered here. Chinggis Khaan thus offers a natural forum through which to examine the relationships among versions of truth, politics and history. In this chapter, as in the following two, I highlight the means by which the two competing versions of history interacted, and the implications of this for the understanding of identity.

Chapter 7 looks at perceptions of Zanabazar (the First Javzandamba Hutagt) and Sühbaatar. While not responsible for achieving independence – in fact, it was during his time that the Halh Mongols surrendered to the Manchus – Zanabazar serves as a marker of moderate visibility in the construction of Mongolian identity. Zanabazar, therefore, is informative for several reasons. A religious figure, he nonetheless received a certain amount of recognition under socialism for his cultural achievements. As a less historically central figure than Chinggis Khaan or Sühbaatar, an examination of Zanabazar reveals how the processes examined here have affected perceptions of history at different levels.

This chapter also looks at changing understandings of Sühbaatar. As Mongolia's equivalent to Lenin, we would be forgiven for thinking that Sühbaatar would have been knocked from his socialist-era pedestal. As the chapter details, however, this is not the case. Sühbaatar's link with socialism was partially overridden by his role in establishing an independent Mongolia. Given this link with independence, I suggest that Sühbaatar has certain rough parallels with Chinggis Khaan as a founding

figure in Mongolian history. Sühbaatar presents us with an ambiguous, yet key, case, one that was highlighted further by the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of his birth during my fieldwork in 1993.

While thoughts on and analysis of the presentations of these figures are offered in the corresponding chapters, in Chapter 8 I return to the larger theoretical issues. In this chapter, I discuss the implications for models of Mongolian identity (and identity more generally) that arise from the data in the preceding chapters. Additionally, the last chapter offers suggestions for an expansion of social memory theory based upon the Mongolian case.

The three figures

Chinggis Khaan (1162–1227) was a logical and inevitable choice. More commonly known in most of the world as Genghis Khan, he and his immediate descendants conquered a swath of land stretching from Korea and China through Russia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. It remains the largest contiguous land empire ever created. More importantly, however, Chinggis Khaan is perceived as the founder of the Mongolian state, and an early giver of laws. No study of Mongolian identity or social memory in Mongolia could be complete without him. In addition to his role as founding father, he has come to be seen by some Mongols (and even a few foreigners; see, for example, Sabloff (2002)) as a democrat.

Chinggis's prominence in post-socialist Mongolia is inescapable even to the most casual observer (although it did change in emphasis and focus over the years). I argue that in some respects his socialist era portrayal has been misrepresented, both in the West and by Mongols themselves. In addition, although his prominence may have been predictable, the shape of it was not. The particular form Chinggis Khaan's prominence has taken requires explanation.

As the First Javzandamba Hutagt – the third-highest ranking incarnation of the dominant Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, after the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama – Zanabazar (1635–1723) provides a direct link with Mongolia's Buddhist past. The son of the Tüsheet Khan, a Mongolian noble, Zanabazar became a unifying force for the politically fractious Mongols. This was further enhanced by the fact that as a son of the Tüsheet Khan, he was a direct descendant of Chinggis Khaan. He achieved renown not only for his holiness, but also for his artistic talents. Sculptures attributed to him are still on display at various museums in Ulaanbaatar. Zanabazar's legacy is mixed, however, as he also presided over the events at Dolon Nuur in 1691, when the Halh Mongols submitted to the Manchu rulers of China. He and the following incarnations in his line were seen as such threats to the secular power of the Manchus that after the Second Javzandamba Hutagt, reincarnations were forbidden to be found in Mongolian families. (This would lead to the rather ironic fact

that when the Mongols declared independence from the crumbling Qing Empire in 1911, the Eighth Javzandamba Hutagt, who was elevated as the Bogd Khaan – the emperor of Mongolia – was in fact a Tibetan.)

With the collapse of socialist rule in 1990, Buddhism publicly re-emerged as a key symbol in constructing conceptions of Mongolness. As we shall see in later chapters, the early democratic opposition quickly seized on the symbolic importance of Buddhism in constructing a particular concept of being Mongol. In light of this, Zanabazar is something of an enigma: his socialist-era label of "traitor" has largely been shed, yet he has not assumed the prominence in historical discourse I originally expected.

Sühbaatar (1893–1923), like Chinggis Khaan, was a logical choice for this study. Portrayed as Mongolia's Lenin, he was the closest thing that official, socialist Mongolia had to a deity. Said to be from a humble herding family, he worked as a printer in the city, and joined one of the two key underground revolutionary groups. Socialist hagiography was to portray him as the founder and leader of the revolutionary party as well as the revolution, although his actual role appears to have been more complicated. He is credited with, among other achievements, founding the Mongolian People's Army, and establishing *Ünen*, the newspaper of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. He died relatively young, in 1923, at the age of 30.

During the socialist era, his role as father figure was inescapable. Thus, one could have predicted that his image would change with the fall of the socialist system, as indeed it did. What I was not prepared for, however, was the manner in which he was re-evaluated. He has not been relegated to the dustbin of history, nor have his statues been hauled away. (Indeed, neither has that of Lenin.) His name still adorns the main square in Ulaanbaatar, a city in Selenge *aimag* in the north of the country, and an *aimag* in the south-east. Rather, re-evaluations of Sühbaatar have been portrayed as giving other early revolutionary figures their due, and finally telling the truth about them and him.

Undertaking the research

The initial fieldwork for this project was carried out over ten months, largely in Ulaanbaatar, during 1993 and 1997. Although later trips (in 1999, 2000–01 and 2002) were focused mostly on other topics, I continued to follow the issues presented here. The research draws upon interviews with the intellectuals and cultural elite of Ulaanbaatar, including members of the Academy of Sciences, politicians, other governmental workers and researchers, university students, and so forth. Over time, the group also came to encompass Mongolian workers for international agencies as well. This group was chosen as a focus because as Fentress and Wickham observe:

"essentially, the bearers of national memory since the arrival of capitalism in each country are the upper middle classes and the intelligentsia" (1992: 126). It is the equivalent strata under state socialism in Mongolia that were the bearers of the official national memory, and, as we shall see, bearers of forms of the unapproved social memories as well. It is these groups that I am most concerned with here. In most cases, what discussions and interviews I have had in the countryside, or with non-elites, support the arguments I put forward here. These are necessarily less certain as my research was not as focused on them. Although I shall at times avail myself of the useful shorthand in referring to "the Mongols," it should be remembered that most conclusions apply most strongly to the intellectuals of Ulaanbaatar.

The term "intellectual" itself is a rather ambiguous one. Mannheim defines the intelligentsia as those "social groups whose special task it is to provide an interpretation of the world" (Mannheim 1936: 10; see Verdery 1991: 15–19 for a fuller discussion of the term). While this is certainly appropriate in the Mongolian case – the issues I am concerned with are nothing if not interpretations of the world – I use the term in a broader sense to encompass what Verdery terms as "various groups, [the] producers of culture and of rule" (Verdery 1991: 3). In a socialist system (and the effects are not immediately shaken off with the first free elections), it is not possible to separate out the discourses of knowledge and politics, culture and rule to the extent perhaps possible elsewhere.[28] The situation is compounded in a country like Mongolia with a relatively small population (2.4 million) and a correspondingly small group of intellectuals. A number of officials were plucked from the countryside to reinforce MAHN's claim to be a party of the common worker and herder. Nonetheless, as I shall discuss in the following chapter, the social networks of intellectuals and other elites were and remain closely intertwined.

The data for this study were collected through a variety of methods. Formal interviews were conducted with a number of intellectuals, most notably politicians, academics and, in the mid- and late 1990s, people from the plentiful NGOs. Informal interviews and discussions were also carried out with members of these groups. Several focus-group studies were carried out with students at the Mongolian National University, and I learned much from my students when I taught at the National University in 2000–01 and other times. Surveys were administered in 1993 and 1997 as well. The topics I am interested in here would also crop up spontaneously during gatherings with friends and on other occasions.

My initial understandings and views of the topic were refined throughout the decade of the 1990s and afterwards by the repeated trips I made, and the catching up with friends and colleagues, as well as the endless discussions of politics and life in general.

Extensive collection of written materials was also undertaken during fieldwork periods. Weekly sweeps of most of the book stores in

Ulaanbaatar (many of which had disappeared by the changed economic scene of 1997, never to reappear) provided not only written materials, but also some indication of their distribution and popularity. Older, socialist-era publications were obtained from the *huuchin nomyn delgüür* (second-hand book store) and street vendors to provide a basis for comparison with the modern works. In general, I attempted to collect any new publications on history, politics and/or traditional culture. The older material was necessarily collected more haphazardly. The works collected necessarily represented not the full range of socialist-era publications, but rather those that people were selling (but even this can be informative).[29]

Throughout subsequent trips to Mongolia, I continued to monitor publications, television (which I had lacked in 1993) and other sources, as well as continuing to pay attention to historical topics in daily conversations.

There are two concerns that must be taken into consideration when dealing with socialist-era texts and recollections. The first of these has to do with the nature of the texts themselves. We do not have any basis for assuming that such texts necessarily consciously and completely parallel the author's knowledge and/or attitudes. While it may have been so for some authors and some texts, this is not necessarily true for all of them.

We may, however, safely take it that the text is supposed to reflect the officially sanctioned knowledge (books that did not were subject to recall and confiscation) and, at this level, is aimed at what Eco has termed a Naïve Model Reader, who reads a text at face-value only (Eco 1990: 55). Particular terms and phrases thus become especially important in this context. We must take care, however, to ensure that we do not confuse or limit our levels of analysis, and assume that a naïve reading is the only one possible.

The second need for caution is the simple fact that people's recollections of the socialist era are being offered from the "other side" of the (successful) democratic revolution. Again, while they may very well be accurate, there remains the possibility that such information has been subtly distorted as a result of the rejection of the socialist ethos. In addition to comparing the recollections with published sources to help to take this effect into account, there are other signposts to aid us in the study. The potential complications seem somewhat mitigated by the fact that, at least in 1993, very few people were claiming an active form of resistance for themselves. Although I had expected to encounter stories of heroic resistance to socialism, even stories of furtive resistance were few and far between. Discussing the socialist period in 1997 also served to help check accounts, as did archival work. While this was related to other projects, it helped shed light on issues discussed here and provided me with a deeper understanding of life and politics under socialism. By the second half of the 1990s, reinterpreting history and confirming certain identities

continued, but not always as self-consciously as during the early 1990s. Indeed, people were now turning a critical eye to the history of the socialist period, an event almost unheard of even in 1993. All of these have been used as clues for evaluating people's recollections of the socialist period.

Few, if any, ethnographies are unproblematical. Yet writing about history and identity in Ulaanbaatar in the early 1990s presents particular problems that are worth discussing here. First and foremost was the difficulty of fieldwork in a time of turmoil. While not as extreme as most cases of conducting "fieldwork under fire" (Nordstrom and Robben 1995), Ulaanbaatar presented its own not inconsiderable difficulties. I shall discuss these in depth in the following chapter, but among the issues worth noting was the depth of the economic collapse, resulting in food rationing, rising crime rates, hostility towards certain categories of foreigners, and the necessity of social networks for access and survival.

The difficulties that gathering data posed are also worth bringing into the open, as they will have inevitably affected the book. Most importantly, many of the questions I was seeking to answer simply did not have answers at the time I first asked them. Identities were in flux and while most people talked and thought about history, economic and social issues were much more pressing than a firm sense of what being Mongol meant. One can get by without knowing for sure what you think of Chinggis Khaan or Sühbaatar, but one cannot get by without food. The social safety net was largely gone, the old ways had been decreed inadequate, but nothing had yet sprung up to replace them.

While the tumult of the early 1990s made it a heady time to be carrying out fieldwork, the immediacy of the issues also meant that there was no overarching perspective to look back on the issues with. To look back now, roughly a decade later, is to look at the same questions with hindsight and clarity that time brings. But the very change that made the topic an important one to study made it difficult to know quite what questions to ask, or for people to know what answers to give. An answer given one week would not necessarily be the same one a person would give the following week. Although it is tempting to bring order and teleology to the discussions of the early 1990s, I have tried to avoid doing so as much as possible. It is precisely in offering a snapshot of the changes that is one of the contributions of this work.

With these issues in mind, I turn to a larger discussion of Ulaanbaatar and urban culture in Mongolia in the following chapter.

NOTES

1 Politics, memory and identity

1 "Chinggis Khaan," while an amalgam of transcription systems, is probably the most common spelling in more scholarly works, as well as better reflecting the Mongolian pronunciation. Genghis is a corruption ultimately traceable to French and Persian sources.

2 Matthew Paris recounts that the price of herring dropped at Yarmouth when, out of fear of the Mongols, the Baltic fishing fleets did not put out to sea (Morgan 1986a: 23). Columbus was inspired at least in part by the tales of the riches of the East that Marco Polo wrote about. Polo, in turn, was discussing the court of Khubilai Khaan, the grandson of Chinggis Khaan.

3 In this book, unless otherwise noted, I use the term "Mongolia" to refer to the independent country of Mongolia (from 1924 to 1992, the Mongolian People's Republic). This may be a somewhat contentious use to some, as the term could equally well be applied to a larger culture area, which would include the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China and parts of Russia. When I refer to these larger areas, I will indicate so. The focus of this book, however, is on the more limited area of the politically independent country of Mongolia.

4 History writing is *never* just an academic exercise. But in certain times and places – under socialism, under colonial rule, in new nations – it is even more obviously a political exercise than usual.

5 Mongolians commonly use only one name. The initial preceding it refers to their *ovog*, based on their father's (or sometimes mother's) name.

6 The acronym is usually pronounced "MAKh Nam."

7 This also holds true for the knowledge of the history of socialism itself in Mongolia. This is a subject outside the scope of the present work, but one I am currently addressing in other projects.

8 Ts. Damdinsüren (1908–86) was a famous writer and scholar. B. Rinchen (1905–77) was a noted scholar. D. Tömör-Ochir (d. 1985) was a member of the Politburo who was later purged. Andrei Sakharov was also an establishment figure, but the point here is that in Mongolia, dissidents as a separate category of people – as Sakharov became – were largely unknown.

9 The phrase is that of the official socialist Mongolian texts; see, for example, Mongolian and Soviet Academies of Science (1984). As will become clear later, the most substantial shift in historiography was to take place at roughly the same time.

10 I will on occasion also use such external reference points to apply a coherence theory of truth to certain claims. This again, however, is largely to highlight the particularities of the statement in question.

11 One might well be tempted to argue that rather than a matter of truths, this is ultimately a matter of interpretation. Besides remembering that it is what is believed to be true that matters, one should also keep in mind that even if any particular interpretation cannot decisively be shown to be true, interpretations can be ranked as more or less probable, and by extension, more or less "true." (Always, of course, according to the standards of the time.)

12 The data could be falsified, but this would be hard to verify without access to original documents or other sources. At any rate, in such cases – such as painting a picture of inequality and oppression before the socialist period – the general outlines reflected something approaching the actual conditions of the time.

13 This interview was conducted in English. In the course of fieldwork, I conducted interviews in both English and Mongolian. The choice of which language to use depended on a number of factors, such as our relative fluency, as many intellectuals, especially by the later 1990s, spoke better English than I did Mongolian. Unless otherwise noted, materials from the Mongolian are my own translations.

14 In the literature on the role of memory in shaping culture and identity, there are two basic terms that have come into use. The older is "collective memory," while others use "social memory." I have adopted the latter usage here, in part to avoid what strike me as the Jungian or Durkheimian overtones of "collective memory." Social memory is shared and constructed between members of a group, but is ultimately drawn upon and shaped by individuals.

15 Amy Mountcastle, personal communication.

16 Another Politburo resolution from approximately the same time dealt with the teaching of literature and history in schools (see Party History Institute 1967: 328–330).

17 Many, if not all, of Mongolia's socialist era leaders were appointed and/or removed under the direction of Moscow.

18 First, the leaders of various Tatar groups were killed: "the important peoples – the Chaqan Tatar, the Alchi Tatar, the Duta'ut Tartar and the Alqui Tatar – were wiped out" (Onon 1990: 67). Then a discussion was held on the fate of the others. Chinggis says, "Let them be killed! We will measure them against a linchpin and kill off (those who are taller) until they are completely destroyed" (Onon 1990: 67).

19 There is one in the government palace, but this is normally closed to most people.

20 "*Naadam*" itself means festival and there are numerous *naadam* throughout Mongolia at various levels and at various times for numerous reasons. However, when simply talking about "*Naadam*," the national festival in July is usually understood as the point of reference.

21 These, of course, are not the only types of nationalism. A myriad of more specific types may be discerned (Hall 1993), if one is a splitter rather than lumper. These two over-arching categories, however, remain useful for classifying writings about nationalism.

22 It would not be insignificant, I think, to note that Ulaanbaatar is located squarely in traditional Halh territory.

23 For further explorations of Halh-centrism, see Bulag (1997, 1998) and Kaplonski (1998, 2001).

24 A nation or nationality is usually translated in Mongolian as *ündesten*. The term is also sometimes translated as "race." *Yastan* refers to an ethnic group, seen as a subgroup of an *ündesten*. The Mongols as a whole would be seen as an *ündesten* as would the Chinese or Russians, while a Mongolian group, such as the Buriats or Dörvöd would be seen as a *yastan*.
25 After the collapse of socialism, however, numerous Kazakh families migrated over the border to Kazakhstan. A few Kazakhs complained of discrimination – in particular, they claimed they were denied permission to build a mosque in Ulaanbaatar – but these issues do not seem to have achieved widespread attention at the national level in politics.
26 Even parties that might support Halh-centrism do not make it part of their official platform.
27 In conversations with various US officials, I was told that in the early 1990s, about half of the Mongols who visited the US overstayed their visas.
28 This is not to suggest, however, that such separation is possible *in toto* anywhere. Rather, it exists to various degrees, but less so in Mongolia than elsewhere.
29 As could the origin of the books. Rather selfishly – and now regretting the lost opportunity to do further research on economics and networks – I did not enquire exactly how various books, often bearing library marks (some from the western provinces), had made their way to the different vendors.

2 Ulaanbaatar, fieldwork and identity

1 The joke, however, only works in English.
2 Traditionally, Mongolians orient themselves facing south. The word for south, *ömnö*, can also mean "in front" or "before" (both spatially and temporally).
3 *Guanz* has no good translation into English. It literally means a restaurant, but the somewhat old-fashioned term "canteen" perhaps better captures the atmosphere of most of them.
4 Sitting in the reading room of the National Central Archives in 1997, I often was serenaded with music that drifted through the walls from the shop in the same building, although the shop was closed when I returned a year and a half later.
5 Some Mongols, however, complained to me of the opposite. With the increased mobility of families since the early 1990s, they said, the sense of community has in fact lessened.
6 In the early 1990s, bottled products in Mongolia (*arhi*, *undaa*, beer) were bought either with bottles (*shiltai*) or without. One had to specify if you wished to buy a beverage *shiltai*, as most bottles were returned and reused. The cost of the bottle (in effect, a deposit) could often approach or exceed the value of the beverage inside. Currently, only certain bottles are returned.
7 *Mongol bichig* is the term used to refer to the old, vertical script in use prior to the 1950s, and still used in Inner Mongolia. *Bichig* itself simply means "writing."
8 This method encouraged a fairly detailed and developed knowledge of buildings and landmarks. I was often surprised to find upon moving into an apartment that people could instantly recognize the exact building based upon my general description. Many could also often give more detailed descriptions of the building and area than I could.
9 This particular role of networks seemed to decrease in importance as the 1990s wore on. This, however, was not due to a decrease in the importance of

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