

十年來蒙古的政經發展 及未來展望學術會議論文集

Mongolian Political and Economic
Development During the Past Ten
Years and Future Prospect

重建蒙古國家主義：十年的觀察分析

Reconstructing Mongolian Nationalism: The view ten years on.

Christopher Kaplonski

(抽印本)

主辦單位：蒙藏委員會

Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission

會議日期：中華民國八十九年八月二十三、二十四日

Aug 23-24, 2000

會議地點：師大教育大樓國際會議廳

International Conference Hall Taipei, Taiwan

重建蒙古國家主義：十年的觀察分析

Christopher Kaplonski

摘要

本文主要是回顧外蒙古自 1990 年的十年來，所發生在其國家主義與民族情感的改變與基本模式，並且提供一些未來可能的發展參考。我認為國家主義及民族情感的交互連結，是由一種與眾不同的民族特質以及文化模式造就出來的，而這實際上與蒙古目前對外發表的詳盡政治規劃沒有絕對關聯性。

過去在社會主義政體下，民族情感的追求十分消弭，無論在公共場合或形式上的表現都很少出現過。然而，自 1986 年社會變遷提供更大範圍的改革基礎，以及 1988 年 12 月對蒙古自身歷史的重新評估，民族情感於是在政府的支持下被公開討論。民族情感國家主義可以由許多形式及變化相貌存在，因為它很難有一個明顯而確實的邊界，所以我們需要透過這目前政治潮流以及文化內容的討論才可以逐漸描繪出它的大略形貌。

在 90 年代早期，蒙古於經歷 70 年的蘇維埃政府統治後，便開始從公開、頻繁、且積極的討論國家主義過程中，重新定位並進行認同重建。其中有些廣泛且長久的重點集中在尋求蒙古與中國跟蘇俄的最大差異。從這點看來，在蒙古的建立民族情感過程中，我們必須同時討論國家主義、民族情感在後社會主義與後殖民國家中的許多現象。

最後，除了討論外蒙古自 1990 年以來關於國家主義與民族認同的發展過程與主要趨向之外，本論文也要檢視這些展演過程與蒙古過去十年來一直不斷面對的問題間的關係。

Reconstructing Mongolian Nationalism: the view ten years on

Christopher Kaplonski*

abstract

This paper provides an overview of the changes and patterns in Mongolian nationalism and national sentiment that occurred in the 1990s, and offers some notes on possible future developments. I consider both nationalism (a political sentiment centered around the nation) and national sentiment – feelings associated with belonging to a particular nation and manifested in cultural forms, although not necessarily linked to an explicit political agenda – as they have been expressed in Mongolia. In doing so I challenge standard theories of nationalism that categorize it as being predominantly manifested in either civic or ethnic forms, and argue that in Mongolia it assumed a form that was both and neither at the same time.

National sentiment was officially discouraged, although present, during the socialist regime, and public, instrumental displays were relatively infrequent. However, with the broadening of the reforms instituted in 1986 to include social change and the reassessment of history in December 1988, national sentiment reappeared in public, and with official approval. National sentiment and nationalism were to assume many forms and variations, but rough lines can be drawn between manifestations in the political and cultural spheres, although this is not a hard and fast boundary.

During the winter of 1989-1990, both MAHN (the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party) and the democratic protesters laid claim to nationalist imagery and sentiment in efforts to legitimate their respective agendas. The protesters were to prove largely, if not unproblematically, successful, while MAHN was unable to capitalize on its earliest attempts to use such imagery. The symbolism utilized during this period, and its immediate and longer-term implications are discussed, with particular attention paid to the ways in which the imagery was to reflect and influence later identity formation.

The early 1990s were characterized by an open, frequent and sometimes aggressive display of nationalism as Mongolians sought to reposition themselves and their identity after 70 years of Soviet domination. Particular concerns were – and to an extent, remain – focused on defining Mongolness *contra* the Chinese and Russians. In looking at how this affected national sentiment in Mongolia, possible parallels between nationalism and national sentiment in post-socialist and post-colonial cases are considered.

The earliest and most vocal displays of national sentiment, however, were largely to fall off after the first few years. This was accompanied by a coalescing of identity around certain key themes and topics. Certain individuals and groups, however, were to continue

* Research Associate, Dept. of Anthropology, Rutgers University.

wielding a chauvinistic model of nationalism in both the political and cultural spheres, and are also examined in this paper.

Finally, in addition to examining the manifestations and processes of nationalism and national identity in Mongolia throughout the 1990s, this paper looks at the relation between such displays and the coming to terms with the past the Mongolians have been confronting during the past decade. I also suggest how this may effect the future development of nationalism and national sentiment in Mongolia.

Admiration and flattery of foreigners has become the norm among Mongolia's elite. We shall not allow foreigners to behave as they please and treat Mongolians like dogs (O. Dashbalbar, quoted in Baatarbeel 1997).

This passage is not typical of all Mongolian nationalism, yet it is emblematic of a certain type of nationalism.¹ It is important not only for the extremity of Dashbalbar's views, but because it also highlights the parallel between Mongolian nationalism and anticolonial nationalism elsewhere. Such a view could not have been openly expressed during the socialist period. It was, in fact, the democratic revolution of 1990 that not only made it possible to express such views, but helped engender them.²

The 1990 democratic revolution in Mongolia was as much a revolution in ways of thinking about the Mongolian nation as it was a movement against MAHN (the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party) and socialism.³ From the earliest demonstrations, the revolution was about what it meant to be Mongolian, not just bringing about a change in political regimes. The revolution led not only to the end of socialism, but also to a substantial shift in the way Mongolian identity was publicly (and to a lesser extent, privately) conceived. The Mongolian nation, understood in a number of competing, yet overlapping ways, became the focal point for thinking about politics, history and self. This

paper is a brief study of the democratic revolution and its aftermath in terms of Mongolian nationalism. The topic, Mongolian nationalism in the 1990s, is a large one. Here I can at most sketch the contours of some of the more important and interesting issues.

I have been studying Mongolia since 1990, and have carried out anthropological fieldwork there since 1993. Most of my research has focused on the political and cultural elites of Mongolia, and has included a study of interplay between Mongolian identity and the democratic revolution (see Kaplonski 1996). I shall focus largely on the issues of nationalism and identity among the elite, but much of what will be discussed is also applicable among other groups (such as herders, workers, etc.), although such groups are not usually as explicit in their wielding of terms and ideas.

The democratic revolution, of course, is the defining event of the 1990s in Mongolia. Politics in Mongolia in the 1990s have largely been concerned with the legacy of the changes wrought by the revolution. It is natural, therefore, in a discussion of nationalism to focus on the revolution itself. Through a review of the events of 1990 and the imagery used in the protests, I will examine the role the democratic revolution played in shaping the contours of Mongolian national identity. I will then sketch the development of nationalism and national identity throughout the 1990s, and suggest some possible directions for its future. In doing so, I seek to question standard theories of nationalism that see it predominantly manifested in either civic or ethnic forms, and argue that in Mongolia, it assumed a form that was both and neither at the same time.

Prior to looking at the democratic revolution, however, it is necessary to briefly consider the terms that I will be using, as well as some background on national identity in the socialist era. I will also spend some time discussing the types of Mongolian nationalism and possible parallels elsewhere. By raising these issues before moving on to a more explicitly chronological account of Mongolia in the 1990s, I hope to illuminate Mongolian nationalism further than a simple exposition would otherwise provide. These discussions will help clarify the dynamics of nationalism in Mongolia.

Being Mongolian: defining the terms

The general scholarship on nationalism encompasses a wide variety of

¹ This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in 1993, 1997 and 1999 under research grants from IREX (1993, 1997) and the American Philosophical Society (1999). Research for this paper was supported in part by a grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) with funds provided by The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc. Neither of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed. I would like to thank Sheryl McBride, Amy Mountcastle and Cathleen Willging for their comments on previous versions, although I have not always taken their advice.

² The earliest demonstrations took place in December 1989, but most of the protests, and the changes they engendered occurred in 1990. For that reason (as well as reasons of brevity) I shall refer to the 1990 revolution, rather than the more cumbersome, if technically accurate, 1989-1990 revolution.

³ Here, and throughout this paper, I use the Mongolian acronyms for political parties.

terms and definitions. Many basic terms in the scholarship – nation and nationalism, for example – lack a single, agreed-upon meaning. To add to the confusion, additional terms are often brought into the discussion, including, as I shall do here, national identity and national sentiment. With such a variety of terms and definitions, it is necessary to spend some time deciding what we mean. One scholar of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm, has observed:

[N]o satisfactory criterion can be discovered for deciding which of the many human collectivities should be labeled in this way [i.e., as a nation]. That is not in itself surprising... But the problem is that there is no way of telling the observer how to distinguish a nation from other entities a priori, as we can tell him or her how to recognize a bird or distinguish a mouse from a lizard (Hobsbawm 1990: 5).

This neatly sums up the issue. We may know a nation when we see one, but not necessarily how to define it, and this gives rise to our definitional difficulties. The Mongolian case is no different and different groups and people using the term “nationalist” or “nation” ultimately have different ideas of what the nation is, what these terms represent and what direction the country should move towards. In other words, definitions are not merely academic. How one defines the nation influences how one’s actions and thoughts toward it are motivated.

Some working definitions are necessary. Even Hobsbawm adopts one, in his case falling back on a largely subjectivist position that a nation is a sufficiently large group that thinks itself one (Hobsbawm 1990: 8). Such a definition ultimately does not tell us much, but it is a start. It reminds us of Anderson’s now-classic definition of a nation as “an imagined political community” (Anderson 1991: 6). Communities may be and have been imagined in a variety of ways, but the key elements for imagining the nation, according to Anderson, has been print-as-commodity, or, more broadly, language. Religion and class are other possible bases for imagining a community. The key term in Anderson’s definition is “community,” the one underlying factor in most definitions. Anderson goes on to note that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (1991: 7). It should, at least in theory, override other forms of community.

This is a fairly acceptable view of the nation and most contemporary definitions are along similar lines. Liah Greenfeld offers a similar concept of national identity:

The remarkable quality of national identity which distinguishes it from other identities – and also its essential quality – is that it guarantees status with dignity to every member of whatever is defined as a polity or society (Greenfeld 1993: 49).

Greenfeld’s definition has the added advantage of pointing out that there is a “dignity” associated with being a member of a nation, and often, nationalism is motivated by what are seen as affronts to this dignity, as Dashbalbar’s quote makes clear. From this point of view, being a Mongolian is seen as more important than being a rich Mongolian, a poor Mongolian, a Halh Mongolian, Buryat Mongolian, etc. By the mere fact of being Mongolian, a certain degree of commonality is assumed; further it is one capable of overriding other differences. The key issue here, of course, is what does one mean by “being Mongolian.” How is it defined? What does it entail? Different people mean different things, and that leads to the complexity of the issue, and the conflicting conceptions of the nation.

The definitions offered by Anderson and Greenfeld will form the bases of my approach, but rather than accepting these definitions without modification, I think it important to bring in two observations made by Partha Chatterjee, the prominent South Asian historian and scholar of nationalism. The first point is that nationalist thought / sentiment is a discourse of power and “it is ... a *positive* discourse which seeks to replace the structure of colonial power with a new order, that of national power” (Chatterjee 1993b: 42, emphasis in original). Chatterjee is here talking about post- (and anti-)colonial nationalism, but his point is applicable to Mongolia as well. It not only argues *against* something (colonial rule) but argues *for* something (self-rule and independence).

Many characteristics of Mongolian nationalism are similar enough to what Chatterjee talks about that we would do best to pay close attention to them. This was particularly true during the democratic protests and immediately after. I return to this point at more length, but much of what is noted in regards to Mongolian nationalism and national sentiment in the 1990s can be understood as the creation of (or attempt to create) a new structure of national power. Mongolian nationalism, like most forms, is not just about thinking about who you are, but what this means in terms of organizing, structuring and motivating groups of people. Nationalism is sometimes conceived of in negative terms (think of the Balkans) but it can also be a positive force. In the Mongolian case,

it was used to help consolidate a new sense of what it means to be Mongolian, and provide a rallying point for the political and economic changes. It has also arguably helped stabilize the new democratic government structure by giving people a common basis for approaching politics. They could agree to rally around the nation, even if what this meant was not universally agreed upon.

Chatterjee's second point, applicable to all forms of nationalism, again holds true for the Mongolian case. "[W]e have all taken the claims of nationalism to be a *political* movement much too literally and much too seriously" (Chatterjee 1993a: 5, emphasis in original). We must be wary of accepting any nationalist movement's claims for itself at face value. The Mongolian case implicates both the cultural and the political, yet Chatterjee's point is germane. The political aspect of Mongolian nationalism must not be ignored, nor can it be de-coupled from the cultural. Yet it is in the (apparently) cultural realm that much of the action has taken place in the 1990s. In certain contexts, the battle over what constitutes Mongolian culture and tradition, and how best to protect it, becomes explicitly political. But at all times, it is impossible to completely distill the cultural from the political, and vice versa. Mongolian nationalism, in short, is as much if not more about Mongolian culture, heritage and identity as it is about Mongolian politics in any narrow sense of the term.

A point needs to be made here. We must view nationalism – and even the nation – as ultimately contextual. Although it may be a community (imagined or otherwise) that links an individual to others through certain feelings of commonness, this does not mean it elides all other identities. Only in certain contexts does the nation as a focus for identity override others (class, ethnicity and so forth). In the Mongolian case, for example, Mongolian national identity *vis-à-vis* the Chinese and Russians has not elided intra-Mongol identity differences, which are manifest at multiple levels, and even in different forms of national sentiment, as we shall see. At times, what kind of Mongolian one is (Halh, Buryat, Dörvöd and so on) becomes more important than the fact of being Mongolian itself, and Greenfeld's "dignity" takes a backseat to other concerns.

I now turn to national sentiment, which I contrast to nationalism *per se*. In talking of national sentiment, I am attempting to remove the programmatic

aspects from nationalism. Nationalism is a *movement*, whether it be political, cultural, or a blending. In referring to national sentiment, I am speaking of the ideas, and more importantly perhaps, feelings, that underlie nationalist movements. National sentiment refers to a sense of belonging to a particular group; of one's identity being in large part contingent upon membership in the group. This does not necessarily imply that the group is bounded, fixed, or static. Indeed, the Mongolian case, particularly in the first half of the 1990s is a case study in the re-visioning of national identity and hence sentiment. One may belong to a particular group without necessarily agreeing on what the group stands for, or what membership in it is. If the nation, to return to Anderson, is imagined, it must also be largely symbolic. This implies that national identity, like any symbol, must be multivocal and multivalent. People need not agree totally upon the interpretation of its meaning for it to be effective. In large part, its very effectiveness is dependent upon this *not* happening.

One final point must be made about national identity, a point that follows from the preceding. Simply put, there is no unitary identity. Prasenjit Duara has observed: "in place of the harmonized, monologic voice of the Nation, we find a polyphony of voices, contradictory and ambiguous, opposing, affirming, and negotiating their views of the nation" (Duara 1995: 10). National identity, like any other identity, is necessarily contingent and in a state of continual reconfiguration. It must be continually produced, confirmed or contested. Such identities are multiple both diachronically and synchronically. Yet for our present purposes, we can talk of "national identity" or "national identities," if we understand these phrases to be useful shorthands, and representational of ideas that are subject to change. Thus, when I talk of national identity having coalesced, it simply means that there is a more or less agreed upon identity that a sizeable number of Mongolians (but not necessarily the majority) wield as their identity in certain contexts. Despite this contingency, certain common elements do emerge among the competing identities, which allow for certain generalizations. Among these are an appeal to history/tradition (variously defined and interpreted) and a sense of exclusiveness. To be Mongolian is not to be Other. Other aspects (how Mongolian is to be defined, for example) are debated, but not the need for an identity labeled "Mongolian." This much is assumed as necessary and natural.

The types of Mongolian nationalism

In seeking to understand Mongolian nationalism and national sentiment, it must be understood that as I have just argued there is no single, overarching identity. Even during the socialist period, when this was a goal of the state, this was not achieved. People have always (and always will) have their own conceptions of who they are, and these ideas will inevitably conflict with others.

In the period of interest to us, there are at least four general types of nationalism in Mongolia, although they vary in their degree of prominence and importance. We can term these four types pan-Mongolism, Halh-centrism, civic nationalism, and what we can view as a general, xenophobic nationalism. These, however, must be viewed as Weberian ideal types, and as Weber himself reminds us: "it is probably seldom if ever that a real phenomenon can be found which corresponds exactly to one of these ideally constructed pure types" (Weber 1978: 20). In other words, the "real world" of Mongolian nationalism is nowhere as neat as such a simple listing of types might lead us to expect. The four different types of nationalism cross-cut and overlap each other, and can not easily be reduced to clear-cut distinct categories. We can perhaps better view them as overlapping and intersecting circles in a Venn diagram.

Most of the forms of nationalism discussed here, however, were and are concerned with some level with the "purity" of Mongolian culture and people. Even civic nationalism, which is predicated upon allegiance to a polity, rather than an ethnic group, in the Mongolian case ultimately calls itself into question through the attempts of its proponents to argue for its legitimacy through appeals to the past.⁴

Pan-Mongolism, also known as Greater Mongolia sentiment, seeks to unite at some level all the Mongolians in the world. Currently blatantly untenable at the political level, this is most often manifested in its contemporary forms at a cultural level, and its main obvious impact is the spread of relations throughout the various Mongolian areas – Mongolia itself, Inner Mongolia in the PRC, Buryatia and Kalmuckia in Russia. It has a long history, and earlier in the twentieth century, it did indeed have explicit political goals. Pan-Mongolism

was seen as a viable option as recently as the late 1940s, when there was still some support for unification with at least part of Inner Mongolia.

Halh-centrism sees the Halh Mongolians, who form the majority in Mongolia itself (75 to 80% of the population), as the only "true" Mongolians. All others are suspect for various reasons: Inner Mongolians, for example, are too Sinicized, and the Buryats too Russified. (In the socialist period, when Halh identity was the 'default' Mongolian identity, the Buryats were also at times suspect as many had historically sided with the White Russians.) The Western Mongolians historically were not ruled by Chinggis Khaan's descendants, and thus in the eyes of some do not qualify as "true Mongolians" either. This overlaps with a more general xenophobic form of nationalism, although they are not completely synonymous, as Halh-centrism also can be, and has been, also turned against other groups of Mongolians. Indeed, it is non-Halh Mongolians that are the most important targets of Halh-centrism. Even ethnic Halh seen as too "westernized" can come under attack in some variations of Halh-centrism.

Civic nationalism is the term I use here for loyalty to the contemporary Mongolian state itself, which neither encompasses all ethnic Mongolians (indeed, it excludes more than it includes) nor includes just Halh Mongolians. The Mongolian state includes both numerous Mongol ethnic groups and even Kazakhs. According to proponents of civic nationalism, one's background does not matter, as long as one works for the betterment of the country / polity as a whole. It is to the state that one owes allegiance, not the embodiment of the state in a certain group. This form of nationalism is most common among the democratic parties – the original demonstrators and their political descendants.

To a certain extent, however, there is an overlap between Halh-centrism and civic nationalism to the extent that the Mongol state during the socialist period did much to equate the state with the Halh as the state's "fictive ethnicity" in Balibar's terms (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 96) (Bulag 1998: 34-37). It is the Halh dialect of Mongolian that is taught in schools, and even history has been at times recast in a more Halh-centric light (see Kaplonski, nd). It must be realized, however, that this process was only partial in terms of both creation and success in Mongolia. Civic nationalism can perhaps be seen as more of an inward-looking form of national sentiment than other forms. It is less concerned with such issues as the purity of the Mongolian "race."

⁴ It is not clear to me, however, that they are aware of this contradiction.

Xenophobic nationalism has much in common with Halh-centrism in that it is a largely directed against others, but in this case, the particular target is often foreigners. Yet I distinguish it from Halh-centrism for two reasons. One is that xenophobic nationalism is best seen as cross-cutting the other forms. It is not necessarily restricted to attitudes towards foreigners. It can, like Halh-centrism, also be leveled against those Mongolians who are not seen as "real" Mongolians, and are seen as selling out to foreigners, or being unduly corrupted by foreign influence. Indeed, particularly later in the 1990s, these people are the main targets of this form of nationalism. Thus, for example, at times Mongolian women in the company of foreign men (for whatever reasons) were a particular target, as they were seen as prostituting themselves, and by extension, Mongolia. This form of nationalism is best typified, albeit in an extreme form, in O. Dashbalbar, quoted at the beginning of this paper.

Xenophobic nationalism, present from the beginning of the democratic revolution, has changed forms somewhat over time. It can be seen in its manifestation in the later 1990s as a particular embodiment of an extreme yet diffuse form of post-colonial nationalism. Under this model, which I will return to below, international aid donors and organizations, as well as Mongolians who turn to them for aid and guidance are portrayed as a new colonial power, and collusion with them will result in the corruption and eventual loss of Mongolian identity.

Mongolian nationalism as postcolonial nationalism

I noted above that Mongolian nationalism in the 1990s had many important parallels to postcolonial nationalism. I wish to explore this aspect more fully here, and at the same time, begin to engage the ethnographic material more fully.

The parallel between colonialism and socialism, and hence, post-colonialism and post-socialism is not a particularly new or startling one. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no one has systematically and fully developed the parallels or their implications. I wish to spend some time drawing out the equivalencies.⁵ The basic argument I am putting forward here is that whatever the justifications under socialism – and at times, precisely because of them – the

⁵ There are also a number of important differences, largely although not exclusively predicated on the differences between European-capitalist forms of colonialism and socialist based forms.

Soviets came to be viewed as a colonial power, and to this extent, the 1990 revolution was in many ways viewed as a revolution of independence. This was a point not lost on Mongolians themselves:

However short-lived the 1911 revolution [against the Manchus] in Mongolia may appear, it did serve as the seed of future successes. In 1921, the Mongolians gained their independence from China. This was a direct result of the national liberation movement and not, as some argue, of Russian instigation. Since 1990, a third stage of Mongolia's revolution has occurred when as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia is gaining a greater degree of independence (Jamsran 1994: 63).

This passage is particularly interesting because it not only makes clear (despite the qualification of "a greater degree") that the democratic revolution is to be viewed as an independence movement, but it also goes further and denies the claim of Soviet instigation in the 1921 revolution. There is thus a double distancing from and denial of Soviet influence, beneficial or otherwise. Further, this particular narrative locates the events of 1990 in a particular, ineluctable trajectory of national development. History is recast in terms of the nation. Historical development, in an eerie parallel to Marxist thought, exists to lead towards an inexorable goal, in this case the supremacy of the nation. This teleological view is typical of most forms of nationalism.

Such parallels between the events of 1911 and 1990 were common and frequent, and crossed most age, gender and status boundaries. Particularly in the early 1990s, they would also crop up in casual conversations as well as in focused discussions on the events of 1990.

The equivalencies between post-colonial and Mongolian forms of nationalism occur at multiple levels, including the rhetorical as we have seen. To students of social theory, the parallels between Soviet development discourse and the apologists for 19th century European colonialism are self-evident. And indeed, both owe a deep debt to 19th century social (and in particular, anthropological) theories and concepts of cultural / social development. Both claimed to aid "less developed" nations by the importation of technology, regimes of discipline, and most importantly, outside rulers or advisors. Although I am leery of pushing the parallel too far, the Soviet policy of not training large numbers of Mongolian technical experts, and instead relying on Soviet "advisors" is highly reminiscent in effect, if not intent, of Chatterjee's concept of the "rule of difference" in colonial India (Chatterjee 1993a;

particularly Chapter 2). This concept argues that the British viewed Indians (and people in other colonies) not only as inferior, but inherently incapable of running the country as well as the British themselves. The British presence was hence not only desirable, but even necessary. One need only to think of the numerous complaints about "lazy Mongolians" to see one parallel.⁶ Like Western European colonial powers, the Soviets took large amounts of raw materials as "compensation" for this aid. And, like the rule of difference, whatever the rationale, the Soviet model had the tactical advantage of keeping Mongolians from positions of power within their own country.

The parallel between socialism and colonialism also find resonances between the Indian nationalists and the democratic protesters. In India, "the nationalist criticism was not that colonial rule [or in this case, socialist 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" (Chatterjee 1993a: 74). This is parallel to the protesters' early claims that what they were calling for was not an end to socialism, but as end to socialism as it was then implemented. It was not so much that socialism was morally and politically bankrupt, but rather that its present incarnation was so. This then logically developed into the argument that it was the Soviets who were responsible for the retardation of the nation's growth, and later, the argument that the socialist form of government was indeed alien. This latter argument, however, was not the original stance of the protesters, who were often at pains to deny such opposition (see Kaplonski, 1996; Chapter Four). This argument is implicit in the radical nationalist critiques of the mid- and late 1990s, and I noted above, also follows the post-colonial parallel. In Mongolia, various proposals would crop up throughout the 1990s concerning reversions to earlier, pre-socialist forms of administration or administrative divisions, but none of these have come to fruition. The current debate on moving the capital to Harhorin is a further example of this. The continued attention this issue receives is an indication of the degree to which the symbolic capital of such a move outweighs the massive logistical considerations.

One could continue the parallels, but I think the point is clear. From almost

⁶ For a further discussion of such modes of discourse, see Said (1978).

the very beginning, the socialist period was portrayed by at least some as yet another colonial period in the history of Mongolia. Much of the national sentiment in Mongolia has significant parallels with anti-colonial nationalism elsewhere. This has allowed a certain unity in the manifestations of national sentiment by offering a common target, and thus to a degree has shaped the more general political and cultural discourse.

National sentiment under socialism

In order to more fully appreciate the nuances of Mongolian nationalism and national sentiment in the 1990s, we will next make a brief stop at the socialist period (1921-1990). Public displays and acknowledgements of national sentiment were in general discouraged by the Party-state (as were private ones) but such a statement is subject to multiple qualifiers. The socialist period was far from monolithic. Official displays of national sentiment even made appearances at various times, although they usually were quickly squashed. Further, despite the terror of late 1930s, when about 25,000 people were killed in a period of 18 months, central government control over the provinces, and compliance with mandates was far from totalizing.⁷ This would suggest that official socialist ideology (including stances against nationalist sentiment) was far from internalized, and was often flaunted or ignored. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that national identity as such was not widespread until the 1950s at the earliest (Kaplonski 1998). I will not rehearse the entire argument here, but will note that although national sentiment and nationalism could be found among intellectuals and political elites as early as the late 19th or early 20th century, there is no conclusive (or to me, persuasive) evidence for its existence among the population at large. Its penetration to all spheres of the political and cultural elites is also open to question.⁸

Before I progress further, it should be made clear that I am here referring to a national sentiment that was focused on specific (if unelaborated) conceptions of a *Mongolian* nation. What is termed in Mongolian as "patriotism" (*eh oronch*

⁷ This assessment is based on my readings of reports and other documents from the *aimags* to various central government and party organizations from the 1950s in the national historical archives.

⁸ In this context, it is noteworthy that Frans Larson, who spent about thirty years in various parts of Mongolia, almost always speaks of "states" run by princes within Mongolia itself Larson (1930).

üzel) and is linked both conceptually and linguistically to the “mother land” (*eh oron*) as opposed to an ethnic / lineage base, was laudatory under socialism. One was expected to work for the development of the motherland, and to make sacrifices for it. This can be understood as a particular, socialist form of civic nationalism. But this was contrasted with an overemphasis on things seen as being too Mongolian, and hence backward, such as Chinggis Khaan, Buddhism, and even certain practices like *Tsagaan Sar* (the Mongolian New Year) and the wearing of *deels*.

Nationalism does indeed make an appearance before the 1950s in certain circles, and at times was close to an official policy, particularly in attempts to reunite Inner Mongolia and the Mongolian People's Republic during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Although one can debate the interpretations, it is most plausible to view the 1921 “People's Revolution” as a nationalist independence movement, only later given a gloss as a socialist revolution. But this does not necessarily mean we can infer large-scale national sentiment among the population at large. For most Mongolians in the early twentieth century, the key elements of identity were manifested at a more local level, such as the *nutag* (homeland), which referred to a more specific locale (see [Kaplonski 1996, Chapter One]).

It was not until 1948 that the first official textbook, which included a history section, was published in Mongolia (although history books were written and published prior to this). This is important because it indicates a conscious attempt to increase a sense of national identity, as well as its more obvious implications for educational endeavors. Called *Ardyn unshih bichig* (*The People's textbook*) it was a general textbook that included a section on Mongolian history (see Jamsranjav 1948). It was, however, recalled almost as soon as it was published, because

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 (MAHN History Institute 1967: 327).

If the official history book, which in part has the purpose of inculcating “proper” identity, could be published with a nationalist element to it, two things should be clear. The first is that national sentiment was at least perceived as a threat to

socialist orthodoxy by the (Soviet) powers that be, although, paradoxically, at the same time they were trying to instill a different version of it. The second is that the orthodoxy could not have been well entrenched if such accusations are being leveled at an official government publication. And indeed a further resolution later in 1949 addressed the need to elevate the content of socialist ideology in history and literature, and included multiple criticisms of various scholars and politicians (MAHN 1967: 328-330).

Here, as in most standard socialist rhetoric, nationalism was something backward, which was to be deplored and replaced by the internationalism of socialism. One should make an exception for something akin to civic nationalism, the allegiance to a political body irregardless of “ethnic” boundaries, which would have gone under the label of patriotism [*eh oronch üzel*]. Heroes of labor and similar awards were presented for exactly such devotion. Patriotism was laudatory, but an overemphasis on the nation [*ündesten*] was not, as it implied an ethnic basis, which could provide a base from which to contest the state's control.

A public exhibition of national sentiment, and nationalism occurred in 1962 during the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the birth of Chinggis Khaan. The event is too well known among scholars of Mongolia to need much recounting here, I think (Hyer 1966; MAHN History Institute 1970). A conference was planned, stamps were to be issued, and several articles on Chinggis Khaan and his accomplishments appeared in MAHN's paper *Ünen* (*Truth*). However, under pressure from the Soviet Union, this was soon seen as an excessive display of nationalism, and steps were taken against those involved.

In this particular case, we must also take into account the larger context of Sino-Soviet relations, which reached a crisis point that year. Nationalist viewpoints, for the Soviets, drew uncomfortable links with the Chinese, who also marked the anniversary. At any rate, the nationalist elements were roundly condemned in the press later that year, and Tömör-Ochir, a member of the Central Committee involved in the preparations, was expelled for “anti-party activities” (Töv Horoo 1962). The original resolution, at least in its published form, does not explicitly mention the Chinggis Khaan celebration, although Tömör-Ochir is said to have been promoting “chauvinistic views” [*ündserheh*

üzel], the meaning of which would have been clear to readers. It is again worth noting the linguistic aspect here. The term which I have translated as "chauvinistic" is again based on "ündesten," root or nation, and has an ethnic, not political, basis.

Apart from these relatively isolated incidents, there was little if any publicly endorsed displays of nationalist sentiment during the period of later socialism (the 1960s and later). What this should not be taken to mean, however, is that it was not possible to read nationalist meaning into socialist events. True to Stalin's idea of "national in form, socialist in content," there were certain events, such as Naadam, that while ostensibly socialist, were ripe for nationalist readings against the official socialist ones. It has already been noted that the traditional Mongolian New Year, Tsagaan Sar, was condemned and starting in the 1950s efforts were made to halt celebrations of it. Further, the wearing of the deel, and similar actions were deemed nationalist and discouraged, although it is reported that some top officials continued to do so, at least at home.⁹

Additionally, the images of historical figures propagated in official texts allowed for multiple readings. Such readings helped reinforce and transmit concepts of Mongolian identity at odds with the official, socialist one. Such identities would become public in the early 1990s, and provide a basis for later constructions of identity. (For a fuller account, see Kaplonski (1996).

The democratic revolution

The anniversary of the democratic revolution in Mongolia is commemorated on December 10. This marks the date of the first public protests in 1989, which were timed to coincide with International Human Rights Day. However, in order to understand the relation of national sentiment and nationalism to the revolution, we need to go back further in time, to 1986.

The 19th MAHN Party Congress, which was held in 1986, was when issues of reform were first officially broached.¹⁰ Much like in Gorbachev's Soviet Union, the initial reforms in the then-Mongolian People's Republic were intended to be economic in scope only, and were intended to revitalize socialism,

⁹ This was mentioned to me by several people in the course of fieldwork interviews in 1997.

¹⁰ See Losolsüren, et al. (1986) for the official account.

not end it. However, in December, 1988, at a Central Committee Plenum, the reforms were expanded to include the social sphere. Importantly for the study of nationalism, this also included a reassessment of history. This is important because people turn to the past to make sense of the present. Writing of the post-socialist Czechoslovakia, Ladislav Holy observes

By constantly referring ... 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 legitimization purposes (Holy 1993: 210).

Although the reevaluations of Mongolian history were understandably circumspect at first, the fact that they were happening at all was of signal importance for national identity. These re-evaluations took place at most levels of Mongolian society, but the most public displays and debates were driven by various political groups.

The re-evaluations also mark MAHN's attempt at shifting its own image from a internationalist socialist party to a socialist party eager to claim its national heritage. Although not an everyday event, articles re-evaluating history – both socialist and pre-socialist – began to appear in *Ünen* in 1989 alongside a myriad of articles on restructuring socialism.¹¹ These were intended to not only reassess periods of Mongolian history, but also reposition MAHN, distancing itself from certain excesses of the socialist period. These shifts also marked the beginnings of a move away from the unflinching pro-Soviet views of the Mongolian political leadership. In time, the Soviet period would come to be seen as a period of colonial domination, not socialist fraternity.

The topics covered under the general rubric of history are instructive, as they are clearly chosen for their political and symbolic capital. Thus, there are articles on the Secret History of the Mongolians, including pieces on the archaeology of the era and even one on horses in the Secret History. These were justified as being related to the 750th anniversary of the Secret History, but 1989 was, of course, one year early. Evidently MAHN was already attempting to ally itself with Chinggis Khaan and pre-socialist history, a move the democrats were to make more successfully later in 1990.

¹¹ It is possible that such articles occurred earlier, but I have not been able as of yet to check pre-1989 issues of the newspaper. At any rate, I would be surprised to find them in any quantity before 1988.

Some of the other articles also give a hint of the anti-Soviet elements of the various forms of Mongolian nationalism that were soon to become important. There are several articles on political repression, but once again these are in the context of figures and historical events that could provide symbolic weight to reposition of MAHN as a victim of the Soviets. Articles focused on repressed figures like Genden and the "Intellectual's affair" from the early 1960s. An article on the repression of the Buryats in general also appeared. This is particularly interesting because the repression of the Buryats points to ethnic tensions, an important if unacknowledged topic during the socialist period.

Perhaps most interesting was the appearance in October 1989 of an article on Mardai, "Concession, or Mardai's secret." The discussion of the closed Soviet-run city, founded in 1981 had clear implications for the shifting view of Soviet-Mongolian relations. This article was apparently the first official acknowledgement of the city's existence (Bulag 1998: 23). (The city itself did not appear on maps.) MAHN could not have been but aware of the reactionary nationalist implications of the timing of the announcement and the reaction the mere existence of the town and associated uranium mine would provoke among the people. The city had been closed to Mongolians, and was soon taken as emblematic of the Soviet's colonial domination of Mongolia and its resources.

Although MAHN attempted to rally national sentiment to its own agenda (reforming socialism and staying in power) through the use of selected symbols, once the protests began, substantial success at doing so was left to the demonstrators. The protesters themselves made early, repeated and successful use of nationalist sentiment in their bid for legitimacy. Slogans on banners at the demonstrations soon were directed as much against Soviet domination as one party rule. Although not present at the first few gatherings, the protesters soon also adopted language and imagery that made it clear that the demonstration was as much against the Soviets and their domination and exploitation of Mongolia as socialism. In fact, at least in rhetoric, it was directed more at the Soviets than the ending of socialism. At several early points, the demonstrators made it clear that they were willing to work within in a socialist framework. (See Chapter Four in (Kaplonski 1996). However, slogans such as "Mongolia for the Mongolians" made the anti-Soviet nature of the demonstrations clear. Early opposition documents and speeches also took the Soviets to task, blaming them

for the economic (and other forms) domination of Mongolia, ultimately retarding its development (Ulaanhüü 1990a; Ulaanhüü 1990b). This recalls the complaints of the Indian nationalists against British rule I discussed earlier.

I wish now to examine some of the symbolism more closely for the light it can shed on Mongolian nationalism and national sentiment in the early 1990s. I wish to use these examples to highlight some of the issues surrounding nationalism and national identity that were prominent in the early 1990s, and that were, as a result, to shape the relevant discourses throughout the decade. Some of these, especially Chinggis Khaan and *Mongol bichig* were to become key symbols throughout the 1990s. That is, they were employed as tools for thinking about what it meant to be Mongolian, while at the same time encouraging uncritical adoption of certain ideas about being Mongolian (cf. Ortner 1973).

Chinggis Khaan

Very early on in the demonstrations and the ensuing battles for legitimacy the use of the pre-socialist past as a tool of legitimation and identity building became quite important. Both sides attempted to utilize the past in various ways and for various purposes, although ultimately, the protesters' use would prove successful, while MAHN's would not. References to Chinggis Khaan, as might well have been expected, were present at many of the protests (Southerland 1990); (Fineman 1990); (Kristof 1990). These were not the first references. We have already seen the articles in *Ünen* relating to the Secret History. *Mongolkino* (the official film company) had also begun production on an epic film on Chinggis Khaan (Sum'yaa 1989).

These references to Chinggis Khaan served multiple purposes, and had multiple resonances. The first and probably most important is the link that was being drawn between the pre-socialist past and the protesters. They were staking a claim to the past that would be seen as "truly Mongolian" and which would become the key source for the construction of a new (but perceived as old) Mongolian identity. In this constructed past, the pre-socialist past was to become an ahistorical jumble, with various referents and allusions spanning the centuries mixed together. But this did not really matter. It wasn't the reclamation of a past that actually happened that was important. Rather, it was the reclamation of a

past that might have (should have) happened, and had been denied by the Soviets that mattered. This was common to the various manifestations of national sentiment, and was to prove a rich battleground over the years as the 'truth' about Chinggis Khaan was contested.

The other key purpose would have been clear to all Mongolians. The use of Chinggis Khaan emphasized the anti-Soviet nature of the protests. Through allusions and reference to the past, the protesters were making clear that a particular model of the past and Mongolia – one untainted by Soviet "influence" – would form the basis for a new identity. (This was particularly ironic, given that most of the key figures in the movement had been educated abroad. This not only gave them exposure to Eastern Europe and the changes taking place there in the 1980s, but would also provide ammunition to be used against the democratic parties by the extreme nationalists, who would accuse the democratic figures precisely of not being Mongol enough.) Chinggis Khaan was ideal for this. He had in the pre-socialist period served as an ancestor figure. His troops had also conquered the Russians (and Subedei's first expedition that introduced the Russians to the Mongolians, was intended as little more than a reconnaissance force), and the Soviets had in particular taken a strong stance against overly-nationalist interpretations of Chinggis Khaan. To adopt him as a key symbol was thus to repudiate the Soviets at several levels simultaneously.

MAHN also attempted to use the symbol of Chinggis Khaan, but less successfully. It was, of course, MAHN's reforms that allowed Chinggis Khaan to be discussed openly, and his image publicly reconfigured. Yet this openness failed to aid MAHN to any great extent in the battle over the past.

The particular emphasis Chinggis Khaan was to assume later is also telling. Although I shall return to this point, it is worth mentioning briefly here. Chinggis became known for his role as law-giver and founder of the Mongol state. An interpretation that had at least partial roots in socialist historiography, it provided a focal point for civic nationalism. It would also provide a much needed parallel, and hence, legitimacy, for the project of constructing democracy in Mongolia. Chinggis Khaan was now remembered for the democratic bent of his state. (For a late, and extreme, example, see (Nyam-Osor 1997). Parallels, particularly when bolstered by the additional emphasis on Chinggis as (Buddhist) law-giver, to the democratic government now being instituted were clear. It also

resonated on yet another level, as it made clear that the socialist period with its one-party rule in spite of claims to rule in the name of the people, didn't. This particular vision of Chinggis Khaan, however, was not the only one present in the early 1990s, and or throughout the decade. Many people chose instead to emphasize his strong, individual, leadership, suggesting that that was precisely what Mongolia needed, and lacked, at such a critical juncture as the early 1990s. Such comments were to be heard at multiple levels in Mongolian society, not just political discourse. The need for a strong leader like Chinggis was a particularly common topic of conversation while taking taxis or standing in lines during the run-up to the presidential elections in 1993.

Mongol bichig

One of the most visible battles over symbolism in the protests was over the use of Mongol bichig (literally, Mongolian writing). Mongol bichig is used to refer to the vertical script, said to have been introduced by Chinggis Khaan, and still in use in Inner Mongolia. It officially was replaced in the 1940s by a Cyrillic alphabet based on the Russian one, although it was still used in some official reports up to at least the early 1950s.¹² It also made regular appearances at several public events throughout the later socialist period.¹³

Signs in bichig appeared at the protests, despite the fact that the majority of the population, and probably the protesters as well, were illiterate in it. Zorig, generally seen as the leader of the democratic revolution, was illiterate in it. I suspect many of the other leaders, educated abroad, also could not read it, at least initially.¹⁴ This was not the point of the signs, however. What mattered was that the signs, by being in *Mongol bichig*, were a claim to the pre-socialist past. They were very much intended as a blow to what was being portrayed as the hijacking and corruption of Mongolian culture by the Soviets. It also served to link MAHN, which was responsible for the policy, once again to the Soviets.

MAHN was not slow to understand and respond to this threat. They announced plans to reintroduce *Mongol bichig* as the official alphabet. They also made use of the script themselves. Thus, for example, their Special Congress

¹² This assessment is based on my experiences working on documents from the 1950s in the archives.

¹³ The full extent of this is not yet clear to me. I thank Katherine Petrie for this information.

¹⁴ By 1999, Baabar, another prominent democratic figure, appeared to be comfortable writing in *bichig*.

[*Onts ih hural*] held in April 1990, was decorated with banners in the script, and the cover of the printed version. In fact, *bichig* had appeared in the late 1980s (and before) at officially sanctioned events: the photographic coverage of the Naadam parade (labeled a Worker's Parade) in *Ünen* in 1989 show signs proclaiming "the People's Revolution" in *bichig*. But it had not been in use as a functional, daily language for decades.

In the early 1990s, the government announced plans to reintroduce *bichig* as the official script. In 1993, most government buildings had plaques labeling them in *Mongol bichig* and English, but not Cyrillic Mongolian. The plans for converting solely to *bichig* were later abandoned, although it is now taught in schools.

The case of *Mongol bichig* (as does that of Buddhism) highlights a further parallel between Chatterjee's model of colonialism-inspired nationalism and the Mongolian case. Chatterjee writes "[N]ationalism declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain" (Chatterjee 1993a: 6). He continues, talking of social reform in India: "although the need for change was not disputed, there was a strong resistance to allowing the colonial state to intervene in matters affecting 'national culture'" (1993a: 6). In 1990 it was, of course, too late to resist the intervention of the Soviets, but it was possible to make objections known, as indeed the protesters did. Once again, it also highlights the success the protesters had in linking MAHN with the Soviets, a sentiment widely (although not universally) shared by many Mongolians.

Buddhism

Another key symbol in the 1990s was Buddhism. The idea of Buddhism, more important than its actual practice, resonated on several levels, providing an ideal focal point for conceptions of national identity. It had a long history in Mongolia, and people were aware of the destruction of the Buddhist monasteries in the late 1930s by the socialist government. Although MAHN had already tried to distance itself from these "excesses" (as they were often termed in official historiography) it was a topic that would continue to haunt them. Early democratic protests at times featured Buddhist lamas alongside the young democratic leaders. This was once again an attempt to portray the protesters as

the true inheritors of Mongolian heritage, and mimicked (if unconsciously) the dual legitimation model, first enacted in the Mongolian sphere by Hubilai Khan. Here, there were two spheres, the secular and religious, and they in theory supported and legitimated each other. This would also reinforce the parallels to 1911, outlined above. The Bogd Khaan (the Eighth Javzandamba Hutagt) was enthroned as the secular ruler of Mongolia after the collapse of the Manchu empire in 1911, but was also a Buddhist reincarnation, collapsing the two spheres into one.

Links were also drawn almost immediately between Chinggis Khaan and the Buddhist church. This was historically inaccurate, as Buddhism did not achieve widespread penetration in Mongolia until the 16th century, but this was irrelevant. It is the perceived past, not the actual past, that matters in such situations. Combining two key symbols was more efficacious than using them independently of each other, and under such circumstances, historical accuracy was doomed.

Buddhism was seen as the Mongolian religion *par excellence*, and in the early 1990s a law was debated that would have given preferential treatment to Buddhism, shamanism (also a historic Mongolian belief) and Islam (in a nod to the Kazakhs). The idea was quickly shelved after international protest, but it is indicative of the strength of belief in Buddhism as a component of Mongolness, and the need to protect and foster it. The revival of Buddhism also serves as an indication of the degree to which the general population took part in such reconfigurations of identity, as donations in cash and kind poured in to help the rebuilding of monasteries, and young boys in lama's robes could be seen walking the streets of Ulaanbaatar.

The use of Buddhist imagery, however, was not totally efficacious. The "three jewels," a standard Buddhist symbol, had been adopted by the Mongolian Social Democratic Party (MSDN). Yet in discussing the new national symbols in 1993, I was told by one person that the "three jewels" had been included because they were the symbol of the MSDN. The Buddhist element was completely unrecognized. This was again not totally relevant. In a survey I conducted in 1993, only about half of the people considered themselves religious. Yet the idea of Mongolia being a Buddhist country had a larger resonance than this statistic might suggest.

The early 1990s

The search for a new, non-socialist Mongolian identity did not end with the first free elections in the summer of 1990. If anything, the victory of the democratic revolution only intensified the need for a new identity, and also allowed greater safety in the explicit manifestation of nationalism. After a brief florescence in the first few years, however, the most visible and heated displays of nationalism became for the less prominent. (Certain key individuals and their agendas refuse to be ignored, and continue to garner press.) This does not necessarily mean that the search for, and construction of, a new identity was any less intense or less important. Rather, it should be taken as an indication that a shift was occurring. This shift was from the first heady days of realizing the possibility of a new identity to the more mundane, but important, work of actually reconceiving such an identity. Nationalism and national sentiment were becoming more internalized.

Through the very visible displays and discussions of the first few years of the 1990s, the ground-rules, as it were, had been set for thinking about national identity and sentiment in Mongolia. It wasn't so much the fact that national sentiment could be openly and proudly displayed, as the case had been at first. It was, instead, what was the "proper" form of such sentiments. This in turn would have the potential to impact the development of the country, as who one thinks he/she is will inevitably shape their actions.

Building upon the trend that both MAHN and the protesters had begun, the emphasis was on the pre-socialist past. With the socialist period now seen as politically, and perhaps more importantly, morally, bankrupt, it was largely elided in the search for a new identity and issues of nationalism. It was, when talked about, presented as a colonial past, and hence unsuitable as a source of "tradition". More often than not, however, the socialist era was simply ignored.

The discontinuity the socialist period presented between the pre-socialist, "traditional" past and the present resulted in a specific approach to this issue. One could not simply pick up where one left off, especially since the vast majority of the Mongolian population knew no past except the socialist one. As a result, "the deep past of Mongolian culture has to be reached across a chasm of foreignness, and this is now done not by structures, but by means of

singular, diverse and individualized actions" (Humphrey 1992: 377). This has also provided a fairly large degree of latitude in the realized constituting actions. The past is invariably interpreted in light of present needs and desires: "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: 1122-3). With the 70 year gap, and the socialist era's derogatory attitude towards pre-socialist history, what comprised "authentic" history was much more open to question and interpretation than it might have been otherwise. In other words, for nationalists of all stripes, the pre-socialist past presented a fairly open canvas on which to paint their visions of Mongolia and Mongolness.

Thus Chinggis Khaan was now a Buddhist law-giver and founder of the Mongol state. It does not matter that Chinggis himself was not Buddhist. The chronological inaccuracies are elided in the interest of greater symbolic force. Rather such an image integrates two of what were to become the key symbols of Mongolness – Chinggis Khaan and Buddhism. Most of the mass-produced statues of Chinggis Khaan available in the early 1990s showed him in the pose of a sitting Buddha, holding a book of wisdom or laws. The parallel was reinforced through the publication of numerous little books of the teachings of Chinggis Khaan. The image of Chinggis Khaan was not universally agreed upon, however, except for his importance. His legacy was interpreted in various ways depending on one's viewpoint and ideology.

As already noted, the general consensus was that Chinggis Khaan was a law-giver and able leader, both militarily and politically. Yet there were variations on theme, which were amenable to interpretations by the different manifestations of national sentiment. Many emphasized the democratic nature of his rule. Such constructions draw an important parallel between the Chinggisid past and the present, and highlight a state-building (i.e., civic) form of nationalism. This was a particularly useful approach, as it offered a diagram for the problem of trying to move forward (a new political and economic system) and backward (reclaiming heritage) as the same time.

But cultures and political arenas are not monolithic. There are other ways to talk and think about Chinggis Khaan. Many people also saw Chinggis Khaan

as a strong leader, citing his firm hand, something largely seen to be lacking in Mongolia in the early 1990s. This, especially when coupled with Chinggis conquests (not often talked about, but well-known) made him a symbol amenable to more conservative / xenophobic forms of national sentiment. Such an interpretation allowed the conception of Chinggis Khaan in fact to be wielded against the young, democratic leaders who were not only seen as lacking in direction, but also unduly influenced by foreign countries and ideas. The more conservative politicians, not the young liberals, the argument ran, were the true protectors of Chinggis Khaan's, and Mongolia's, legacy. This argument was to hold throughout the 1990s. As the MP and poet Dashbalbar noted in a newspaper interview in 1997:

In fact, I respect history's dictators, such as Hitler, Stalin, Chinggis, Alexander of Macedonia, Shih Huandi [the first emperor of China], Kim Il-Sung, Pinochet, Oliver Cromwell, Mao Zedong, Saddam Hussein. They stirred up trouble in other lands, but united their own people and made them strong....

Emperor Peter was a terrible, cruel, hard man. But Peter the First not only made the Russian land Russian, but left a world-class, strong, undefeated country.

They don't say bad things about the Emperor Peter in Russia, they don't say bad things about Chinggis Khaan in Mongolia, they don't say bad things about Napoleon in France; our self-proclaimed democrats must understand this (Tsendjav 1997: 2).

Although this quote is from 1997, the sentiment was found throughout the 1990s, and can still be found today. Chinggis may (or may not) have had democratic tendencies, this line of reasoning went, but above all, he was a man who also knew what was best for his country, and wasn't afraid to take the necessary steps.

Another indication of the strength of this return to the past was the number of *tailbar tol'* (explanatory dictionaries) on Mongolian history, tradition and customs that were published during this period.¹⁵ Such books accomplished at least two things. First they offered a model on how to be a "good" (ie, true) Mongolian in the guise of learning about the past. In doing so, they contributed to conceptions of Mongolian national identity through what they ruled as acceptable parts of history. This leads us to the second point, which is that they helped the construction (albeit temporary) of the socialist period as a kind of

¹⁵ These were put out by various publishers, including those associated with official institutions, as well as private ones.

"white noise" (Humphrey 1992: 376) which did not constitute a part of Mongolian traditional culture. It was almost invariably excluded from the books, which everyone I talked to accepted uncritically as reflecting "true" Mongolian traditions and customs. Significantly, publications of this sort fell off as the 1990s progressed, although they could still be found in the shops. This seems to support the argument that the limits of permissible national sentiment were being progressively refined as the decade wore on.

Although the bulk of the socialist period was largely excluded from the debates on what constituted being Mongolian, some aspects were discussed. Both MAHN and the democratic parties offered a new interpretation of the early Mongolian revolutionaries. During the socialist period, some of them had been conceived of as the leading lights of socialism. Others were branded reactionaries and were largely excluded from the history of the socialist state. All received a re-evaluation in the early 1990s, and were now almost uniformly portrayed as proto-capitalists and nationalists, who wanted only the best for their country. They turned to the Soviet Union only out of necessity, and resisted the installation of socialism in Mongolia.¹⁶

Such a move again signaled a battle over a well-known event in Mongolian history. This was a particularly sensitive, and powerful, point for the various groups to try to lay claim to. Indeed, for many Mongolians, the 1921 "People's Revolution," was better known than earlier history. For MAHN it was a move designed to re-associate the Party with the early, heady, optimistic days of the revolution, when the Mongolian People's Party (MAHN's original name) represented the vanguard of progress and national sentiment. For those in opposition to MAHN, it represented the legacy of MAHN in a negative light, for it was MAHN (even if under the direction of the Soviets and/or Comintern) that had exiled, defamed and killed many of the early revolutionaries, and thus, in some eyes, lead Mongolia squarely down the path of socialist development. But significantly, both framed the discussion over the re-evaluation of the revolution and revolutionaries in largely civic terms, although some Buryats claimed Sühbaatar as their own, lending an ethnic angle to the issue (Bulag 1998: 89).

¹⁶ To be fair, this interpretation has parallels in some contemporary accounts by foreigners. See, for example, Ma (1949) and Forbath and Geleta (1936).

Let me now consider more explicitly some of the varying types of national sentiment outlined earlier as they were manifested in the early 1990s in Mongolia and their relation to the topics addressed.

Civic nationalism. This, as outlined above, was more or less what most early democratic figures were arguing for. But this complicated their invocation of the Mongolian past, and their invocation of the Mongolian past complicated their claims to a civic nationalism conceived in ideal typical terms. There is no real correlation between the Mongol empire and the state that was renamed Mongolia in early 1992. The current borders of Mongolia do not correlate with any historical boundaries. It claims to be civic, but is clearly predicated upon a presumed (invented?) ethnic basis, as the exodus of large numbers of Kazakhs from the western regions to Kazakhstan in the early 1990s demonstrated. In other words, even the claim for the civic nature of their nationalism is rooted elsewhere. Civic nationalism, could, perhaps make an appeal in terms of the rule of law, and this resonates with the image of Chinggis Khaan as law-giver. Yet as I have already noted, this begs the questions of who is included and excluded from the constructed nation. It may be an "imagined community," to return to Anderson's phrasing, but the actual dynamics of the situation make it clear that not all see themselves as equal members of the community. In particular, many Kazakhs see Mongolia as a Mongolian state, as evidenced by the large migrations to Kazakhstan in the early 1990s. Many have now returned, but in 1999 a Kazakh research assistant claimed there was still much discrimination, and claimed they were denied permission to build a mosque in Ulaanbaatar.

Importantly, the various scandals and what is seen as corruption, threaten to undermine the argument of civic nationalism, portraying many of those who argue for allegiance to the state above all as out for their own interests above all.

Halh-centrism. Halh-centrism was fairly prominent in certain areas of politics and culture in the early 1990s. It is still important, but some of its most extreme manifestations (such as talk about a possible constitutional article limited the presidency to a Halh Mongol) are not currently prevalent. Much of the hostility seems to be leveled against, but not limited to, Buryats. The protest leader S. Zorig, part Buryat (and part Russian/German), I was told by some in the early 1990s, probably wouldn't get very far in politics because of his ethnic background. Other prominent members of the movement (such as Bat-Üül) were

also Buryat. Similarly, the President, P. Ochirbat's, rumored heritage (he was said to have a Chinese father) was a substantial issue in the 1993 elections (which he nevertheless won).

Interestingly enough, one of the most vocal proponents of Halh-centrism until his death in 1999, the poet and MP O. Dashbalbar was actually a Dariganga Mongol, and not Halh himself (Bulag 1998: 85). This strongly suggests that Halh centrism, even when portrayed as such by its proponents, is something more. It is a form of national sentiment that is more concerned with issues of purity (in terms of "blood" or "race") than other forms of national sentiment. This, of course, is a very common characteristic of many variations of nationalism. It is often linked with xenophobic sentiments, although it is by no means limited to them.

Pan-Mongolism. Pan-Mongolism has appeared in the 1990s largely in the cultural sphere. Cultural and academic exchanges take place (and are encouraged) between the various Mongolian groups, including Inner Mongolians, Buryats, Kalmucks, and so forth.¹⁷ In the early 1990s there was also at least one journal, published in both *bichig* and Cyrillic Mongolian that aimed at being explicitly pan-Mongolian, but as far as I am aware, it did not last long. One can argue that the cultural pan-Mongolism also implicates a form of political pan-Mongolism. My earlier insistence that the political and cultural spheres can not be completely divorced raises precisely this point. This is indeed the case. But as far as I am aware, there are no current attempts at political reunification of the various Mongolian geographical areas.

Xenophobic nationalism. Xenophobic forms of national sentiment / identity are still present in Mongolia, although not as violent and palpable as they were in the early 1990s (but there are notable exceptions). Violence was at times directed against foreigners or Mongolians (and in particular women) with them. However, there were two categories of foreigners that were of key concern to Mongolians: Russians and Chinese.

The Russians (and those taken to be Russians) were the recipients of violence, a direct and physical reaction to what was seen as seventy years of

¹⁷ These exchanges and conferences are often sponsored by private organizations, but often receive government support. More explicitly political, I have been told by government sources that a large proportion of the Mongolian intelligence effort in the late socialist period was directed at Inner Mongolia.

Soviet colonialism and occupation. The Chinese, while usually not the subjects of violent attacks, were (and continue to be) widely mistrusted. It is feared by many that China eyes Mongolia as possible expansion room, much as it did with Inner Mongolia and other border regions. This fear even affects such seemingly unrelated issues as privatization, with some people afraid of potential domination by the Chinese if they are allowed to bid on privatized industries. At times, the sentiment against the Chinese was even stronger than against the Russians, and this has become more the case as the 1990s progressed.

The mid-1990s and after

By the time of my return to Mongolia in 1997, obvious displays of national sentiment were not as common as they had been during my previous visit in 1993, or earlier (see Campi 1991). This strongly suggests – and this view was supported by Mongolians – that this indicative of the fact not that national sentiment was no longer important, but rather that it had become much more taken-for-granted. People did not talk as much about Chinggis Khaan, for example, not because he wasn't important, but because he had become a part of their life and worldview in a way he had not been earlier in the 1990s.

The main components of national identity, in other words, have more or less coalesced. It should be realized that this does NOT imply (or should not be taken to) uniform views. Not everyone agrees on what (or who) is a Mongol. National identity is still debated, if not to the same degree as before. Rather, it means that individuals and/or groups have come to terms (more or less) with their own interpretations of identity, and if not agreed upon, they are more or less bounded.

The key to understanding these interpretations is that they have not only become more internalized than they had been before, but that they also have become more inward-looking in another sense as well. I mean this largely in that they have become more focused on domestic issues of national sentiment, rather than international. Mongolians have, it seems, become more comfortable in their status as an independent country, particular vis-à-vis their northern and southern neighbors, although this does not mean that they are confident of their neighbor's intentions. Worry over the intentions and influence of the southern neighbor in particular continues.

Xenophobic nationalism, coupled with Halh-centrism, continue to be the most noticeable forms of national sentiment. The most visible (and vocal) proponent of these forms of nationalism was doubtless O. Dashbalbar, the poet and MP who died in October 1999. The bulk of his criticisms, however, were tendered against the new democratic parties and those Mongolians who were seen as being too "Western," as we saw in the quote earlier. Similar sentiments, also complaining of the changing role of women, were echoed by others, such as the MAHN MP Zenee.¹⁸

Others, however, argue that most people employ such radical notions of nationalism against the Chinese only. I asked Dulmaa, a high-ranking woman working for the UN if many people subscribed to Dashbalbar's sentiments. She replied:

Yes, particularly if we understand that whenever and wherever this nationalism issue surfaces it implies only our relations vis-a-vis the southern neighbor. Mongolians don't seem to care enough about other foreigners, you know. The only thing they are concerned with is the.... I wouldn't say "perceived," it is too much of a weak word... the potential Chinese infiltration.

You know about that. The Chinese operate the whole economic sphere in the whole of Southeast Asia; in many countries in this region. So this is what the Mongolians wouldn't like to see in their country. This is very traditional. This is so irrational, you shouldn't try to seek an explanation [we both laugh].

Xenophobic nationalism, however, is not the only form to be found in Mongolia today. Pan-Mongolism is largely relegated to the cultural / intellectual sphere. Civic nationalism also remains strong, and if anything, is growing in prominence.

An appeal to "Mongolness" and tradition continues to cross-cut the various forms of national sentiment, even those proclaiming some sort of appeal to state. D. Mönkhüü, a former MAHN MP and founder of the *Gal Golomt* movement, made the linkage clear in an article published in the *UB Post* in 1997:

¹⁸ It is worth pausing here to mention the issue of gender and nationalism. Much has been written on the topic (ieg, Funk and Mueller 1993). What concerns us most here is the fact that more "retrograde" versions of nationalism are coupled with a call for a return to what is seen as a "traditional" role for women. This calls for a relegation of women to the domestic sphere, and subservient to men. It does not matter that Mongolian women have always been noted for their independence and degree of economic control of the household. The women's role has been reconstructed as a more stereotypically "Oriental" one (cf. Said 1978). It must also be noted that there are many parallels with this in the post-Soviet bloc more generally, where women have been linked to the ills of socialism (Occipinti 1996).

The notion that everybody has equal rights before the law has been lost, terrible crimes have been covered up by the courts, and the foundations of order and discipline in this country have been seriously damaged. Mongolians' sense of pride in themselves and their country is weakening (Mönhüü 1997).

The linkage Mönhüü made was not an uncommon one. She appeals to the rule of law, but then links it to a specific, Mongolian past and sense of self. Despite the rhetoric, it is clear that she is not appealing to a sense of being Mongolian as a citizen of the state of Mongolia. Rather she is appealing to an ethnically-based (if unstated) conception of being Mongol.

What is also notable about this is that once again, the issues being linked to nationalism are inward-looking. It is not Mongolia's position in the international community that concerns Mönhüü (and many others), although this concerns some. Rather it is the morality of the people that is of concern. This, I would suggest, has become the focus of most manifestations of nationalism. With Mongolia's membership in the international community assured, most energy is now focused on the domestic sphere. The leadership is often seen as corrupt or at least inept, and not acting in the interests of the country as a whole. Appeals to tradition and the pre-socialist past are employed (if not explicitly) in the defense of the "real" Mongolia. Linked to this is the claim that certain groups and individuals are not true Mongolians, and worse, are traitors, because of their excessive links to and interest in, the west. More radical, conservative nationalists, for example, have at times criticized certain laws in Mongolia because they are based too much on Western European and American models. This brings them into conflict with a higher ideal, the nomadic heritage of Mongolia.¹⁹ It is this nomadic heritage, in the eyes of such nationalists (usually sedentary themselves) that defines Mongolia, and must be protected from external threats, or internal corruption.

There are further parallels that could be drawn between Western aid to Mongolia and colonialism. Mongolia is currently heavily reliant on foreign aid, grants, and other forms of assistance and more than one observer has commented that the international community has largely assumed the Soviet Union's role in Mongolia's economy. The nationalist critiques of western

¹⁹ This particular example is drawn from an interview with O. Dashbalbar in 1997. He did not use the phrase "higher ideal" himself, but the sentiment was clear.

influence, then, are simply an extension of previous critiques of Soviet hegemony.

Conclusion

What this necessarily brief survey has attempted to do is map out some of the key issues related to nationalism and national sentiment in Mongolia. There are multiple types that offer competing visions of what it means to be Mongolian.

In doing so, I have also tried to blur the lines between the various manifestations of national sentiment and nationalism. Although for analytic purposes, I have kept the labels, I hope it is clear that in actuality the different types run together. Things are, in short, interestingly messy.

It seems clear that national sentiment and nationalism will continue to play a role in Mongolian politics for the foreseeable future. It is both impossible and unwise to predict the directions it will develop in. However, barring any major changes, I do think that nationalism and national sentiment will continue to play an important role, but one more visible in the domestic than international sphere. The issues of what some see as undue reliance on, and fear of excess influence of, foreign aid and investment will continue, but it seems that most issues will become inter-party.

Various parties and groups will continue to try to stake a claim as the rightful rulers with the only vision of what will really work for Mongolia. But this begins to take us away from issues dealing directly and only with nationalism, and enters the realm of politics more traditionally conceived.

Works cited

- Anderson, Benedict
1991 *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Baatarbeel, Ch.
1997 Foreigners treat Mongols like dogs: MP. *In* *The Mongol Messenger*. Pp. 1. Ulaanbaatar.
- Balibar, Etienne, and Immanuel Wallerstein
1991 *Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities*. New York: Verso.
- Bulag, Uradyn

- 1998 Nationalism and hybridity in Mongolia. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campi, Alicia
- 1991 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 Mongol Studies* 2(6):3-17.
- Chatterjee, Partha
- 1993a The nation and its fragments: colonial and postcolonial histories. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1993b Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse? Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Duara, Prasenjit
- 1995 Rescuing history from the nation: questioning narratives of modern China. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fineman, Mark
- 1990 Mongolia reform group marches to rock anthem. In *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles.
- Forbath, Ladislaus, and Joseph Geleta
- 1936 The new Mongolia. London: William Heinemann.
- Funk, Nanette, and Magda Mueller, eds.
- 1993 Gender politics and post-communism: reflections from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. New York: Routledge.
- Greenfeld, Liah
- 1993 Transcending the nation's worth. *Daedalus* 122(3):47-62.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J.
- 1990 Nations and nationalism since 1780. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holy, Ladislav
- 1993 The end of socialism in Czechoslovakia. In *Socialism: ideals, ideologies, and local practice*. C.M. Hann, ed. Pp. 204-217. New York: Routledge.
- Humphrey, Caroline
- 1992 The moral authority of the past in post-socialist Mongolia. *Religion, State and Society* 20(3&4):375-389.

Hyer, Paul

- 1966 The re-evaluation of Chinggis Khan: Its role in the Sino-Soviet dispute. *Asian Survey* 6(12):696-705.

Jamsran, L.

- 1994 Similarities and differences of the 1911 revolutions in Mongolia and China. *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs* 1:61-63.

Jamsranjav, G.

- 1948 *Ardyn unshih bichig*. Ulaanbaatar: Ardyg Gegeerüülekh Yamny Hevlel.

Kaplonski, Christopher

- nd "Heroes of the national west: trans-ethnic identity in Mongolia" Unpublished manuscript.

- 1996 "For the memory of the hero is his second life": Truth, history and politics in late twentieth century Mongolia. Ph.D., Rutgers University.

- 1998 Creating national identity in socialist Mongolia. *Central Asian Survey* 17(1):35-49.

Kristof, Nicholas D.

- 1990 With official permission, change stirs Mongolia. In *New York Times*. Pp. A6. New York.

Larson, Frans August

- 1930 *Larson: Duke of Mongolia*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company. Losolsüren, Ya., N. Dorj, and N. Dambii, eds.

- 1986 *Mongol ardyn huv'sgalt namyn XIX Ih Hural*. Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Hevleliin Gazar.

Ma, Ho-t'ien

- 1949 *Chinese agent in Mongolia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

MAHN History Institute

- 1967 *Mongol ardyn huv'sgalt namyn tüühend holbogdoh barimt bichgüüd 1940 - 1960 ond*. Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Hevleliin Gazar.

- 1970 D. Tömör-Öchiroos namyn esreg üildsen ajil yavuullagyn tuhai. In *Mongol ardyn huv'sgalt namyn tüühend holbogdoh barimt bichguud (1961-1970)*. Pp. 39-41. Ulaanbaatar: Ulsyn Hevleliin Gazar.

Mönkhүү, D.

1997 A world turned upside down. In UB Post. Pp. 3.

Nyam-Osor, N.

1997 Minii medeh Chingesiin Mongol. Ulaanbaatar: Öngöt Hevlel Company.

Occipinti, Laurie

1996 Two steps back? Anti-feminism in Eastern Europe. Anthropology Today 12(6):13-18.

Ortner, Sherry B.

1973 On key symbols. Am. Anthropol. 75:1338-1346.

Said, Edward

1978 Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books.

Southerland, Daniel

1990 Mongolians march for democracy. In Washington Post. Washington, D.C.

Sum'yaa, Budyn

1989 The moral mission of culture. World Marxist Review 32(11):21-24.

Thelen, David

1989 Memory and American history. Journal of American History 75(4):1117-1129.

Töv Horoo

1962 Mongol Ardyn Huv'sgalt Namyn Töv Horoony III бүгд хүрлйн тогтоол: D. Төмөр-очироос намьн эсрэг үйлдсэн ажил явууллагын тухай. In Үнэн, 12 September. Pg. 1.

Tsendjav, D.

1997 O. Dashbalbar: Bi Saddam Husein, Jirinovskii hoyert shine jileer bayaryn tsahilgaan yavuulna. In Önөөдөр. Pp. 2,3. Ulaanbaatar.

Ulaanhүү, P., ed.

1990a Ardchilsan sotsialist hөдөлгөөний медее materialyn emhtgel. Ulaanbaatar.

1990b Mongolyn sotsial-demokrat namyn anhdugaar ih hural. Ulaanbaatar.

Weber, Max

1978 Economy and society. 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press.