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Mongols, Kazakhs, and Mongolian Territorial Identity: Competing Trajectories of Nationalization

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While Mongolia's emergence from the Soviet sphere of influence was expected to entail a recasting of history, identity and statehood, the nature of this recasting was largely uncertain in the early 1990s. Among the foremost questions concerning ethnic Kazakhs, the state's second largest ethnic community,[1] were "what form of nationalization would be enacted in the wake of the Marxist-Leninist decline and would ethnic Kazakhs still have a place in a truly independent Mongolia?"[2] An effort to answer these questions requires the exploration of the complex negotiation of discourses that has taken place over the last 14 years.

[1] According to the Mongolian National Statistical Office (2001a: 50), in 1989 Kazakhs represented 5.9 percent of the total Mongolian population. In 1999 this percentage had dropped to 4.3, but the Kazakhs remained the second largest ethnic community.

[2] The terms post-communist and post-socialist are problematic because of the retention of power by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, which currently holds 72 of 76 seats on the Great Khuraltai and from which current President Natsagiyn Bagabandi draws his political power. The term post-Marxist-Leninist implies an altered, potentially more nationalistic, socialist approach to governance in the "independence period" (i.e., Mongolia's existence after its extrication from the Soviet sphere).

This short paper explores discourses shaping the relationship between somewhat essentialized nomadic cultural traits, Mongolia's socioeconomic development strategies and the current trajectory of nationalization. As I shall demonstrate, the interaction of perspectives on these issues is potentially volatile and draws from the long and complex ethno-cultural history of the steppe region. In the final section, I suggest that Khalka (majority elites) attempts to construct hegemony over all other ethnic Mongols have a direct impact on the status of Kazakhs in Mongolia.

This effort to elucidate the dynamic negotiation of identity and homeland conceptions among cultural elites and various components of the Mongolian citizenry takes the form of a discourse analysis. I rely primarily on interview data and a review of in-country literature and media (government documents, newspapers, poetry, film, and academic writing). Fieldwork was carried out in 2001 and 2002 within the capital city of Ulaan Baatar, the province [*aimag*] of Bayan Olgi and a variety of locales of Mongolian-Kazakh concentration.

Democracy, Civic Nationalism, and Territorial Citizenship

It is not a simple matter to answer the question "Who is a Mongol," let alone "Who is a Mongolian?" Taking the form of anti-Chinese feelings, the Oirat/Khalka divide, the East/West distinction, and the "othering" of the Inner (Chinese) Mongols, oppositional social structures have been in place for decades, if not centuries, in "Outer Mongolia." It was, however, the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist powerbase that catalyzed a new national reimagining, with the potential to radically alter the status of "Mongol" and non-Mongol groups both within and outside the state.

Pan-Mongolism could have emerged and redefined *all* ethnically Mongol peoples as part of the national structure of contemporary Mongolia. Such a conception would likely have problematized relations between Mongolia and its more powerful neighbors,[3] as well as alienated the country's Kazakh community. The Turkic-speaking, Muslim, and highly geographically concentrated Kazakh community was extremely vulnerable to being recast within "othering" discourses. No longer did this group represent a proto-national exile-community, prevented from returning to its historic homeland by Soviet restrictions on transborder movement. Instead, through the emergence of an independent Kazakhstan, it had been transformed into a nationalizing diaspora comprising over 80 percent of the population of a Mongolian province (Bayan Ogli) in close proximity to the group's ethno-national kin-state.

But overt "othering" discourses and pan-Mongol conceptions of Mongolness have not manifested themselves. Quite the contrary, residence within the borders of Mongolia, as of 1990, has served to define Mongolian civic-national identity. Inner Mongols of China, and Buryats and Kalmyks in Russia have remained marginalized, while despite their religious and linguistic distinctiveness, Kazakhs who reside within Mongolian territorial limits have been vested with a legitimate claim to "belonging." Kazakhs have *not* been incontrovertibly or seamlessly integrated into the civic conception of the Mongolian nation, but aggressive "pan-Mongolism" was essentially "taken off the table."

Application of this territorial principle to the nationalization of Mongolia suggests that the majority of both Mongol and Mongolian-Kazakh elites envisioned a relatively free choice of residence and citizenship for Mongolia's Kazakh community (i.e., remain in Mongolia as equal citizens or voluntarily migrate to Kazakhstan). An effort to institutionalize principles of democracy within Mongolia's new constitution was genuinely undertaken by the country's elites following the fall of the Soviet supported/directed regime (Sanders 1993). Such an effort was couched within an essentialist discourse holding nomadic cultural heritage to be inherently democratic.

Nomadism and Modernization

One can point to a relatively successful marriage of "East and West," "modern and traditional" in the construction of Mongolian political ideals, but this hybridity has proven far more complicated in the arena of economic and cultural development. The very nomadic heritage credited with providing the basis for the success of democratization in Mongolia since 1990 is regarded by some factions within the state as antithetical to economic advancement.

[3] The "Russian as colonizer" constituted an obvious base against which Mongolian elites could "push off" in an effort to propel their nationalization project along a new trajectory, but such exclusion would have alienated a much needed regional ally.

At the core of a rather heated and multifaceted negotiation of development strategies is a question of the viability of nomadism in the modern world. The debate can be broadly characterized as consisting of those who espouse placing nomadism at the core of the new nationalization process, and those viewing such a socioeconomic model as archaic and incompatible with the state's future in the modern international system (Batbayar 2002: 327).

Writers such as the Member of Parliament M. Zenee (1992) and the poet M. O. Dashbalbar (1995, 1996) represent the culturally conservative faction in this highly polarized debate. With clear aspirations of preserving the purity of Mongolia's eco-cultural heritage, they equate modernization with westernization and declare these processes to be incompatible with the basic characteristics of the "Mongolian" nation.

For these writers, and elites like them, removing pastoral nomadic heritage as the centerpiece of discourses framing the new nation would "ring the death knell" for Mongolian culture. My use of the word "Mongolian" in this case is significant because both Kazakhs and those Oirat groups portrayed at times as being only marginally related to the Mongol ethnic group[4] are included in this conception of cultural heritage as fellow "felt tent dwellers" [*tuurgatan*]. An ethnic core is, therefore, far less prevalent than a cultural core in this particular manifestation of a primordialist national discourse. Having set the limits of Mongolian nationalization within the borders of the state, the "other" against which this aspect of identity is to be defined is not necessarily ethno-national in nature.[5] It is rather the "rest of the world" or, put another way, globalization's attempts to infringe upon the nomadic space that constitutes the oppositional structure against which traditionalists seek to define the Mongolian nation.

Cultural Hybridity and the Hegemony of Modernization

According to Ch. Sharavtseren, "the Mongols divide the world into those who live within earth walls and those who dwell within felt walls. From the nomads' point of view the sedentary lifestyle still appears rather miserable" (2002: 7). This being said, urbanization, which boomed in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse only to see a steady reversal during the economic crisis of the early 1990s, appears to have regained momentum since 1995 (Diener 2003: 179).

The dwindling of government supplies to remote counties [*soums*], the possibility of urban jobs, and the opportunity to access the new global culture from which Mongolia had been "walled-off" during the Soviet era are responsible for this large-scale movement of people to the city. Young people, whose vision of the future differs greatly from that of their parents, compose the most prominent component of this migration wave. It is this generational divide that has led to an increasingly prevalent discourse debating the viability of hybridizing nomadic values and modernization.

This cleavage has taken on a political dimension, as parties like the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP) and the Mongolian Socialist Democratic Parity (MSDP) provide vehicles for the ascension to power of what Zenee describes as "people with un-Mongolian bodies and mentalities, thieves, liars, hooligans, criminals, border-crossers, alcoholics, and prostitutes" (Zenee 1996: 4).[6] This negative characterization reflects the fear that modernity is hegemonic, constituting a proverbial threshold that once breached will override traditional culture and render it "quaint," "archaic," and by consequence "obsolete" (Zenee 1992). The process of marginalizing traditional culture in the lives of the population is seen as already underway and embodied by efforts to hybridize modern technology within centuries-old cultural and material practices.

"Modernizers" present the counter argument to nomadization. This faction of Mongolian political elite accepts modernity's hegemony and encourages a strictly nominal hybridity of modernization with traditional Mongolian values. Bat-Erdeniin Batbayar argues the debate between modernity and nomadism is moot in that the purity of Mongolian society has already been irreparably corrupted by 70 years of

[4] Here I refer to the portrayal of various western Mongol tribes as Mongolized Turks. See Uradyn Bulag's discussion of ethno-genesis (1998: 90-97; 1994).

[5] A renewed fear of Chinese aggression and the desire for distinction from Russia, as a former colonizer, are lesser, but still prevalent, elements in this discourse.

[6] Tumursukh argues this condemnation is far less abstract than it may seem (2001: 132-134). The younger men and women running for parliament from the MNDP and MSDP coalition have regularly been cast as modernizing puppets of foreign powers and examples of "political prostitution."

Soviet influence. To retain nomadic cultural paradigms as the core of the nation-making process is to make the country a living museum (1996: 3-5). Elites within this faction regard modernization as essential to Mongolia's integration into the competitive world market of the 21st century.[7]

It is thought that the construction of cities along the yet to be completed 2,400-kilometer east-west highway (the Millennium Road), envisioned as the prime future artery for trade, will impel the urbanization of more than 90 percent of the state's population over the next 30 years (Batbayar 2002: 328; Enkhbayar 2002: 5). The revival of single family herds, occurring since the fall of socialism, would be reversed through the incorporation of large farms employing as little as ten percent of the country's population (Bayartsaikhan 2002: 5). Reminiscent of Soviet efforts at modernization in the 1960s and 1980s, a direct assault on the traditional eco-cultural paradigm of the Mongolian people once again looms on the horizon.

Kazakh Inclusion and Khalka Hegemony in Mongolia

In the spirit of utilizing the past to reset the trajectory of the national future, a "Mongol renaissance" was launched in the early 1990s (Campi 1991; Sabloff 2001). The reification of genealogies, revival of the cult of Chinggis Khan, rebirth of shamanism, and return to traditional herding practices — all of which had been repressed under socialist rule — were expected to appeal universally across the Mongol ethnic spectrum and generate a rebirth of "pre-socialist unity."[8] The demographic predominance of the Khalka, constituting 81.5 percent of the total citizenry of Mongolia, provided the ethnic core of this process (Bulag 1994, 1998; Tumursukh 2001).[9]

Of particular interest in this reimagining of the Mongolian nation is the idea that by virtue of their long habitation of "Mongolian territory," history of cooperation with "Mongols," shared suffering under the reigns of Stalin and Choibalsan, and cultural/genealogical overlaps with the Mongols, the Mongolian-Kazakhs have been afforded greater legitimacy in their claims to membership in the new Mongolian nation than even ethnic "Mongol" peoples living beyond the state's borders. As noted above, a territorial principle has served as the criterion for inclusion within the nationalization process.[10] The question remains however, why? The answer to this question may ironically be found in the concept of Khalka hegemony and its innate resistance to "pan-Mongolism."

"Pan-Mongolism," or the incorporation of all ethnically Mongol peoples into the "Mongolian nation," is seen as negative in two senses. First, extension of the Mongolian identity to all Mongols could dramatically improve the political power of the "Western Mongols" through the infusion of Buryats, Tuvans, Kalmyks, and other groups currently living in Russia. Second, while one can argue that the inclusion of the predominately Khalka Inner Mongols in the Mongolian nation would actually increase Khalka hegemony, the almost pathological fear of the Chinese demographic dilution of Mongolia eliminates any possibility of this occurring.

This political motive of nationalizing only those already within the territory of "Outer" Mongolia supports constructivist theories of nationhood asserting that criteria of belonging relate most directly to parochial concerns of a particular "elite."[11] Khalka hegemony has proven rather non-threatening for the Kazakhs because they have no desire to be considered Mongols and, at least those remaining within the semi-autonomous province of Bayan Olgi, appear rather accepting of a "second among equals" status within Mongolian society (Diener 2003: 210-71).

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[7] In an interview, Mongolia's Prime Minister Nambariin Enkhbayar stated, "it is not my desire to destroy the original Mongolian identity, but in order to survive we have to stop being nomads" (quoted in Murphy 2001: 31).

[8] An attempt to replace Cyrillic with the traditional Mongol script (*tod*) was also part of this Mongol renaissance but was abandoned in the early 1990s.

[9] Evidence of this ethnic core within the nationalization process is available in the increasingly prominent use of the term "Mongol" in reference to the Khalka, while other "Mongol" groups are referred to by their ethnonym (Uriangkhai, Durvut, etc.) or grouped into a category of "Western Mongols" or Oirats.

[10] A 1995 law on citizenship states that every person who was a citizen of Mongolia on and after 11 July 1921 and has not relinquished their citizenship will be considered a citizen of Mongolia (*Mongol Messenger* 1995).

[11] The constructivist approach to nationalism is perhaps best articulated in Benedict Anderson (1991).

Conclusion

It is within this contested sociopolitical landscape that Mongolian-Kazakhs currently seek to reconcile their ethnic identity (which links them to an independent Kazakhstan) and their attachments to place and patterns of sociocultural behavior that have sustained them within Mongolian society for multiple generations. With over 80 percent of Mongolia's Kazakhs residing in Bayan Olgi Province, ethnic purity is retained within a "ghetto or enclave demarcated by boundaries so sharp that they enabled the [Mongolian] nation to acknowledge the apparently singular and clearly fenced-off 'other' within itself" (Tololyan 1991: 6).

Such "fencing off" can be viewed in two ways. First, the territorial articulation of Kazakh ethnicity has the capacity to reaffirm the privileged position of Mongols in Mongolia and may even serve the hegemonic aims of the Khalka by providing an ally in the western, predominantly Oirat, region of the country.[12] Second, in contrast, this "fencing off" of difference may result in greater marginalization of Mongolian-Kazakhs in Bayan Olgi. They are not "Mongol," but have found points of access to the Mongolian nation; they are not Kazakhstani, but are well aware of their Kazakh identity. Is this community deterritorialized? Are they devoid of a national homeland? By examining both the process of nationalization within Mongolia and the export of Kazakh nationalism from Kazakhstan, further research may be able to address these questions.

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[12] Peter Finke argues that "the exceptional treatment of the Kazakh minority may have had its origin in the political events in western Mongolia in the first half of the century when the Xalxa (Khalka) government feared a west-Mongolian separatist movement. The favoring of the newly immigrated Kazakhs could make them loyal subjects and as such a buffer against the Oirats" (Finke 1999: 119).

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Power, Influence and Stability: The Unified Energy Systems of Russia in the Southern Tier FSU

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Energy remains a key component of Russia's relations with its southern former Soviet neighboring states. In electricity exports, oil and gas imports and exports, and ownership of the associated infrastructure, energy serves as a tool of Russia's foreign policy and as an important market for Russian companies. Although it has long been in vogue in energy and energy policy circles to worry about Russian energy behavior in its "near abroad," it is increasingly inappropriate to speak of the energy sector as if it is unitary, and to conflate interests of the Russian energy corporations and the Russian state. This paper will focus on the lesser-known electricity sector. Some "natural monopolies," such as the gas giant Gazprom, remain very close to the government and are used by the government directly to further foreign policy goals. The Russian Joint-Stock Company-Unified Energy Systems of Russia (RAO-UESR), is far more likely to pursue its own market interests, even when those are at odds with Russian state interests.

In fall 2003, a RAO-UESR press release announced that, under its leadership, all of the former Soviet republics were now operating on a parallel grid. Parallel grid operation for the entire former Soviet space is particularly notable because it was never achieved during the Soviet era (Unified Energy System of Russia 2003a). Such a grid increases the quality and reliability of electricity, by ensuring that shortfall in one area can be supplied by another area, and that surplus electricity in one area can be exported rather than wasted.

[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the US Government.