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Soviet Experts in Mongolia: Between International Mission and Colonial Practices

Soviet experts in Mongolia is a phenomenon having empire nature. In the beginning of the twentieth century after Russian — Japanese war Russian soldiery wrote many times about the necessity of annexation and colonization of this country. As a result the colonial model was chosen. Thousands of Russian peasants moved to Mongolia, they were aimed at its agricultural developing.¹ The Soviet Union only went on that policy shifted the priority from agricultural developing to industrial one. The Soviet engineers, geologists and architects had been creating “industrial basis of socialism” in the Mongolian People’s Republic (further — the MPR).² This country became the birthplace for their children but it did not become their Motherland. It was because of their rather specific experience of living in the environment of other culture. In spite of all efforts of Soviet propaganda which had been proclaiming the brotherly friendship of two peoples, Mongolia stayed misunderstood and strange. This friendship was based on the alliance of Soviet and Mongolian peoples, “older” and “younger” brothers.³ The Soviet people was “the older brother,” who performed the important mission of enlightenment and aid to the “backward” oriental peoples. Paying attention to “backwardness” they succeeded to form at Mongols so called complex of “younger” brother. The key stigmas ascribed to Mongols were just “oriental factor” and backwardness. It was the basis of Soviet citizens’ superiority

¹ A.P. Svechnikov, *Russkie v Mongolii (nabljudeniya i vyvody)*. *Sbornik rabot odnositel'no Mongolii (Halhi)*, Jenergiya, St. Petersburg 1912.

² N. Ganin et al., *Revoljucionnyj perehod Mongolii k socializmu*, Mysl', Moscow 1984, p. 25.

³ D.B. Ulymzhiev, *Nerushimaja bratskaja družba sovetского i mongol'skogo narodov*, BGPI im. D. Banzarova, Ulan-Ude 1961.

which were also supported from the side of their army quartered in the MPR. They created their own world, different from the life standards of the country (the USSR), they had come from. It was the world of special shops, of privileged consumer coupons, of commodities in short supply, which were available for them and there were special rights for Soviet citizens. At the same time Mongolia was the place of political exile where the anti-Soviet inclined people from the whole USSR were sent to. They were Cossacks and their descendants, old believers and soldiers of general Vlasov fascist army. Many of them did not have documents and thus they couldn't come back to the USSR.⁴ They were called as local Russians. It was the situation for arising of two parallel realities of Soviet presence in Mongolia.

At the level of everyday life it burst into constant clashes between these two groups of Russian speaking population. Mongols and local Russians were subaltern group. Having no opportunity of consumption prestigious commodities in the privileged shops, they had to consume in the informal sector. The Soviet presence in Mongolia raised many of such phenomena, all of them contradicted the rhetoric of Soviet ideology. Many Soviet citizens got the first experience of speculation (profiteering) just in Mongolia, selling the surpluses of prestigious goods. Hardly hidden enmity founded the empire complex of some people and ethnic nationalism of other ones, demolishing the idyllic image of "proletarian internationalism" just in this country. This ideology was only the concealment of inequality between Mongols and Soviet citizens. Though the official discrimination of Mongols was punished by such measures as deportation to "Big land" and deprivation of possibility of prestigious consumption. Essentially it was the colonial system with all institutions characteristic to it. It revealed broad possibilities to some people and did not leave a chance to others. However during the period of Soviet presence the Mongolian elite formed, which had been governing the country and aiming at the Soviet type of consumption.

The experience of life in Mongolia affected thousands of Soviet citizens because the great number of Soviet experts visited just that country. The MPR during the long period of time was the most available foreign country, as they said, it was the 16th republic of the USSR.⁵ Such a perception of the country affected the everyday practices at that time as well as it affects the contemporary attitude to Mongolia. In the future many of people should experience decolonization of their consciousness. But before it happens, the

⁴ A.V. Mihalev, "Russkij vopros' v socialisticheskoy Mongolii (1920–1980-e gg.)," *Vestnik BNC SO RAN* 3 (2011), pp. 123-130.

⁵ E.I. Lishtovannyj, *Ot velikoj imperii k demokratii: ocherki politicheskoy istorii Mongolii*, Izdatel'stvo IGU, Irkutsk 2007, p. 76.

reflection should be done, taking into consideration the experience itself and the stages of its formation. It is necessary to state that it has not been done through nowadays. There are a lot of researches on the history of Mongolia of the epoch of socialism, but however, the experience of life of experts from the USSR practically has not been studied. This issue was concerned in the researches on contiguous themes, but still it has not been studied separately. That's why the author has chosen to research, describe and analyze that experience.

1.

The numerous Russian speaking diaspora in the MNP was legitimated according to the necessity of the development of industrial basis of socialism in this country. This theory was grounded on V.I. Lenin's thesis, the founder of Soviet regime, who proposed the necessity: "to promote "disinterested cultural aid" to the peoples (in our context — Mongols, A.M.), who are more than we, backward and oppressed. That policy was aimed at the building of socialism, omitting capitalism, according to Lenin's hypothesis of "backward countries with the help of proletariat of foremost countries can transfer to Soviet regime and then, through some stages of development, to communism, without the capitalist stage of development."⁶ This theory was called as "the policy of proletarian internationalism." The conception of Asia backwardness in comparison to Europe took the important place in the Soviet/Marxist paradigm of world history and politics. The idea of Progress and revolutionary transition from one social-political formation to another, more perfect, was the basis of all transformations in the countries of socialist camp. They worked out five stage model of historical development (primitive communal system — slave-owning — feudalism — capitalism — socialism/communism) and they left to Mongolia the place at the third stage of such development.⁷ It was constantly emphasized that just this country was the second country in the world where "socialism won." Following the USSR, Mongolia had passed the hard path of collectivization and industrialization, which in fact undermined the background of Mongols nomad civilization, who were engaged in cattle breeding through centuries.

The stigma of backwardness and semi-feudal state in Mongolia was inspired by Soviet oriental studies during 1920s, beginning from the very first

⁶ V.I. Lenin, *Beseda s delegacijej Mongol'skoj Narodnoj Respubliki, 5 nojabrja 1921 goda. Polnoe sobranie sochinenij*, Vol. 44, Politizdat, Moscow 1974, pp. 232-233.

⁷ A.P. Okladnikov et al., *Istorija Mongol'skoj Narodnoj Respubliki*, Nauka, Moscow 1983.

expedition held by I.M. Maisky in 1921⁸ and finishing by B.Ya. Vladimrtsev's fundamental research which concerned the Mongolian nomadic feudalism.⁹ Fundamental researches of Mongolian sociologists of that time underlined the cardinalship of evolutionary leap, the brightest example of those researches is "Omitting Capitalism."¹⁰ But the Soviet supporters of Marxism dogmata didn't incline to declare about building of socialism in the MPR. The so-called non-capitalist intermediate stage of development was worked out especially for this country. Mongolia followed this course through 1940, later they called it as the socialist country. The MPR became the full and equal member of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance only in 1962. In fact at the beginning stage of Soviet-Mongolian partnership the Soviet side constantly emphasized its superiority in the evolutionary development of its society.

The essence of the rhetoric of proletarian socialism concluded in the fraternal friendship of the nation, and the Russian nation, "the older brother" had been dominating in it.¹¹ In the Soviet-Mongolian equivalency the older and younger brothers were considered as "akh" and "doo" accordingly. The Russian people was called the older brother because of social-economic reasons, which in the dogmata of Leninist theory were the principal. As the USSR was the first country in the world having started the progressive path of building socialism, it allowed to dominate in the attitudes to other countries which chose this model of development later. The Soviet rhetoric of that time, getting rid of the categories of empire colonialism, formed its own quasi colonial regime. By 1980s this regime acquired all features of classical colonialism. Struggle with backwardness led to arising at Mongols "the complex of younger brother." Struggle with illiteracy led to exclusion of traditional Mongolian alphabet and its substitution by Europeanized Cyrillic alphabet.¹² Destruction of Buddhist church led to Moscow monopoly in Marxism interpretation for the MPR. "The older brother" took the mentor position, which we considered in the context of M. Foucault conception.¹³ Just because of socialist experiments in Mongolia the key disciplinary institutions were established: hospitals, barracks, schools and manufactory.

⁸ I.M. Majskij, *Sovremennaja Mongolija*, Znanie-Sila, Irkutsk 1921.

⁹ B.Ya. Vladimircov, *Obwestvennyj stroj mongolov. Mongo'skij kochevoj feodalizm*, Vostoklitizdat, L.1934.

¹⁰ B. Shirendyb, *Minuja kapitalizm*, Gos. izd-vo MNR, Ulan-Bator 1967.

¹¹ V.V. Bocharov, "Politicheskaja antropologija i obwestvennaja praktika," *Zhurnal sociologii i social'noj antropologii*, 2 (1998), p. 134.

¹² Baabar, *From world power to Soviet satellite: History of Mongolia*, Tatarskoe knijnoe izdatelstvo, Kazan 1999, p. 462.

¹³ M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Nika-Centr, Kiev 1996, p. 130.

Soviet experts who had been coming to Mongolia, were mostly engineers, physicians and teachers. Mongolia turned out being involved in the system of Soviet GULAG, though in fact it hadn't had prisons in its history (before the revolution in 1921 corporal punishment and death penalty had been practiced).¹⁴

The ideology of international assistance to the fraternal country was the screen for two pragmatic objectives for Moscow government:

- 1) Under the conditions of the conflict with China, which began in the second half of the twentieth century, to form the buffer if the war would arise;
- 2) To improve the position of the Ulan Bator political regime because of the large scale economic support of the countries of the whole Soviet block and manpower from the USSR.

On the other hand such large scale support formed the feeling of comfort among the Soviet citizens. Moreover, at the level of everyday life they joked that Mongolia was the 16th republic of the USSR. Among the experts there was a phrase that Mongolia is not a foreign country. It was because of the fact that from 1921 through 1990 the entry to this country was without visa. The cultural revolution in Mongolia led to the broad expansion of Russian language and by the end of 1980s 90% of the population could speak it at various level¹⁵. Soviet schools and universities trained political elite of Mongolia. And such education, though it was free, considered as rather prestigious. In fact the whole body of governance elite was taught in the USSR and the education was conducted using the language of metropolis. As the principal manifestation of such policy became the lines from the Soviet poet, Mayakovsky's poem: "I'd like to learn Russian only for the reason that Lenin spoke it."¹⁶ To the end of 1980s the ideology of Soviet presence in this country completely lost its urgency on the background of discriminative everyday life reality, which didn't leave a chance to the other interpretation of social reality.

Signing "the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" in 1966 arose the beginning of entry the Soviet troops to the MPR, as well as it provided the coming of civil experts from the USSR and from the other countries of Comecon. In 1960–1980s the number of civil experts from the USSR in the Mongolian People's Republic estimated its maximum. Annually almost five thousand people were on their business trip and they had been

¹⁴ Baabar, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

¹⁵ A.V. Mihalev, "Russkij jazyk v politicheskom prostranstve postsocialisticheskoy Mongolii," *Politicheskaja jekspertiza* 2 (2010), pp. 198-212.

¹⁶ V. Majakovskij, *Stihotvorenija i pojemy*, Astrel' AST, Moscow 2007, p. 147.

prolonging their being in Mongolia, according to the data of 1985.¹⁷ Besides the civil experts half a million of Soviet soldiers served in this country during the whole period of 20 years (the MPR population was three million).¹⁸ All of them performed “the international mission of assistance to fraternal Mongolia in the affair of building the socialism.” Schools, kindergartens and museums were built in the country. Taking into consideration such a number of Soviet citizens, the necessity of providing the civil rituals “arouse.” The holidays of the 7th of November (Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution), the 9th of May (Victory Day), the 19th of May (Pioneers Day) were held in different places in the capital of Mongolia. The Victory Day was held in the Zhukov memorial, the Pioneers Day in the Lenin museum, the 7th of November in the museum of Revolution. On the whole such arrangements regulated and formed the style strategies which were named in the Soviet ideology as “Soviet mode of life.” The Embassy and the Society of Soviet citizens in Mongolia had been keeping the maintenance the norms and observance the moral image of Soviet citizens. Just these institutions were also responsible for ideological norm of everyday life of Soviet citizens in the MPR. Deviation from this norm was punished by “sending back to the Big land” — to the USSR.

The concept of “Big land” is the key category which is in all the materials, reminiscences of Soviet experts. “Big land” is the Motherland: the USSR. In such a way the space had been marked, and Mongolia took the place as a kind of some island aside of archipelago, where Soviet citizens lived in their own civilization. This category is characteristic not only for Mongolia, but for Soviet enclaves in the Arctic, Africa and in Afghanistan. This image is the category of commonplace and it is not directly related to official ideology. However this example vividly demonstrates the gap between theory and practice of the policy of “proletarian internationalism.”

2.

Dynamics of Soviet presence in Mongolia was directly connected with the institutions that determined the number of Soviet citizens in that country. First, guest workers were recruited to Mongolia by Soviet line ministries, for example, by Ministry of Construction. Second, the military, in contrast to civilians, were sent at a large scale according to the order, regardless of

¹⁷ V.C. Ganzhurov, *Rossija–Mongolija (na trudnom puti reform)*, Izd-vo BNC SO RAN, Ulan-Ude 1997, p. 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

their wishes. Third, volunteers went to work in the MPR as the members of the USSR public and youth organizations. Fourth, there was a system of exchange and training of people engaged in science and culture. Teachers, actors and scientists used it and came to work in Mongolia from the Soviet Union. And last but not least — there were invitations from the Mongolian side. At various times Mongolia itself needed workers for joint ventures, geologists and experts in the field of medicine.¹⁹

Beginning from 1950s, Chinese builders worked in Mongolia, they were building houses, bridges and highways. However, the deterioration of Soviet-Chinese relations in 1960s led to the fact that Mongolia refused from the Chinese labor force, replacing it by the Soviet one. Within that context, the dynamics of growth of Soviet workers' number in Mongolia is interesting. In 1960 there were 502 persons, in 1965 — 3,379 people, in the late 1980s — 50,000 people. In addition to it the contingent of 30,000 Soviet military was constantly in Mongolia. Since 1962 in Mongolia three Soviet companies were engaged in construction: SOT-1 SOT-2 and COT-3. The acronym SOT meant the Soviet Civil Construction Trust. SOT-1 was engaged in construction of industrial facilities in Darkhan, SOT-2 — in construction of residential buildings and cultural sites; SOT-3 — in construction in rural areas.²⁰ In addition, in 1959 the agreement between the USSR and the MPR was concluded on cooperation in geology and exploration of mineral resources in Mongolia. As a result of this agreement hundreds of Soviet geologists were sent to work in that country. They explored deposits of gold, uranium, coal, copper and oil.

To understand the degree of dependence of the Mongolian market from the labor resources of the USSR, statistics of the involvement of Soviet experts in the MPR is presented below. In fact, the decline of their number in the late 1980s demonstrates shift in economic relations between Mongolia and the USSR and the beginning of transformation of the former Eastern bloc. To begin with, the complete information about the total number of Soviet experts in Mongolia does not exist up to nowadays. L. Shinkarev gives data on the dynamics of growth of the number of Soviet experts in the country since 1961 — 990 people, in 1962 — 2,624 people in 1963 — 3,779 people.²¹ V.Ts. Ganzhurov gives data concerning the late 1980s.²²

¹⁹ B. Shirendyb, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁰ V.C. Ganzhurov, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²¹ L.I. Shinkarev, *Cedenbal i Filatova: Ljubov'. Vlast'. Tragedija*, Izdatel' Sapronov, Moskva-Irkutsk 2004, p. 322.

²² V.C. Ganzhurov, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

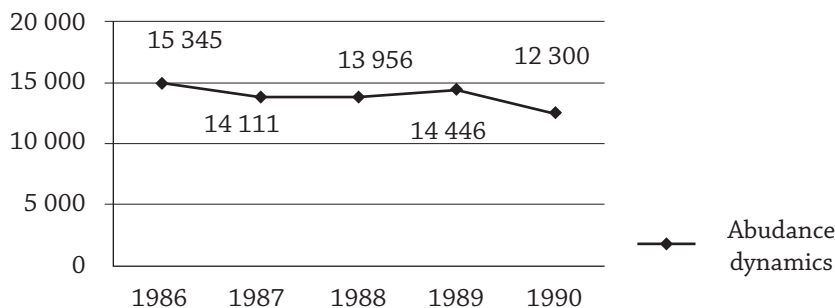


Figure 2.1. Dynamics of the number of Soviet experts in the MPR in 1980 (in thousands of people).

In general, all Soviet citizens in Mongolia (military, civil experts, builders, doctors, and descendants of the colonists of Tsarist Russia) were about 100,000 people, while the country's population was 2.2 million people.²³ Therefore, in the 1960s, a separate infrastructure was formed, aimed at conducting service to the Soviet citizens who worked in the MPR. It included shops, schools, hospitals and kindergartens. In addition, they had access to prestigious consumption of food, clothing, household appliances which were exported to Mongolia from the USSR and socialist-oriented countries. But only Soviet experts and Mongolian elite had the opportunity to buy these goods.

The Soviet schools, “kindergartens” and museums were built in the country. The system of special shops of prestigious consumption for Soviet experts was formed and they enjoyed the right of extraterritoriality. Under the conditions of total deficit in the MPR in 1970–1980-s it gave rise to anti-Soviet attitudes which followed by ethno-nationalist speeches. By the way, the formation of prestigious consumption among Soviet specialists in Mongolia, tied to the privilege system, led to a gap between everyday practice and ideology. As K. Kaplonski states, who conducted research in Mongolia in the early 1990s, the majority of Mongols characterized the Soviet presence as colonial.²⁴

The museum named after Zhukov was established in the capital of Mongolia in 1979 in order to conduct the ritual needs of the Soviet army. In political terms, it was a period when the number of Soviet troops in the

²³ E.I. Lishtovannyj, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²⁴ Ch. Kaplonski, *Truth, history and politics in Mongolia. The memory of heroes*, Routledge Curzon, London, New York 2004, p. 168.

country reached its maximum. Its reason was the aggravation of Chinese-Soviet relations, which began as far back as in 1960. Throughout the territory of Mongolia there were Soviet military camps and garrisons. Systematically joint exercises were conducted, and the Soviet press noted local conflicts at Mongolian-Chinese border.²⁵ The idea that “chicken is not a bird, Mongolia is not abroad” was widely spread among Soviet experts. A struggle against the Russian great-power chauvinism began, in which the Soviet experts who had manifested such ideas within 24 hours could be deported back to the Soviet Union.²⁶ By the 1970s, the Soviet mission in Mongolia had finally lost the features of the romance of building socialism, the country became a platform for career and access to material values. The romanticism and heroic image of staying in Mongolia also lost their features. The main task of the time became the preservation of the “Soviet way of life” among sovspesialists (Soviet experts) — the canon of behavior which included observance the rituals and reproduction the rhetoric of international mission.

The whole generation of Soviet experts’ children has been growing, Mongolia and the memories concerning it take in their lives prominent place. Many years later, they keep in touch with each other and they have got the classmates portal on the site with the address: <http://www.ulanbator.ru>. Shops “Voentorg” (shop only for military peoples), schools, houses of pioneers and other agencies, established specifically to meet the needs of Soviet experts, still take the important place in the memories of people who lived in Mongolia at the time. At that time “economic,” purely functional buildings, such as the modern Russian Center of Science and Culture and the Soviet clinics, now called the Russian Medical Center were added to the building of the Soviet, now Russian, trade mission previously constructed in neo-classical style, In the country during the period of Soviet domination the Chinese part of the town and “Tibetan block” disappeared, and such a unique phenomenon as “the Russian block” survived only thanks to the Soviet presence and domination of command and distribution system in Mongolia. At that time in Ulan Bator, in fact there were two “parallel realities.” One reality was actually Mongolian city, with people in European clothes and people in traditional Mongolian dress in its streets, the other reality was the territory of residence of Soviet experts — with checks, “Voentorg” and the supervisory authorities.

Since the late 1960s the production from most countries of the socialist camp was distributed to the MPR. This production supported Mongolian

²⁵ V.C. Ganzhurov, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁶ *Sovetsko-mongol'skie otnoshenija. Dokumenty i materialy 1921-1974gg.*, Mezhdunar. Otnoshenija, Vol. 1, Moscow 1975).

economy, and it also substantially supported Soviet experts. The volume of these supplies was so great that many of these products were not sold in the USSR but were freely sold in the shops in Ulaanbaatar. Therefore every year thousands of Soviet citizens came to this country from the USSR. That is why it was possible just in Mongolia to buy goods from Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Cuba, Poland and the Czech Republic. Under the conditions of the deficiency, characteristic to planned economy, that country seemed as some kind of “Eldorado,” “the land of plenty” and the area of great opportunities. All this help was needed for establishing a base in Mongolia, in case of war with China. This threat was real through the 1980s concerning the Chinese-Vietnamese war in 1979.

At that time, the Mongolian political elite got Soviet education and 90% of population in varying degrees, understood the Russian language. Through the period from 1922 up to 1990 more than 15 thousands of Mongolian citizens got higher education in the USSR. However Soviet experts after several years of working in a friendly country did not know anything in Mongolian but welcome *Sain bayna yy!* (Hello!) and a simple set of 5-10 phrases.²⁷ By the early 1980s, the quality of the visitors from the USSR in Mongolia decreased, which provoked criticism of hosts: “Fifteen years ago, the Soviet experts whom I worked with were much more friendly and industrious than those who come to us now.”²⁸ Under the conditions of the crisis of socialism in the 1980s the Soviet experts caused the greatest irritation among the local population. It was largely due to the position of the Soviet Union towards Mongolia, this position imitated the West’s attitude to the colonial East. As the Mongolian historian K. Demberel states: “The USSR was a kind of West to Mongolia, that is, Western civilization had been penetrating into Mongolia in the twentieth century with the USSR activity.” All this came along with the Marxist ideology and Soviet culture.²⁹

Through the entire period of Soviet presence in Mongolia the museums, devoted to Lenin, to the revolution, to G.K. Zhukov, the Soviet commander, were opened. The memorials to Stalin, to the Soviet military and intelligence officers who liberated Mongolia from the colonial oppression were opened too. In fact, the space of Mongolia was included in the vast Soviet empire, which marked its rule using one and the same characters from Berlin to Ulaan Baator. The infrastructure was formed for performing the Soviet rituals associated with the dominant ideology. The Mongolian infrastructure

²⁷ E.I. Lishtovannyj, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁹ K. Demberel, *Vlijanie mezhdunarodnoj sredy na razvitie Mongolii: sravnitel'nyj analiz v istoricheskom kontekste XX v.*, Ottisk, Irkutsk 2002,

was a continuation of the Soviet one, and the regime without granting visa between the USSR and the MPR, which existed at that time, was an indirect confirmation of that fact.³⁰ That is why among the former Soviet experts you can still hear their mention of “the great civilizing mission of the Soviet people”³¹ towards Mongolia and even to China.

3.

Scarcity of goods was one of characteristics of socialist economic system. It was formed through the notion of prestigious — non-prestigious consumption. It arose many paradoxes. Thus, for example, some goods available in the USSR (jewelry) were not prestigious because they were not in short supply. Cars, food, clothes of non-Soviet production were in the category of prestigious products. At the same time the large-scale deliveries of all types of goods to Mongolia from the countries of socialist bloc began. However, they were available only to the Mongolian political leaders and Soviet specialists. In Ulan Bator a network of special stores was opened where these goods could be bought. Their inaccessibility was secured by Soviet soldiers, who guarded these centers of trade preventing people without the USSR citizenship (the representatives of Russian diaspora in this country), and Mongols who did not have a rather high social status. In fact, the consumer price regulation was replaced by commanding and administrative one. We can confidently assert that Soviet shops in Mongolia enjoyed the right of extraterritoriality. At the same time consumer checks were put into circulation for Soviet citizens who worked abroad. These checks were called in Mongolian as *bichig*. The check allowed Soviet citizens to buy goods of prestigious consumption and high cost: cars, apartments and furniture when they came back to the USSR. These checks were the basis of motivation of Soviet experts to work in Mongolia³². For their sake the experts went to the country with poorly developed infrastructure of roads and hospitals, as well as with the hard conditions of mode of life. The threat of deprivation of check actually made senseless a long stay in Mongolia.

Under this system the informal economy of socialism began flourishing. Speculators outbid checks, commodities from special shops appeared on the black market. This segment was monopolized by representatives of the Russian diaspora in Mongolia. In fact, they did not have the access rights to

³⁰ V.C. Ganzhurov, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³¹ N. Ganin et al., *op. cit.*

³² E.I. Lishtovannyj, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

special shops, but they easily established contacts with their compatriots and bought their excess goods. Restriction of civil rights led to lowering of legal culture among the Russian community in the MPR. In the 1970–1980s many of them were engaged in the informal sector of economy, in profiteering and shady business (video shops *etc.*).³³ Such facts are recorded in the memoirs of Soviet military and civil experts who had used local Russians' mediation for sales of "surplus" from Voentorg and special shops. By the end of the 1980s the most discriminated group of the MPR population had taken an important place in the system of redistribution of prestigious consumer goods, though primarily it did not have access rights at them. On the black market goods from Soviet shops could be bought at higher prices, often three times higher than the original one. In fact, the black market existed at the expense of the Mongolian population who extremely needed goods under the conditions of total deficit. Since the 1970s along with speculation, prostitution which was focused on the citizens of the countries of socialist bloc began flourishing in Ulan Bator. By the end of the 1980s Ulan Bator had acquired all the features of the classical colonial city. They were vividly revealed in the segregation of the city. So through nowadays there is a "Russian block" in the capital of Mongolia. In the socialist era in the "Russian block" in fact there was something like an autonomous administration which "looked after" the Soviet citizens who lived in Ulan Bator. Interactions within the district the informants themselves divide into three types: 1) with Soviet citizens, 2) with local Russians, 3) with Mongols.

The informant, who in the 1980s in Mongolia worked as an engineer, said:

Well, how were we shadowed? Well, the Society of Soviet citizens: they summoned up those who was not in line with the moral image and strictly criticized them. Of course, we laughed at such execution, but at the same time we feared it. Since the deals with Mongols were not always good at all, in most cases the relations with them were based on the exchange of goods. At that time it was more important because money meant far less. The Soviet authorities did not approve such deeds.

In the 15th district of the city Soviet civil shops and "Voentorg" stores were concentrated and they supplied Soviet experts with a variety of goods. In these stores you could buy goods, which were shortage both in the USSR and in Mongolia: a variety of products of high quality, which was entirely distributed abroad, including "Soyuzplodoimport" products (elite canned food and beverages), household appliances and, of course, books. The richest assortment of goods in "Voentorg" shops actually enjoyed the right

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

of extraterritoriality: the citizens of Mongolia were simply not allowed to enter there, except the few lucky owners of special pass. Meanwhile, under the conditions of a total deficit, especially in the 1980s, perhaps the only opportunity for Mongols was buying in the “Soviet store” even not prestigious things, but the necessities such as milk for children. It increasingly polarized and hostilely set off against each other two different worlds of the Mongolian capital. The difference in salary was of the same kind (for example, interns of Academy of Science of the USSR could get a stipend equal to a salary of Mongolian professor),³⁴ it was actually the same in the area of consumption.

All these differences, taking into consideration that “the Russian block” had its own administration, presented it as a closed enclave, separated from the outer world and its problems. But at least some of its residents succeeded in finding various excuses of such closure. Hence the strict evaluation can be easily noticed, as in the narrative of the informant, the officer, presented below.

The officer served in Mongolia in the 1980s:

There were queues of Mongols near Voentorg. They wanted to break forth insolently or barter something. They did not want to understand that it was only for the Soviet military. We went there from perpetual Soviet shortage of goods. Later, when we were withdrawn from there, I realized how good it was there: no problem how to get food. That was quite right they were not allowed to enter it — the goods were not suffice to everybody. Of course, speculation of these commodities took place, but it was for money. But they sold those goods that they didn't need. I never sold anything, I had a family and the goods that I bought, were necessary for me.

“The Russian block” promoted stability of the life of Soviet citizens in Mongolia. It was symbolic that in the Soviet period “the Russian block” was officially called “Nairamdal” (Friendship) and when the communist regime fell it was renamed in Bayanzurh. In fact, the Russian-speaking enclave was a kind of major economic resource: the Soviet shops, hospitals and schools. At that time Erdenet was built — the city of Soviet miners. It was the second largest city, where Soviet citizens dominated in number. Special shops were also opened for them and they enjoyed the opportunity of prestigious consumption. The other center of a special supply from the Soviet Union was the town of geologists at the uranium deposit Mardai. The latter in Mongolia was legendary. The matter was that the shops of Soviet miners were provided with all kinds of food, clothes and it roused the indignation of the majority of population of the country. Thus, the essence of the Soviet presence concluded in a strong segregation of areas, especially in the area

³⁴ Ibid., p. 75

of consumption. Institutions “only for the citizens of the USSR” with the ideology of “big brother” shaped the design of Soviet colonialism.

The other aspect was the attitude of the local Russians to Mongolia as to the second homeland. One of the members of this community said: “The Russian, who was born there, would consider Mongolia as his homeland. The word ‘immigrant’ was not in use in the 16th republic of the Soviet Union. And there was the brotherly people.” The common history of the local Russians and Mongols actually opposed them against the Soviet experts who came from the Soviet Union and imposed their vision of the historical path of the MPR. Moreover, the policy of proletarian internationalism often contradicted with the everyday relations between citizens of the USSR and Mongols. The rejection of culture and traditions led to arousal of conflicts.

The Soviet style in the Russian enclave of Ulan Bator was traced even in the design of architecture. It formed a sense of comfort among Soviet specialists and advisers, and did not cause a need for adaptation. There was the big state emblem of the USSR on the building of the Soviet trade mission, and it was preserved through nowadays. On the building of the Marshal G.K. Zhukov Museum the scenes were depicted, they were not related to his activities in Mongolia but they were related to World War II. In combination with the standard five-storied houses, typical to the most cities in the USSR, everything, mentioned above, formed absolutely Soviet design space. It should be especially said about the military cities of the Soviet garrisons. They just duplicated small Soviet cities with complete infrastructure and management, in fact they had extra-territorial status. The ruins of these cities are still in the steppe like remains of ancient cities. For example, Choyr, a city with destroyed airfield, or an abandoned Soviet base in Saishand still remind about Soviet military presence. The author of this work many times has seen the ruins of small houses, built for Soviet officers in the area of Darkhan. In fact, these houses were abandoned and no one occupied them later. Gradually, Mongols carried away their glass, doors, roof, and as a result, after twenty years of Soviet military withdrawal, they became like ghosts in steppe.

In this section we present the biographical materials relating to the Soviet presence in Mongolia. The materials of this interview show how to read topographical text called “the Russian block in Ulan Bator.” This narrative is the rationale for their right to the city, right to the bloc. The memoirs of how they have performed not just only an international mission in Mongolia, but in their strong opinion they have built everything for themselves and for their families, is dominant. It is also remarkable that the Soviet experts have perceived their position in Mongolia as “we lived well”. Moreover, in the conversation the colonial discourse post factum is clearly

traced only after withdrawal from Mongolia. For many of the Soviet peoples Mongolia remained the only foreign country in their lives. It is their Nice, their Caribbean, their Canary Isles.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Soviet migrants in Mongolia is rather complex and varied. They are people from various parts of the USSR, with different educational level and from different social experience. However, as soon as labor migration from the USSR to Mongolia became widespread, the negative aspects of the interrelationship between Soviet citizens and Mongols arose at once. As Mongolian officials pointed out in the 1980s: “Ten years ago, the quality of the coming Soviet specialists was higher.”³⁵ Indeed, the events of winter 1989–1990, related to decline of socialism in the country were based on aversion to everything originally Soviet. At the same time the increasingly real and perceived attacks on Soviet citizens in Mongolia forced the Soviets to build metal fences around all the important sites in the city. Thus, in the early 1990s before the mass departure of Russian-speaking population from the country, physical boundaries were erected, which were merely a reflection of social boundaries. The Soviet builder A. Neverov who had been working at that time in Mongolia wrote about it:

We try to protect ourselves by metal fences from the population of the country in which we work, from the country, that receives so much aid from our people as no other one. I think that some incidents do not give us the right to do so. We can't provide protection to each of us, and nevertheless we should live in this country, with this people, go to its museums, theaters, shops and admire its nature. By the way, none of the countries whose representatives live and work here — they do not follow our example.³⁶

Commenting on this narrative, I would like to quote the Mongolian joke of late 1980s, which K.Kaplonski mentions in his book:

Three people, an American, a Russian and a Mongolian, were on a plane when it started having engine troubles. The pilot called back to the passengers and told them they would have to lighten the load by each getting rid of some baggage. The American took a last look at his suitcase, which was full of jeans, and threw it out of the plane. The Russian and the Mongolian were shocked. “It's okay,” the American explained to the other two. “In my country, we have plenty of jeans.” The Russian took his suitcase,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

which was full of vodka, and threw it off the plane. “Don’t worry,” he said, “there’s plenty of vodka in my country.” The Mongolian looked around, and then pushed the Russian out of the plane. Turning to the American, he said, “No problem. My country is full of Russians.”³⁷

In our opinion, a default of system of Soviet presence in the country was directly connected with a rigid gap between declared equality and brotherhood and the cruelest inequality in opportunities. In fact, Mongolia became a branch of the Soviet Union in which Soviet citizens were people of special status, “white people,” as experts spoke ironically about it. Thus, in their memoirs they don’t focus on negative aspects, describing them as an exception. At the same time, the Russian publicist Shinkarev L. writes:

Army drivers drove cars along steppes in all directions. Approaching the flock, in the sight of the astonished shepherd they caught sheep, tied them up and threw them into the truck’s body. It was possible to determine the location of Soviet military bases because of around the clock barbecue smells”. But the military themselves object to it because “they have personally bought the meat from Mongols.”³⁸

However, the fact remains — the looting in the Soviet army thrived. On the other hand just for this Army schools, houses, hospitals have been built, which then the Soviet Union have donated to Mongolia. But the fact of their existence testifies the special reality of life in the entire country, which has existed for a long time. This is the reality of Soviet colonialism, which still should be understood and analyzed.

The events of winter 1989–1990 marked the beginning of the process of “desovietization” the country. The credibility to Soviet advisers, Soviet experts and even to Soviet goods was swiftly lowered. By the beginning of 1992 almost all former Soviet citizens had left the country, the meaning of everything which was Soviet, reached zero. Weak Russia’s attempts to remind the new leadership of Mongolia the external debt raised irritating rhetoric.

The culmination of this process was the publication in the press, concerning information that some advisers, authorized by Moscow, were guilty in the death of D. Sukhe-Baator, the leader of the Mongolian People’s Revolution in 1921. Such unverified information often worked on the formation of the Soviet Union image as an enemy. At the same time the works of repressed Mongolian nationalists of the 1920s, kept in the special depositories, were widely published. For 70 years they were stigmatized as a model of reaction and chauvinism, but in the early 1990s they got new life. Country learnt that under the pressure of “big brother” “the policy of suppression and

³⁷ Ch. Kaplonski, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

³⁸ L.I. Shinkarev, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

concealment of information about the greatness of the country and the Mongolian nation” was conducted. In the logic of the nationalizing state the question of the return of the Soviet debt was raised. In 1990 the Russian-language newspaper “News of Mongolia” published a letter of J. Purev, a writer, to the USSR President M.S. Gorbachev. — “Is Mongolia in debt to the Soviet Union?” The main thesis of the article was that the USSR supplied goods to the MPR on obviously overestimated prices, while the Soviet army caused irretrievable damage to ecology of the country. Purev was supported by D. Molomzhamts, a Minister of Finance of Mongolia. In the newspaper “Unen” (“Truth”) he declared that the amount of debt had been artificially overestimated. When Mongolia returned \$ 250 million, MP L. Gundalay said that debt was paid off to the killers, who had repressed 30,000 Mongolian citizens, though he explained that his incrimination referred to Bolsheviks, but not to the people of modern Russia.³⁹

The trauma of unsuccessful experience became a prelude to more complex processes that unfolded after the USSR collapsed. The mass exodus of Russian population from the majority of republics of Central Asia became a confirmation of the final fall of ideology of “proletarian internationalism.” Moreover, today at the entire post-Soviet space researchers have been looking for a model that would’ve adequately explained all the processes concerning the Soviet project. Mongolia is not an exception in this case, because just its example could be very revealing to contemporary post-colonial theories. It also reveals the aspect associated with the study of obedience (subaltern studies). In this context, we primarily focus on the difference in consumption between dominant and subordinate groups. At the same time I’d like to say that even today the practices of that time haven’t been described yet, the only narrative that is at my disposal — the memoirs of Soviet experts. The latter narrative is rather dramatic, as it is associated with loss of status and material well-being, which has become an atonement for the honor to perform a “great internationalcivilizing mission.” The aspect of civilizable superiority through nowadays leaves its imprint on the interrelations between contemporary Russian missionaries and Mongols. The statements of the representatives of the Russian Orthodox church, having been rather thoroughly described by the author of this article, could be considered as the example of it. Today they have taken the burden of the Soviet people (the pseudo internationalist’s burden) on themselves, and it has much in common with the British narrative of sir Rudyard Kipling. Finishing this text, I’d like to quote A.S. Shkvarin, a Soviet diplomat, who worked in Mongolia in

³⁹ E.I. Lishtovannyj, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

1941: “Mongolia is a tremendous Soviet colony.”⁴⁰ I think that it is directly in common with the context of the novel “Kim” published in 1901.

Alexey V. Mikhalev

**Soviet Experts In Mongolia: Between International Mission
and Colonial Practices**

Abstract

In the work presented we have analyzed the sources of formation the Soviet International Mission in Mongolia. Its development was conditioned by the factors, originated in the second half of the XX-th century (Soviet-Chinese conflict in 1960 years). In 1966 after signing the Soviet-Mongolian treaty the Soviet troops were brought into Mongolia and the Soviet experts began arriving in it. They came to build civil and military objects, mine uranium and copper, work at schools and hospitals. Though the experts from all countries of Eastern block worked in Mongolia, but the majority of them were the citizens of the USSR. They lived in their specific world (community): reserved and hostile to the local people. They formed their own system of consumption of commodities and services, built their (military) cantonments which as a matter of fact were on extraterritorial rights. The article is based upon the published memoirs, interview, as well as data from the Internet forums dedicated to problems of the Soviet presence in Mongolia.

Keywords: Soviet experts in Mongolia, consumption of commodities, services, colonial practices.

⁴⁰ L.I. Shinkarev, *op. cit.*, p. 309.