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The History of Nation and Ethnicity in Mongolia

The term “Mongol” known in the world since at least XIII century, is rather ambiguous. In broad sense with the help of this term are defined representatives of the peoples, using the languages that belong to Mongolian language group. To these peoples inhabiting the territory of three states: People’s Republic of China, Russian Federation and Mongolia, is attributed possession of common identity based on historical and linguistic tradition, and also on set of cultural traits related to nomadic pastoral economy.¹ In another context we call “Mongols” residents of the state Mongolia (*Mongol Uls*). Sometimes ethnonym “Mongol” becomes synonymous with inhabiting the state ethnic majority—Khalkhas. For this reason, we can assert that the term we are interested in, in different contexts, is used for definition of the ethnic group, citizens of the state, or widely understood culture and language community, sometimes defined as super-(meta)ethnos. This “Mongolness” (in all three values) is used in discourses of ethnic activists, scholars and various government institutions.

Let me assume that I am dealing here with a number of discursive practices aimed at creating certain ethnic and national identities. In this paper I will focus primarily on the process of creating ethnicity and nationalism in Mongolia. Herewith I do not aspire to an exhaustive analysis

¹Of course, this is a big simplification, because many Kalmucks, Buriats and a significant part of Mongolian minorities in China do not use their native language any more. The same reservations are applied to nomadic pastoral economy. There are settled Mongols farming in China that have been there for a long time, such as Mongors, Dongxiang, Baoan. In Buriatia nomadic pastoral economy dominated first of all among Eastern Buriats, but now, in reduced form, it occupies a small part of the local economy. In Mongolia itself only about 1/3 of the population is engaged in cattle breeding. We can therefore say that we are dealing with stereotypes which are used to construct the identity of the groups.

of ethnic processes related to Mongolian groups in Russia and China, but I cannot entirely avoid these processes. Following Frederick Barth (1969) I would focus on ethnic boundaries based on social processes of inclusion into the group of certain people and communities and their exclusion from it. I would try to analyze how some social actors (such as state institutions, ethnic activists and also ordinary citizens of Mongolia) define what they have in common with some Mongolian groups, and what separates them from those. Mongolian-speaking groups from China and Russia in this perspective become “significant others,” from whose point of view stand out ethnic or national boundaries. These “others,” depending on discourse, are sometimes included and other times excluded from the Mongolian community, but they do not cease to be subjects. Elites (Buriat, Kalmuck, Bargut) create their own ethno-national discourses. In the next part of the text I will show an interaction of alternative group identities on the example of the Buriats, who live in Mongolia.²

As an ethnologist, I should be interested primarily in modernity understood as a period that started with the fall of communist regime in Russia and Mongolia.³ But since I consider ethnicity as a process I should take into account the historical background of social facts that I am interested in. This is all the more inevitable because the majority of identity constructions are legitimized by historical narratives and their “holy book” is the *Sacred Legend of the Mongols*. Let’s focus on scientific and public perceptions of Mongolian historical sources and on interpretation of pan-Mongolism. Historical context in this paper will appear in two narrative orders: first, in clarification of the genesis of today’s constructions of collective identities, and second, as an element of identity discourses. In the second case I will consider historical discourse as policy aimed to the past, i.e. as a specific form of cultural practice, serving to the creation of collective identities and legitimization of state power or groups alternative to the government. In this case I am not interested in so called “historical facts” but on functions created on their basis of views on the past. The above assumptions define further structure of the text. First, I will analyze the two most important ethno-national concepts in the history of Mongolia in the 20th century: pan-Mongol and socialist. I believe it is necessary, because these concepts still distinguish the boundaries of modern ethnic and nationalist projects.

²Since December 2005 until June 2006 due to the scholarship of the Ministry of Education (Poland) I had an opportunity to do a research among the Buriats living in Mongolia. As a result of this research I collected ethnographical material that is partly used in this article.

³Officially, i.e. according to the Constitution, Mongolia is on the „non-capitalist way of development.” Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it was a system created by the example of the Soviet Union.

Next, I will ascertain what role ethnogenetic discourse plays in the problem of ethnicity and nationalism. I will show attempts to place the beginning of nation in archeological cultures, and also practice of legitimization of emerging ethnic differentiation with the help of texts relating to the period of, such as *The Sacred Legend of the Mongols* or *Altan Tovch*. In the final part of the article I will represent the differences arising from simultaneous aspirations of the Mongolian state to the unity of the Mongolian world, and time for the construction of ethno-national nationalism.

Pan-Mongolism

In my opinion the first modern nationalist ideology was pan-Mongolism. This ideology, unusually lively in first decades of the 20th century was used in the construction of nationhood in Mongolia, in political projects of Ataman Semenov, Buriat intellectuals and in the Japanese project of colonization of Northern Asia. This idea also inspired various Mongolian activists from Inner Mongolia until the 50's of the 20th century. Still today it stays on the outskirts of ethno-political discourse but more often becomes a postulate of cultural partnership between Mongolian groups living in different countries.

Pan-Mongolism can surely be called a reaction to the changes caused by final demise of the old interethnic orders in Russian and Manchu empires. In the first decade of the 20th century the Buriat Steppe Dumas (native administration) were liquidated, and there was also an organized and massive resettlement of the peasants from European part of the Russian Empire to Transbaikalia (Atwood 2004: 66). The struggle for land rights exacerbated interethnic conflicts and caused political activity of the Buriats. The same political activity and desire to unite with Outer Mongolia was the reaction of the Tuvinians to the intensified Russian colonization in the first decades of the 20th century⁴ (Baabar 1999: 186-188).

In the same period the tottering Manchu power abolished restrictions related to the settlement of Mongolian territories by the Chinese (*Han*) population. The influx of Chinese agricultural colonists caused conflict related to land leasing. Chinese colonists did not fall under the jurisdiction of local Mongolian princes, because of what the last thought that it was the theft of their territories (Bulag 2000). Among Mongolian nomads was a widespread feeling of economic exploitation by Chinese trade companies. The Europe's idea of nationalism that talks about the right of nation for self-determination

⁴ At the beginning of the century Uriankhai *de jure* was a part of the Manchu empire, but it did not stop Russian colonists before building settlements, mines and sales areas.

and self-government brought to various Mongolian-speaking groups a language of emancipation, with the help of which they could fight against socioeconomic oppression. Mongolian-speaking groups tried to respond to threatening modernization with the help of the modernist language—nationalism⁵. Changes in the existing order of ethno-social relations, which was established by Manchu authorities, clearly characterize the example of Daur. Daur in the Qing Empire enjoyed certain privileges. Manchus did not consider them Mongols and called them “new Qing” that made them younger relatives of the ruling dynasty. However, after the decline of the Manchu dynasty the Daur began to emphasize their Mongolness. In early 20's they began to add the name “Mongol” to their ethnonym. In 1924, a Mongolian-Daurian national activist and one of the leaders of Mongolian communists, Merse, in his work “The Mongolian Issue” wrote about five main groups that make up the Mongolian nation.

- Khalkha-Mongols residing in Outer Mongolia,
- Öled-Mongols residing in Qinghai and Northern Tianshan,
- Daur-Mongols from Heilongjiang, Hulun-Buir and Bhutan,
- Buriat-Mongols inhabiting the Transbaikal territory and the Irkutsk province,
- Kalmuck-Mongols living on the Volga.

These groups, in the author's opinion, first of all were united by the common language, Buddhism and pastoral economy (Bulag 2002: 149). The Daur extensively took part in creating autonomy of Inner Mongolia, but in the 50's they were recognized by central government as a non-Mongolian group, and in spite of the Daur identity they came to be considered a separate group of the Tungus origin.

Being in Nantong in the summer of 2009 near Hailar, I noticed that local Daur define themselves as Mongols and their Tungus origin was strongly negated by them when given assumption about it. As I got familiar with local Daur I tried to find out what they think about their ethnic origins. I have been telling them “Daur are not Mongols, and their language has Manchu-Tungus roots.” Most of my interlocutors protested indignantly: “That's not true. We are Mongols!” Others indifferently concluded that nothing they know about that.

We have given an example of the Daur for normally the phenomenon of pan-Mongolism is considered in relation to the three groups: Khalkhas,

⁵ Acceptance of the language of this kind was possible due to European education. Many Buriat-Mongols and later Mongols from Inner Mongolia, Barga and Outer Mongolia graduated from Russian or Soviet schools and universities. The formation of the idea of pan-Mongolism was surely influenced by the idea of Pan-Turkism, which Buriats had a chance to face at the Kazan University.

Buriats and Barguts. But the pan-Mongolism ideology also influenced the other Mongolian groups. Certainly, the creation of nationalist discourse in a lack of statehood would be impossible without a common cultural base, historical consciousness and common sense of kinship. According to Mönh-Erdene Lhamsüren (2006: 61-61), terms that functioned at the beginning of the 20th century defining Mongols, such as: *Monggol obogtan, togatan, izagurtan, ugsagatan, ündüsüiten, jasu* indicate a primordial concept of community related to the conviction about common origin, idea of kinship, and common roots. This idea about common origin as well as participation in one cultural, religious and linguistic sphere was used in the first nationalist ideology—pan-Mongolism. Within this concept all Mongolian peoples have been recognized as one nation entitled to the unification of all Mongolian peoples within one state organism. It manifested in aspiration to unite Inner and Outer Mongolia and Barga, and also in promoting the migration of Mongolian groups to the territory of liberated Outer Mongolia. The Proclamation of People's Party of Mongolia of 1921 reads as follows:

Mongolian jazguurtan, struggling against an oppressive enemy-occupier—will declare our rights and power, praising our nationality [*jazguur ündes*], and will build the state of our real nationality. To increase the population of Mongolia it would be right to resettle Buriats, Torguts, Inner Mongols, Barguts and other Mongolian peoples to Mongolia, if they wish, and make them citizens, providing them with accommodation.

The purpose of unification of Mongolia by establishing links with numerous aimags of the Mongolian ugsaatan is an important task for our party. Until now Barga, Inner Mongolia, Uryanhay and other Mongols of our religion and nationality [*jas ündes*] have not had a possibility to unite (Lhamsüren 2006: 88).

As can be seen, Buriats, Torguts, Barguts and the inhabitants of Inner Mongolia were identified as *mongol ündesten*—people of the Mongolian nationality. So here we are dealing with ethno-cultural concept of a nation and with Gellner's definition (2006: 1), the statement about compliance of national and political boundaries. Buriats Tsyben Zhamsarano and Elbeg-Dorzh Rinchino played a special role in the pan-Mongolian movement of Mongolia. These two politicians, who got their higher education in Russia, also played an important role in the formation of the nationalist policy of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. It was Zhamsarano who was involved in the introduction of a new national-ethnic terminology into the state discourse that was mostly supported by the Bolshevik nationalist theory. The following Mongolian equivalents were defined for Russia: clan—*ovog*, tribe—*aimag*, nationality—*yastan*, nation—*ündesten* (Bulag 1998: 31).

In later years this terminology was further developed and used in the ethnic policy.

Zhamsarano also introduced the concept of civic nationality directly connected to participation in state reality to the Mongolian national-ethnic discourse. He identified the Mongols living in the framework of the Mongolian statehood as *monggol ündesten* (*mongol ündesten* in modern Mongolian), whereas he identified Mongols living outside the borders of the same statehood as *monggol obogtan* (*mongol ovogtan*)—Mongolian tribes, groups with the common roots and language; they could become a nation only by joining the Mongolian state. A nation, according to Zhamsarano, requires a functioning common language, origin, religion, traditions and, most importantly a common state (Lhamsüren 2006: 60).

In my opinion, it is quite a constructivist position that emphasizes the importance of state discourse practices in creating a nation—the potential of ethnographic reality can be realized by institutes of the independent Mongolian state. Although until the 30's of the 20th century there was a strong influence of terminological pluralism in the ethnic and national terminology the next generations of ethnologists borrowed a lot from the ideas and suggestions of this prominent Buriat-Mongol. A crisis of the pan-Mongolist movement in Mongolia and USSR came in the 30's of the 20th century. One of the most important reasons for such a turn of events was the policy of the imperialist Japan that was trying to utilize the idea of pan-Mongolism and pan-Buddhism for the effectiveness of its territorial expansion. Japan propagated the idea of unification of all Mongols under its aegis and the release of the Mongolian people from the oppression of the communists and Chinese. In response to this, the communist government in the USSR and later in MPR began to persecute the ideologists of pan-Mongolists as well as lamas often accusing them of spying for Japan.⁶ It caused massive purges and the division of the territory of the Buriat Autonomous Republic in the USSR. The Japanese-Mongolian-Soviet conflict and later the Soviet-Chinese confrontation turned into a long-term mutual distrust between the Mongols of Outer Mongolia and those of the Eastern part in Inner Mongolia (Morozova 1999).

In my view, the end of ideas of pan-Mongolism in the state discourses came in the 50's of the 20th century. During that period it was not only the Daur who stopped being Mongols. In 1958 Buriat-Mongols were renamed into the Buriats, and the same happened with the names of the Buriat-Mongolian autonomous territories in Eastern Siberia. In Inner Mongolia

⁶ This phenomenon can be considered part of the liquidation process of the nationally oriented on the elite of the USSR.

in 1957 attempts were taken to reform the old Mongolian writing system as it had been done in Outer Mongolia. They were also considering the introduction of Cyrillic. The new technical vocabulary was adopted not from the Chinese language (as is the case today), but from the terminology created in Outer Mongolia. However in 1958, prime-minister Zhou Enlai declared that the national minorities in China should use the Latin alphabet pinyin as the basis for the written language. At the same time a struggle was started with so-called “local Mongolian nationalism.” The partnership between MPR and PRC ended with the cooling of relations between the USSR and PRC. China entered upon the domestication of national minorities (Bulag 2003: 757-758).

Ethnos, Nation, Socialism

The defeat of pan-Mongolist ideas became the beginning of the enhancement of the separation process of individual Mongolian groups. This process can be clearly seen on the example of the Buriats. In 1937, the Buriat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was divided into three parts, which undoubtedly complicated the ethnic consolidation of Western and Eastern Buriats. Literarily the Buriat language also underwent some change. Originally created on the basis of the Songool dialect (with pronunciation close to the Khalkha norm), it was replaced by the Khori dialect, which is more difficult to understand for the rest of the Mongols. As was in Mongolia, writing was reformed in Buriatia: the Uighur-Mongolian script was abandoned in favor of the Latin alphabet, and later the Cyrillic alphabet. On the one hand, it simplified the struggle against illiteracy, when new systems better reflected modern phonetics of individual groups. On the other hand, younger generations of the Mongols in Mongolia and Soviet Union lost universal means of communication and were cut from the heritage of the Mongolian writing. In 1958, the name of the Buriat republic was also changed from Buriat-Mongolian into Buriat, and the ethnonym Buriat-Mongol was changed to Buriat. The ethno-genetic discourse in the Soviet ethnology emphasized the Turk and Tungus origin of many clans, what according to Bulag (1998: 32) was to emphasize the difference between Mongols and Buriats.

Such a policy has been associated with the effect of functioning of quasi-state autonomy creating a sense of national isolation among the Buriats living in Russia. This process, of course, was not a separate phenomenon. The same methods of ethnic engineering were used throughout the Soviet Union and in the countries that fell under the Soviet influence. According to V. Tishkov, the Soviet Union, through the creation of Soviet and Autonomous republics,

formed new national and ethnic formations from different linguistic and cultural-territorial communities. The author of “Requiem for ethnos” writes about:

... the Soviet ethnic engineering, including construction of “socialistic nations” on the basis of existing cultural, religious and local differences, through institutionalization (nationalization) of ethnicity and its sponsoring or repressions (Tishkov 2003: 146).

Today, most Buriats consider themselves a nation separate from the Mongols—often identified with the citizens of Mongolia, with Khalkha Mongols in particular. Such processes also occurred in the Mongolian People’s Republic. Following a “non-capitalist way of development” Mongolia adopted a number of regulations of the Soviet ethnology based on the Marxist-Leninist theory and related to this way’s evolutionary and historical understanding of ethnicity. The evolutionary conceptual process was supposed to lead to disintegration of clan and tribal groups and their transformation into *yastan*—nationality. Ethnography was a supportive science of history, which was supposed to register the materials and spiritual artifacts of disappearing social formations. In the 70’s of the 20th century, after the theory of ethnos by Y. Bromley, the term *ugsaatan* began to dominate in the Mongolian ethnological discourse, which corresponded to the word *ethnos*. Also a term of the ethnic group—*ugsaatny büleg*—was introduced. In the socialist society certain ethnoses were supposed to undergo uniformization and create a united nation—*ündesten*. The Cultural and linguistic standards of the nation were Khalkhas who formed the ethnic majority in Mongolia. Ethnic minorities defined as *yastan* were considered a relic of feudal society, the lowest stage of the ethnic process. According to this evolutionary unifying discourse smaller groups were assimilated by bigger ones creating large “socio-political” units and forming a socialist nation. The 1956 general census of Mongolia indicated 23 *yastan*, and only 10 of those were indicated in 1969 (Bulag 1998: 33-34). This idea, to my opinion, responded to the Soviet concept of the Soviet man who was supposed to replace national relics of the old society.

Ethnologists from other socialist countries also talked about ethnic unification. In the early 80’s of the XX century, Polish scholar Sławoj Szynkiewicz wrote that a selection of numerous ethnic groups showed a small linguistic and cultural difference, so it would be a mistake to consider them separate ethnic groups (Szynkiewicz 1984: 220-225). Representing the British anthropological school U. Bulag and K. Pegg defined this ethno-national strategy as a trial of Khalkhaization of smaller ethnic groups. Processes of such type of linguistic and cultural standardization do not

depart from many other nation-building projects led in the 19th and 20th centuries. An excellent example of it can be found in most of European states and nations. An extremely important consequence of this nation-building process was a compound of nationality (*ündesten*) with the state, with the fact of being a citizen, with the state symbolic and historical narration. This identity has survived the collapse of communist ideology and is effectively developing in the independent and democratic Mongolia. A perfect example here is young Buriats living in Ulanbaatar. Many of them do not consider themselves Buriats, but simply Mongols, without defining their *yastan*.

The Discourse of Ethnogenesis in the National Policy

The dispute concerning the ethnogenesis and the beginning of the Mongolian nation is, to my opinion, directly related to the discussion on the very definition of nation. Below I will give a few opinions functioning among scholars, national ideologists and also among a greater part of the society in Mongolia. I will also try to show in what way some discourses affect one another. Scientific reflection of the 20th century on the genesis of Mongols interests, first of all, Soviet and Mongolian scholars; it was under the long-term influence of the Soviet ethnographic school. The main characteristic of this school was the adoption of ethnos as the main object of research, concentration on the process of ethnogenesis and ethnic history, and also obvious influence of Morgan's evolutionism and the Marxist thought (Jasiewicz 1987: 301-304). According to Darima Voronoeva (2007: 16), concentration of research effort on the problems of ethnogenesis came from a primordial understanding of ethnos and nation.

The process of ethnogenesis was tried to be reconstructed with the help of an interdisciplinary approach using ethnographic, historical, archaeological and also linguistic sources. This method *implicite* allowed the identification of ethnic development beginning from Paleolithic peoples through the archaeological culture of plate graves, Donghu, Xianbi, Kidan peoples to modern Mongols. Limited access to written sources (originating mostly from the references in the chronicles of neighboring states) led to the focus on presumption of continuity of material culture, so-called cultural relics among the Mongols, because of what in the narration one could avoid issues related to the identity of the described groups. Characteristic features for the mentioned approach can be found in the ethno-historical monograph by L. Viktorova (1981) based on respectable materials of Mongolian, Soviet and European researchers. In the part "Main stages of the ethnic history" she wrote:

The Man of Mountain Paleolith knew about cave paintings associated with rituals ... The characteristic feature of painting is a contoured two-dimensional image on a flat surface. It became traditional in the fine arts of Mongolia before the 19th and 20th centuries. (Ibid.: 100)

These communities [talking about Neolithic communities that lived in the present Mongolia] cannot be considered only amorphous Paleolithic clans; there appeared tribes made up of several totem clans connected by marital relationships. Relics of such situations of Mongolian peoples persisted for many centuries. [Ibid.: 103]

We surely do not confirm that the author identified the Mongols with the societies of the Stone Age. Nevertheless the research questions formulated by her, the structure of work and some strategies of constructing arguments were aimed at convincing the reader in historical and cultural-genetic continuity of the development of nomadic peoples. Such an ethnogenetic way of historical description finds its use in the construction of national identity. What was taken in the scientific discourse as a hypothesis limited by number of reservations in identity discourse is subject to simplification. Mongols like to say that they are descendants of the Huns. Not only territorial community with that ancient people indicates it, but also the fact that in the Mongolian language *hün* means 'man.' Distancing the rudiments of ethnogenesis of the Mongols to the period of Huns without estimating the validity of this measure⁷ can be considered manifestation of aspiration to archaization, which is characteristic of ethnonations. Let me give here a short fragment from a Mongolian textbook.

It is clearly seen that the core of the Mongolian gene pool formed on the territory of the state Hun with their state center, the core of today's Mongols is inherited from the Huns who created the first state in Asia (Zanhüü, Altanceceg 1999: 31).

Identification of the Mongols with Huns makes an impression of immutability, timelessness of the nation, rudiments of which date back further than historical sources and which in its essence remains unchanged in addition to continuing development. Despite the fact that the roots of the ethnogenesis of Mongols should go back to the period about which only archaeologists can speak, the last realization of the national potential sleeping in Mongolian tribes is often Chinggis Khan. According to some researches, especially those of Mongolia, Mongolian-speaking peoples were

⁷The scientific evidence of this hypothesis was looked for mainly by Mongolian researchers, such as Sūhebaatar, Dorzhüren. Most Mongolian scholars are accustomed to consider Huns a Turkic people. (Viktorova 1981: 121-123) The importance of the excavations in the Hun Ivolga grotto near Ulan-Ude led to the fact that the Huns became a permanent element of the historical identity of the Buriats.

able to build common state-national identity already in the 13th century due to unification of the Mongols under the leadership of Chinggis Khan. It is evidenced by the terms that appeared in that period, such as *Mongol uls*, *Mongol irgen*, *Mongolchin* (Lhamsüren 2006: 57). Besides, the creation of the state, emergence of common ethnonym “Mongol,” and replacement of the clan-tribal social structure by the system of dividing to military *tümens* contributed, according to some historians, to the creation of national identity. This view coincides with today’s state ideology dominating in Mongolia since the 90’s of the past century. In the state discourse Chinggis Khan performs the function of a divine⁸ ancestor-founder who united the tribes into nation, gave them a common name, and created law (*Zhasa*, *Ih zasag*) and state (Bira 2001: 256-261).

When democratic Mongolia restored forbidden clan names from the socialist period, most of the citizens said that they belong to the clan Borjigin—the lineage of descendants of Genghis Khan. Continuity of Mongolian statehood was vividly emphasized in 2006 during the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Mongolian state in Mongolia. This is when in the center of Ulanbaatar on the Sühebaatar Square there was set up a huge monument of Chinggis Khan. Sitting on the throne (in front of the Parliament, in the place where used to be the mausoleum of Choibalsan) the great khan looks at the monument of Sühebaatar—a symbolic father of the socialist revolution in Mongolia. One can say that for today’s Mongolia Chinggis Khan became *axis mundi* of the national discourse. His figure threads the national symbolic, folklore, modern art, religion and many other spheres of social life. Being in an inhabited corner of Mongolia it is hard to find a place that does not have his image. He looks at us from tugrugs of almost all values, from vodka and beer bottles, from carpets hanging on the walls and from youth t-shirts. His name wear hotels, restaurants, tourist camps and even a rock band⁹. There is an impression that the Mongolian national discourse is entirely directed to the past and constantly turns back to its mythical beginning—to Chinggis Khan—who, with his divinity, lights up the whole nation. In order to demonstrate the presence of the myth I will bring a case registered by me during a field research held in 2006 in the Khentei aimag.

⁸ Shamanists and Mongolian Buddhists both give Chinggis Khan the status of deity. Buddhists consider him the emanation of Vajrapani and bring him offerings. At the same time his image became a “trade mark” of Mongolia used more often for marketing than as a sacred image.

⁹ In Warsaw a Mongolian woman who taught Mongolian language placed the following advertisement: “This is the language of Chinggis Khan, a great leader who brought his state to such sizes that no other state ever had: from Southern China to Russia and to Vienna.”

In 2004, in the district Binder, in the place, where according to tradition Temujin was chosen great Khan, local Buriat shamans performed rituals that were to ensure the welfare of all Mongolia. The first president of democratic Mongolia Bagabandi and other politicians took part in it. The spirit of Chinggis Khan himself was called, and numerous gifts were offered. Chinggis Khan speaking through a shaman thanked everybody for the offerings, especially for the horses that were of the same color as his favorite horse since his childhood. He assured the audience that he would protect his people, gave some practical advice to the gathered representatives of the government, and in the end confirmed the assumptions of historians about the place where the *hurultay* was held during which Temudzin was chosen the great Khan of all Mongols (interview 8.05.2006, Binder). In the abovementioned perspectives the Mongolian nation was formed in 1206 as a result of Chinggis Khan's aspirations to unite all Mongolian tribes. The issue of formation of Mongolian nation is considered in a different way by some researchers from the circle of Anglo-Saxon culture, such as Ch. Bowden, A. Nathanson and M. Rossabi. Leaning towards the radically constructivist perception of nation they are inclined to attribute the beginning of the Mongolian nation to the verge of 19th and 20th centuries.

The difference of views on the topic of the beginning of Mongolian nationalism on the example of interpretation of the rebellion of Chinggünjab was clearly presented by C. Kaplonski. Mongolian historians are used to interpreting this anti-Manchu rebellion of the 18th century as the manifestation of the national struggle for independence of Mongols. Suspicious-minded towards "naturalness" of a nation as a form of socio-political organization, Western historians emphasize that this period cannot yet be regarded in the sense of Mongolian nationalism. According to Ch. Bowden, attributing feudal societies with national consciousness is an ideological exertion, which using history and myth of ancient nation legitimizes the authorities. Nation here is understood as a relatively recent social project realized in the 20th century under the influence of ideology of nationalism that originated from Europe (Kaplonski 1993: 240-242). Kaplonski himself is inclined to more radical censorship of the beginning of the Mongolian nation, writing as follows:

I do not deny the existence of nationalist moods and aspirations among intellectual avant-garde of Mongolia at the beginning of the 20th century but it does not lead directly to the creation of national identity. I suppose that there were no attempts of creating national identity on a larger scale until later when they arose as a result of socialist activity. In other words, nationalist moods were conveyed through socialism and its

measures adopted in education, elimination of power of the Lamaist church and political legitimation (Kaplonski 1998: 36).

A less radical interpretation of the formation process of the Mongolian nation is represented by Polish ethnologist Sławoj Szyrkiewicz. Based on the Sacred Legend of Mongols he noted that during the period preceding the empire of Chinggis Khan Mongolian people did not have a common ethnic identity. The center of collective identity was clan, and higher levels of collective integration formed a group of allied clans and a tribe with culturally close tribes. Half of the ethnonyms of the abovementioned Mongolian chronicle of the 13th century are names of lineages related to the Borjigid clan from which originated the clan of Chinggis Khan. Along with the growing social distance in relation to this clan groups are described in a more general way by using the names of clans, tribes and in relation to non-Mongolian peoples: ethnic and state ones (Szyrkiewicz 1984: 223-224). According to a Polish researcher, we cannot look in this text for vivid boundaries that distinguish Mongols as ethnoses.

The transition of cultural boundary happens insensibly and is marked only by a type of onomastic, which prior to this moment referred only to kin groups and from this moment it relates more to political groups. It is typical that the boundary is blurred and some more distanced Mongolian groups which seem to be called by ethnonyms, more tribal than clan-like ones (for example Buriats, Oyrats). Hence we conclude that the cultural and linguistic unity was not an important criterion of identification of people's groups until the Middle Ages. ... Ethnos was never a clear structural category in the social organization of steppe-dwellers, and for this reason, perhaps it was not considered a generic term. And we, too, in our model of concentrated circles of Mongolian concept of the universe place the state after the tribe. (Ibid.: 224-225)

During the period of the Mongol Empire tribal communities were to lose their significance in favor of troops. This marked the beginning of new ethno-territorial groups which, based on military structure, were comprised of representatives of different clans. New units of the social organization of the Mongols based on military division after the decline of the Mongolian dynasty in China became military-territorial units. Having returned to their native steppes 40 Mongolian *tümens*¹⁰ created new feudal military-territorial units. Such units often took ethnonyms derived from a clan tradition. These units became the formation base of regional ethnographic groups. According

¹⁰A unit of military organization consists of 10 000 warriors. Together with the warriors this organization included military families, for this reason the actual number of such an organizational unit was several times greater.

to S. Szyrkiewicz, this phenomenon has its consequences in the current classification of the Mongols. Diversity of Mongolian groups considered within ethnic categories can, in the opinion of Szyrkiewicz, be attributed to regional differences (Szyrkiewicz 1984: 233).

You can make a list of tens of Mongolian peoples but, in my opinion, it would be a failed effort, for it would contain too many unnecessary items, which would get enlisted only because of having the ethnonym. This, however, cannot be a criterion of cultural differences because it often appeared, either by happy coincidence or also largely owing to a specific administrative or political feature. Referring to the period discussed by Kaplonski, Szyrkiewicz refutes views about the Mongols of that period as of a nation.

When, in the XVII century, Mongolian princes passed under protectorate of a new Manchu dynasty, which had only begun to govern in China, the official argument of this step was the fact that the Manchu ruler became the holder of the Chakhar khan's seal, the main symbol of khan's power of the Mongols. It was supposed to formally legitimize the transfer of khan's authority. Since then the ruler in Peking was called bogdokhan, like the heir of the all-Mongolia throne. The ethnic difference of the new regime was not taken under consideration. When, in 1911, Khalkha princes proclaimed independence of Mongolia, they had not used the argument of the loss of legitimate power of the khan's mandate, together with the decline of Manchu dynasty. The main motive ... was national oppression which at that time was expressed in the absence of an independent solution for their problems (Ibid.: 251-252).

So, we have at least two opposing theories of formation of the Mongolian nation. In the first one, nation, based on ethno-cultural community, appeared due to the institute of the state established by Chinggis Khan and continued as an idea until the XX century. In the second theory, this nationalist ideology has created a historical narration distributing historical sources in such a way that the nation is primordialised creating an illusion of timelessness. It resembles a costume film where actors dressed in costumes of past epochs tell a story about the past while solving the problems of the present. Not trying to figure out which approach is right, I will note, following Anthony D. Smith, that the identification of nation with the concept of a modern nation that appeared between the XVIII and XIX centuries is an ethnocentric and arbitrary measure. According to A. Smith, a modern nation (also called massive) is a specific modernist ideal type. This ideological movement is directed by a number of rules, such as acceptance of a nation as a basic unit of division of the world, recognition of a nation as the only source of political power, right of a nation for autonomy and self-determination, and also priority of an individual's obligations to a nation (Smith 2008: 30-34).

Certain elements of this definition lead me to confirm that the Mongolian nation (understood within the criteria of the modernist ideology of nationalism) was formed only at the beginning of the XX century. However we are not sure that it is the only acceptable definition of a nation. In the conclusion I can say that certain linguistic, cultural and political community appeared in the Mongolian steppe in the XIII century and could give rise to an overlocal identity of imaginary community, which I can consider a pre-modern nation.

Not developing this subject I would like to bring to notice possible consequences of adopting of one of the abovementioned concepts of a nation. If I agree that the Mongolian nation appeared in the XIII century, then the emergence of such ethno-national groups, such as Buriats and Kalmucks, can be considered as an effect of disintegration of the Mongolian nation resulting from Russian colonization and seizure of most of the Mongolian territories by Qing Empire. All Mongolian-speaking peoples would compose one nation¹¹ since the XIII century, which fell into separate ethnic groups as a result of the decline of the Mongolian Empire, and later created a separate national identity as a result of the ethno-national policy pursued by the USSR, PRC and MPR.¹²

Mongol to Mongol is not a Match—Discursive Schizophrenia

Inhabitants of the Mongolian state created a strong national identity largely based on ethnic culture, but excluded Mongolian-speaking groups living in PRC and RF. In the early 90's a native of Ordos U. Bulag got convinced by it. In his book devoted to Mongolian nationalism he describes the ambivalence, with which he was perceived in Mongolia. Being an Inner Mongol he felt excluded from the national community, to which, as he used to think, he had belonged (Bulag 1998: 1-11). In my opinion, the origin of this identity dissonance comes from the confrontation of the two different concepts of nation—civil nation and ethno-cultural nation. The ideology of assimilation was abandoned along with the democratization of the country, and pluralism began to dominate in the ethnic policy as in other spheres of public life,. Just

¹¹ Here I note that in the framework of so understood nation they often include Tuvinians—a Turkish-language group. According to B.Batbayar, in XIX century the Uriankhai people were considered Mongols, the example of this can be participation of Uriankhai troops in liberation of Mongolia from Chinese power (Baabar 1999: 186-188).

¹² Instructive here can be the discussion about the rudiments of the Buriat nation and the role which the Russian state and USSR played in its creation (see: Nimaev 2000, Chimitdorzhiev 2001).

as in many parts of the world of this period, Mongolia began the process of the revitalization of ethnicity: *yastan*, or *ugsaatan*, were no longer considered to be a relic, they turned into manifestation of wealth of the Mongolian people.

After the collapse of the hitherto dominating socialist ideology there arose a number of ethnic discourses in public space that often contradict each other. Ethnic leaders of Tuvinians and Buriats living in Mongolia expressed their wish to be recognized as national minorities as it was done with Kazakhs. It is interesting that almost all the Buyats from Hövsgöl, Dornod and Hentey aimags whom I met did not share the conviction about their national isolation. In contrast with the Buriats from Russia they identified themselves as *Buriat yastan*, *Mongol ündesten*. However, having in mind the fact that nationalisms create nations, we can assume that such situations can be changed in parallel with the renewal of relations between Buriats from Russia and Mongolia. Those from Mongolia fall under the influence of two opposing national-ethnic ideologies. According to one of them, they are a part of the Mongolian nation, according to another; they are a Buriat national diaspora living outside their homeland. Some scientists worry about the national terminology related to ethnic roots that in certain degree can exclude non-Mongolian minorities from the concept of a nation. An interesting suggestion for changes in terminology used in the state vocabulary was given by Gombosüren. In his opinion, the term *national (ündesnii)*—can be replaced by the term *ulsyn—state* (Gombosüren 2001, from: Lhamsüren 2006: 52-53). Hence the term *national* could “open up” for the groups of the Mongolian origin living outside the territory of the Mongolian state.

This interesting suggestion becomes an attempt to overcome certain schizophrenia in the Mongolian national discourse. Mongolia continuously supports the unity of the Mongolian world offering the idea of nation, created by Chinggis Khan. Mongolian groups residing in Russia and China in this context are often considered victims of colonization. They are constantly expected to confirm their Mongolness. During a field research carried out in 2006 in Ulanbaatar we noticed that Russian-speaking Buriats are often met with hostility of the capital’s residents. Many Mongols considered shameful the loss of their native language by Buriats, which is considered a dialect of the Mongolian language. Lack of knowledge of the (Buriat-)Mongolian language sometimes was taken by the Mongols as a declaration—“I am not a Mongol”—and considered within the categories of national betrayal. Mongols from Outer Mongolia also consider Mongols from Inner Mongolia as “defective” ones. Dissatisfaction is caused by occurrences in their speech borrowed from the Chinese language. The fact that they do not show hostility toward the Chinese, so widely spread in Mongolia, is taken as national

betrayal. Inner Mongols marry to the Chinese and stop being “pure-blooded Mongols” (*cever cusny Mongol*). Inner Mongols do not have cultural unity which was reached by the inhabitants of Outer Mongolia due to the state practices.

Representatives of Mongolian groups, who are not the citizens of Mongolia, are perceived ambivalently, between the categories “our” and “alien”. The state discourse creating the identity of an ethno-civil nation excludes them because they do not participate in the sphere of the state *sacrum*. Simultaneously, the same discourse includes them into the community, because this *sacrum* continuously refers to the heritage of Chinggis Khan. The abovementioned difficulties in inter-ethnic relations of Mongolian groups point to the need of discussion of general terminology, which would create a place for ethnic differentiation, build solidarity between groups, and at the same time would allow for expression of interests of individual groups.

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Zbigniew Szmyt

The History of Nation and Ethnicity in Mongolia

Abstract

This article deals with ethnic and national processes in Mongolia. It analyzes the panmongolian, socialist and post-socialist ethnic/national discourses, paying special attention to the practices of inclusion and exclusion of border groups in/from the category of the "nation." I analyze the influence of the ethnological discourse on the current ethnic policy in Mongolia, and consider the trials of national identity construction leading to the ambivalent perception of Inner Mongolians and Buryats as both: "us" and "strangers."

Key words: Mongols, Buryats, Mongolia, nationalism, ethnicity.