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Russia, China, and the Origins of the Mongolian People's Republic, 1911–1921: A Reappraisal

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FEW issues in the history of Chinese-Russian relations have exercised Western historians more fully, or have been less perfectly understood, than territorial disputes. Mongolia is a particularly striking example. While often the source of strain between the two countries since the seventeenth century, rivalry over this part of their common frontier was never played out with such intensity or with such staggering consequences as it was during the decade from 1911 to 1921. For over two hundred years Mongolia was a tributary of the Ch'ing dynasty and part of the Chinese state. With tsarist diplomatic support, the Mongols seceded in 1911 and formed an independent state; in 1921, with infinitely greater Soviet military support, they again declared independence and the formation of a revolutionary state, officially named in 1924 the Mongolian People's Republic.

Most Western historians have seen in these events the unfolding of a coherent Russian strategy aimed at either dominating or absorbing Mongolia.[1] A re-examination of this period seems timely, not only because the ideas which have prevailed for so long need to be tested in a critical and non-partisan way, but because a great deal of primary and secondary literature on this period in the Chinese, Mongolian, and Russian languages has become available since the 1960s. A careful study of this new scholarship, together with the valuable but relatively unused material published during the 1920s

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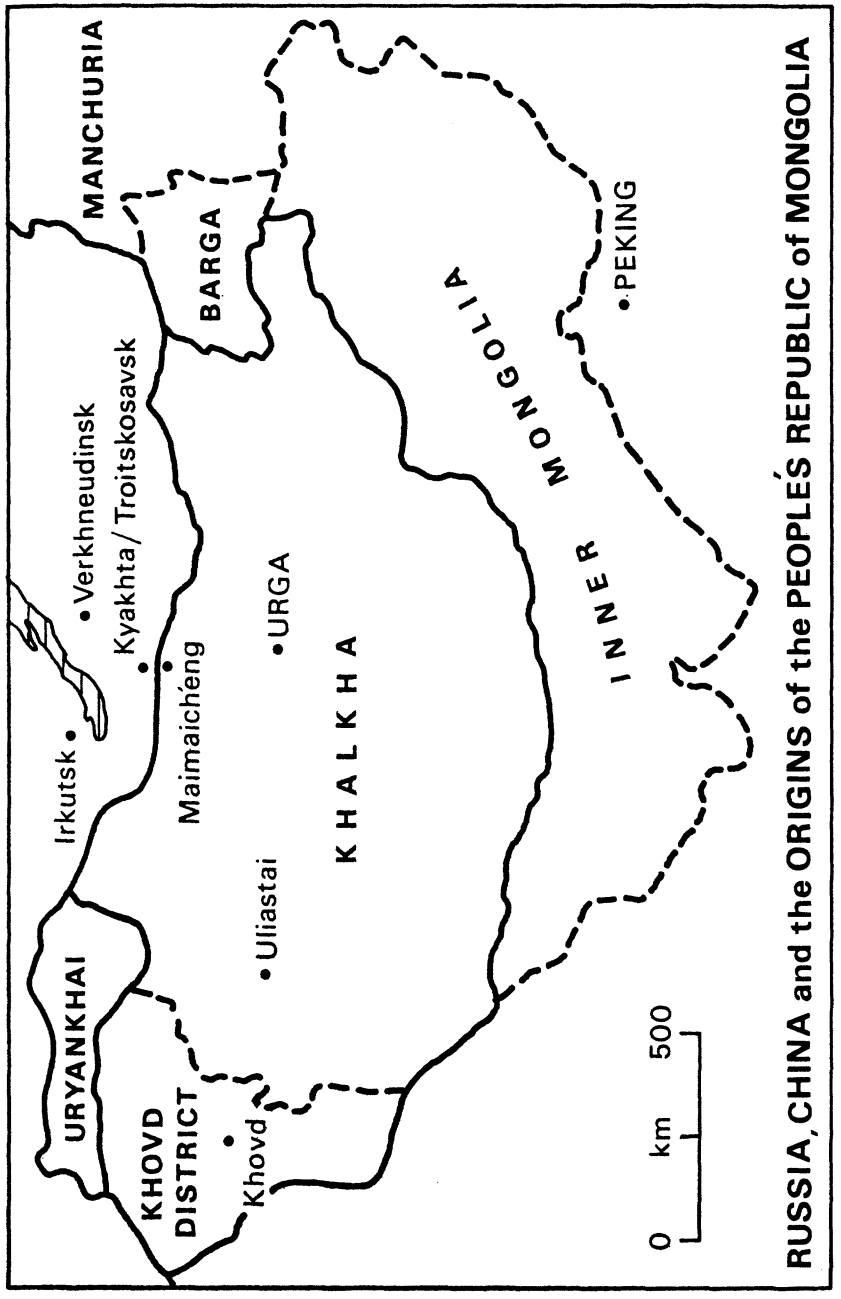
[1] Since a list of the books and articles subscribing, more or less, to this thesis would be virtually a bibliography of modern Mongolia and Sino-Soviet relations, I shall limit myself to some of the more recent and important: C. R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, New York, 1968; O. Edmund Clubb, *China & Russia: The 'Great Game'*, New York and London, 1971; Thomas T. Hammond, 'The Communist Takeover of Outer Mongolia: Model for Eastern Europe?', in Thomas T. Hammond, ed., *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers*, New Haven, 1974, pp. 107–44; Sow-theng Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917–1926*, Honolulu, 1976; George G. S. Murphy, *Soviet Mongolia*, Berkeley, 1966; Robert Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, Bloomington, 1964; Peter S. H. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911–1931*, Durham, N. C., 1959; Allen S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China, 1917–1924*, Stanford, 1966.

and early 1930s, uncovers a very different, more ambivalent, picture. While the tsarist government did indeed seek exclusive influence over Mongolia, it also wished to see the Mongols build a strong and prosperous state; it had considerably less success in both enterprises than has been believed. The young Soviet state, moreover, far from harbouring aggressive designs on Mongolia, was extremely reluctant to intervene in Mongolia. It was only in February-March 1921, after the Peking government had proven its incapacity to deal with the White Guard occupation of Mongolia, that the Soviets began actively to assist the Mongolian revolutionaries in Siberia. And finally, the sources show that the roots of the revolution must be discovered in Mongolia, not in Moscow, and in particular during the Bogd Khaan (Autonomous) Period from 1911 to 1919, when powerful political, intellectual and social changes occurred which laid the foundation of an indigenous revolutionary movement.

When the Outer Mongolians (Khalkhas) declared their independence in late 1911, two hundred and twenty years of Ch'ing colonial rule came to an abrupt end. The dynasty's policy of administrative and cultural autonomy for the Mongols, and concentrated attention on the careers of the banner and ecclesiastical (*shav'*) ruling princes were responsible perhaps above all for this remarkable record. But during the second half of the nineteenth century extortion by Ch'ing officials, new taxation, and the economically crippling effects of Chinese commerce began to stretch intolerably the loyalty of these princes. By 1911 there were few regions of Mongolia where signs of impoverishment were not present in abundance.[2] Frustration, fuelled by poverty, found release in scattered banner and urban riots, which if not exhibiting large political purposes, were nevertheless clear evidence of social unrest.

The Ch'ing government, however, was more apprehensive of the Russian presence on the northern frontier than of disaffection in Mongolia. After decades of indifference the dynasty was now alerted to the vulnerability of its northern frontier — poetically likened to China as the 'lips to the teeth' — and plans were formulated to link both Inner and Outer Mongolia more securely with the centre. This meant abandoning the principle of segregation which had been the keystone of Ch'ing policy towards the frontier: Mongolia

[2] Not only do Mongolian archival documents attest to this impoverishment, it is also corroborated by other sources — for example: James Gilmour, *Among the Mongols*, reprinted New York, 1970, p. 238; P. Piassetsky, *Russian Travellers in Mongolia and China*, London, 1884, vol. 1, p. 14; Philips M. Price, *Siberia*, London, 1914, p. 273; N. M. Przhevalsky, *Mongoliya i strana Tangutov*, reprinted Moscow, 1946, p. 50; A. M. Pozdneyev, *Mongolia and the Mongols*, Bloomington, 1971, vol. 1, p. 72; see also a September 1909 memorial from the Li-fan Pu in *Ta-ch'ing Hsuan-t'ung cheng-chi shih-lu*, reprinted Taipei, 1964, vol. 1, p. 350.



and Manchuria were opened to colonization; intermarriage between Manchus, Mongols and Chinese was permitted; and the sundry proscriptions against adopting the Chinese language, clothing and so forth were rescinded.[3] More importantly, Japan's stunning victories over China in 1895 and over Russia ten years later persuaded many Ch'ing statesmen that China's only hope of survival lay in comprehensive constitutional and administrative reforms, known as the New Administration (*Hsin cheng*).

The New Administration was also to be applied to Outer Mongolia. Various agencies, similar in purpose and design to those being set up in China, were organized in Urga (modern Ulan Bator) for the implementation of these reforms; barracks were constructed in Urga, intended (rumour had it) for a Chinese regiment soon to arrive; and Mongolian youths were to be called up for military service.[4] If in Peking these measures were seen as indispensable for the survival of China, the Mongols — who were expected to subsidize the expenses of the New Administration — interpreted them as a colossal threat to their own survival. Their desperation was poignantly echoed in a petition to the Ch'ing government: 'Among the many directives repeatedly issued there is not one which benefits the Mongols. Consequently, we all desire that we be allowed to live in accordance with our ancient ways.'[5] According to one Chinese source, the Mongols of Urga, no longer able to satisfy the exactions made upon them in the name of the New Administration, 'followed one another in flight, emptying the banners near the city'.[6]

In the early part of July 1911 eighteen influential nobles of Khalkha assembled secretly in the hills outside Urga and resolved that the Mongols could save themselves only by declaring independence; however, foreign assistance would be necessary. With the approval of the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu, the primate of Mongolian Buddhism (Lamaism), a delegation headed by Prince Khanddorj left immediately for St Petersburg.[7] But opinion among the Russians, who were totally unprepared for this mission, was

[3] A. Boloban, 'Kolonizatsionnyye problemy Kitaya v Manchzhurii i Mongolii' (*Vestnik Azii*, no. 3, January, 1910, pp. 101–2); Hsieh Pin, *Meng-ku wen-t'i*, Shanghai, 1935, pp. 42–43; Huang Fen-sheng, *Meng-Tsang hsin-chih*, Canton, 1938, vol. 1, p. 207; Robert H. G. Lee, *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History*, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, pp. 149–53.

[4] Ch'en Ch'ung-tsu, *Wai meng-ku chin-shih shih*, Shanghai, 1926, pien 2, p. 5; Hsieh Pin, op. cit., pp. 48–52; Lin Wei-kang, 'O-Meng chiao-she shih-mo', in Wu Hsiang-hsiang, ed., *Min-kuo ching-shih wen-pien* [1914], reprinted Taipei, 1962, p. 669.

[5] Sh. Natsagdorj, *Manjiin erkhsheeld baisan üyeiin Khalkhyn khurangui tüükh* (*1691–1911*), Ulan Bator, 1963, p. 261.

[6] Ch'en Ch'ung-tsu, op. cit., pien 1, p. 5.

[7] Ch'en Lu, *Chih-shih pi-chi*, Shanghai, 1919, p. 180; L. Dendev, *Mongolyn tovch tüükh*, Ulan Bator, 1934, p. 3; Sh. Sandag, *Mongolyn uls töriin gadaad khariltsaa* (*1850–1919*), Ulan Bator, 1968, vol. 1, pp. 244–45.

divided over whether to receive it or not. The debate which followed was important, for it identified the historic principles of Russian strategy in Mongolia that continued to operate well into the Soviet era. In the broad context of Russian foreign policy China was economically and politically important; Mongolia was not. Nevertheless, sharing a border with Russia seventeen hundred miles long, Mongolia's military importance was incalculable. The only solution, as the Petersburg government recognized in mid-August, was to convert Mongolia into a buffer state, enjoying full internal autonomy but officially still part of China.[8] For the next five years the tsarist government worked tirelessly to force the Chinese and Mongols to accept such an arrangement.

On 1 December the Mongols announced their independence and on 29 December the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu was publicly installed as the 'Holy Emperor' or Bogd Khaan. No more than a brief account of the period from 1912 to the opening of the Kyakhta Conference in late 1914 will be necessary, for the events of those years have been fully described elsewhere.[9] After the new Peking government had rejected a Russian proposal to 'mediate' between it and the Mongols, the tsarist government moved quickly to find a unilateral solution. In 1912 a secret convention was signed with Japan dividing their zones of influence by the Peking meridian: Outer Mongolia fell to Russia, and eastern Inner Mongolia to Japan; and later in the year an agreement was concluded with the Urga government, by which Russia promised to support Mongolian autonomy in return for extensive commercial privileges. The Russians, however, realizing that there could be no genuine settlement of the Mongolian question without Chinese participation, never took the 1912 agreement with the Mongols seriously. For them, it was simply a stick with which to prod the Peking government to the conference table. The tactic succeeded. In that same month, November 1912, talks began, but with the Chinese fighting a hopeless rear-guard action over every concession demanded by the Russians, the pace of negotiations was agonizingly sluggish.[10] In November 1913, a full year later, a declaration was issued (circumventing the need for ratification by the Chinese National Assembly), recognizing Mongolian autonomy and arranging for a tripartite conference to define Mongolia's position within the Chinese state.

[8] The records of this debate may be found in *Die Internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, Berlin, 1931–40, s. III, vol. 1 part 1 (hereafter *IBZI*).

[9] See Gerard M. Friters, *Outer Mongolia and Its International Position*, Baltimore, 1949, pp. 65–112.

[10] For a record of these discussions see *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov po mongol'skomu voprosu* (*23 avgusta 1912–2 noyabrya 1913 g.*), St Petersburg, 1914.

The Mongols, keenly disappointed by the failure of the 1912 agreement to provide for both full independence and a pan-Mongolian state (Outer and Inner Mongolia, Barga, and Uryankhai), refused to accept any other settlement. Between 1912 and 1914 they worked feverishly, but futilely, to realize these twin objectives: attempts were made to contact Western diplomatic representatives in St Petersburg and Peking; Khanddorj was sent again to St Petersburg; the Mongols and Tibetans signed a treaty recognizing one another's independence; a mission was sent to Japan with a proposal for establishing diplomatic relations (it did not advance beyond Harbin); the Mongolian Prime Minister, the Sain Noyon Khan, headed a new delegation to St Petersburg; and the Urga government dispatched a joint Outer and Inner Mongolian army into Inner Mongolia. But the Mongols were unable to breach the wall of diplomatic isolation erected by the Russians, with Chinese and Japanese help. By the second half of 1914 the Urga government appeared to have no alternative but to meet the Chinese and Russians at Kyakhta.

When the conference opened in September 1914 the chasm separating the Mongolian and Chinese purposes could not have seemed less bridgeable, nor the auguries for success less favourable. The determination of the Mongols to secure total independence and Pan-Mongolia was rivalled only by that of the Chinese to restore complete sovereignty over Mongolia. Predictably, the conference had a very rough passage, with questions relating to railway, telegraph and postal services, tariffs on Chinese commerce and Chinese colonization in Inner Mongolia generating long and angry debates. The conference did ultimately succeed, however, not only because the Russian position — Mongolian autonomy and Chinese suzerainty — was a compromise of sorts between the other two, but because the Russian delegation was able to negotiate from the greatest strength. The Peking government, then locked in confrontation with the Japanese over the 'Twenty-one Demands', could offer only feeble resistance at Kyakhta; and the Mongols, who were regarded by the other two delegations as slightly irrelevant, seem to have enjoyed very little influence at the conference.[11]

By the conclusion of the Tripartite Conference in June 1915 Russia's domination over Mongolia seemed complete. It was not. The Mongols did owe over five million roubles to the Russian government, but the loan was never repaid, even in part. The Mongols had agreed to form a brigade, trained and equipped by the Russians,

[11] The first half of Ch'en Lu's diary, *Chih-shih pi-chi*, is a detailed account of the conference. Pi Kuei-fang, *Wai-meng chiao-she shih-mo chi*, Shanghai, 1928; reprinted Taipei, 1968, and *IBZI*, vols 6 part 2 and 7 part 1 may also be profitably consulted.

but it languished in the face of Mongolian resentment and indifference.[12] The Mongols agreed to accept a Russian financial adviser wielding extensive economic powers, but his efforts to reform Mongolian finances were either sabotaged or ignored by the Mongols.[13] The Russians did win a concession for a Mongolian National Bank, but during its three-year existence from 1915 to 1918 it failed to issue a single banknote or extend a single loan to the Urga government.[14] Although given special railway and telegraph rights the Russians built neither. Finally, Russian merchants were never able to compete with the Chinese despite their commercial privileges.

The outbreak of the First World War, forcing the Russians to redirect their entire attention to the West and proportionately sapping the vigour of tsarist diplomacy in Asia, was one of the principal reasons for the Russian failure to exploit their new opportunities in Mongolia. Rumours of military reversals and the spiralling inflation of the rouble could only have undermined confidence in Russia among the Mongols. But it was the feelings of anger and betrayal at St Petersburg's failure to endorse full independence and Pan-Mongolia that really alienated them from the Russians.[15] The tide of tsarist influence in Mongolia, therefore, seemed to be ebbing irreversibly.

The Chinese were only too eager to follow in the wake of the Russian withdrawal. Once relative order had returned to China following the 1911 revolution, President Yuan Shih-k'ai tried, first by persuasion, then by intimidation, and finally by seduction, to induce the Outer Mongolians to return to the Chinese state. The Peking government understood, as its predecessor had, that the key to controlling Mongolia was winning the allegiance of the banner and ecclesiastical princes; the heart of its strategy, therefore, lay in reviving the former franchises and practices, including the tribute system, which had been the backbone of the relationship between the Mongols and the Ch'ing dynasty. Thus we have the anomaly of a republican government scrupulously adhering to imperial methods: the 'Rotation' (*Nien-pan*), or periodic tribute missions of Mongolian princes to Peking, was retained; hereditary and theocratic rule

[12] The Diplomatic Agent A. Miller reported in 1914 that the size of the brigade had not exceeded six hundred, let alone nineteen hundred as was originally planned, because of desertions, sickness, and lack of qualified recruits: *IBZI*, s. 1, vol. 2, no. 148, p. 149. According to the English officer Binsteed, Russian doctors had discovered that ninety per cent of the recruits were suffering from syphilis or rheumatism: 'Life in a Khalkha Steppe Monastery' (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. XXIII, 2, London, 1914, p. 864).

[13] Iwan J. Korostovetz, *Von Cinggis Khan zur Sowjetrepublik*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1926, p. 286.

[14] B. Shirendev, *Mongoliya na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov*, Ulan Bator, 1963, pp. 113, 116–17; A. Kallinikov, *Revolyutsionnaya Mongoliya*, Moscow, 1925, p. 58.

[15] See Korostovetz's remark, op. cit., p. 225.

was left intact; and the social structure, with its sharp vertical stratification of aristocrats, commoners, lamas, and serfs, was left undisturbed.[16]

The Peking government had been wrong to think that nothing was salvaged from the Tripartite Treaty: the right of appointing a High Commissioner to Urga (and Deputy High Commissioners to Uliastai, Khovd, and Kyakhta) was a bonus, unappreciated at the time, which the Chinese were later to parlay into substantial dividends. With an official presence in Mongolia they could work to achieve the objectives which had eluded them thus far. Success, however, hinged on the character of the appointee. The selection of Ch'en Lu, the deputy chief of the Chinese delegation at Kyakhta and a man who was to play an important role in Chinese foreign affairs until his assassination in the late 1930s, was a fortunate choice.[17] His firm but intelligent handling of the Bavuujav affair in late 1915 appears to have made a strong impression on the Mongols.[18]

Indeed, the Bavuujav affair, although of no particular importance in itself, does establish a clear watershed in relations between Mongolia and China. If before this time the rate of drift to China was ill-defined, detectable only by the assassinations and reshuffling of cabinet ministers in the Mongolian government, by early 1916 the direction and pace of this turn were unmistakable. The gift of camels and horses from the Bogd Khaan and his consort to Yuan Shih-k'ai resembled the 'Nine Whites' tribute of Ch'ing times too closely to have been coincidental; shortly afterwards the Urga government suddenly dropped its objections to the President of China investing (*ts'e-feng*) the Urga Khutukhtu as 'Bogd Khaan' and withdrew its poll and house tax on Chinese merchants.[19] Although Ch'en Lu deserves some credit for this dramatic revival of Chinese fortunes, disenchantment with the Russians and Russia's diminishing presence in Asia were for the Mongols more powerful incentives to seek accommodation with China. The nature and degree of that accommodation were significantly influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution in late 1917, when the Mongols became aware that the Russians — both Red and White Guard — although

[16] Huang Fen-sheng, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 463; Chang Hsing-t'ang, *Pien-chiang cheng-chi*, Taipei, 1962, pp. 161–64; Chou K'un-t'ien, *Pien-chiang cheng-ts'e*, Taipei, 1962, pp. 41–45.

[17] For a biography of Ch'en Lu see Howard L. Boorman, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, New York and London, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 211–13.

[18] Pursued by Chinese troops Bavuujav had escaped with a band of Inner Mongolians into Khalkha, and then into Manchuria. He was killed in 1916 after participating in an unsuccessful attempt to restore the Ch'ing dynasty. For more on the Bavuujav affair see Ch'en Lu, op. cit., pp. 72–104; *IBZI*, s. II, vols 7 part 2 to 8 part 2; *Bügd Nairamdakh Mongol Ard Ulsyn tüükh*, Ulan Bator, 1966–69, vol. 2, pp. 530–34.

[19] Ch'en Lu, op. cit., pp. 97, 104–5, 157.

diplomatically powerless were nevertheless militarily dangerous. They would have to turn to China, just as they had turned to Russia in the past.

After alarming rumours circulated throughout the country, especially in the west, of imminent Bolshevik invasion, the Mongols (with encouragement from the new Urga High Commissioner, Ch'en I) in the summer of 1918 reluctantly asked China for military assistance. Although the 'invasion' never materialized, a small unit of Chinese troops was nevertheless transferred to Urga. This was the first step towards increasing Chinese military forces in Mongolia and scrapping the entire Kyakhta settlement. But it was to be the White Guards, and not the Bolsheviks as the Chinese had supposed, who represented the greatest threat to Mongolia.

Early in 1919 Grigory Semyonov had assembled with Japanese help a group consisting mainly of Buryats and some Inner Mongolians for the formation of a Pan-Mongolian state; the Khalkhas, although invited to join this government, refused, possibly because of vanity but certainly because of suspicion of the Buryats. A Pan-Mongolia in which the Khalkhas played no part, however, was hardly credible, and in June the Urga government was threatened with invasion if it did not agree to join. The history of the Pan-Mongolian affair need not be related here (the movement collapsed in early September following an armed clash between its Buryat and Inner Mongolian members[20]); what is important is the reaction it provoked among the Khalkhas. First, new military assistance was required, or thought to be required, from China. And secondly, the Pan-Mongolist threat hardened the determination of the banner princes to save Mongolia, not merely from a Buryat invasion, but even more from Lamaist ecclesiasticism.

The new theocratic state over which the Bogd Khaan presided was a fascinating experiment in grafting modern governmental forms, taken primarily from China and to a lesser extent from Russia, on to the stalk of political traditions derived from the Ch'ing and earlier eras of Mongolian history. While the Bogd Khaan appropriated all the powers, symbolic and real, of past emperors of China, there were also efforts to adorn the new state with a modern facade: 29 December was declared independence day and a national holiday; a national flag was devised; the old Mongolian name for Urga was changed to 'Capital Monastery' (*Niislel khüree*),

[20] *Chung-O kuan-hsi shih-liao: Wai meng-ku (1917–1919)*, Taipei, 1959, appendix 1, p. 26 (hereafter *COKHSL: WMK*); I. I. Serebrennikov, *Velikiy otkhod*, Harbin, 1936, p. 62; G. Ye. Grum-Grzhimaylo, *Zapadnaya Mongoliya i Uryankhayskiy kray*, St Petersburg, 1914, Leningrad, 1926–30, vol. 2, p. 764; A. Kallinikov, *Natsional'no-revolyutsionnoye dvizheniye v Mongolii*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, p. 36.

as the Ministry of Internal Affairs explained in 1912, 'because of the custom to name the cities in which the emperors of the nations of the world reside as the "capital".'[21] Far more significant, however, were the formation of a Western-style government of five ministries, staffed mainly with banner princes and officials, the creation of a modern army in 1913, and the opening of a national parliament in 1914. These were important signs, it must also be stressed, that the intellectual insularity of the Mongols was breaking down. But in failing to reconcile the contradiction between theocracy and lay constitutionalism, the graft was ultimately rejected. Power resided in the hands of the Bogd Khaan and his entourage, especially his consort the Ekh Dagina, and the new institutions — the ministries and the parliament — which were expected to be the agencies of lay participation in government, were ineffectual. The Ch'ing government had carefully maintained a rough equilibrium between the powers of the church and those of the banner princes; but with the fall of the Ch'ing and the formation of a theocratic government, ecclesiastical politics in Mongolia were given unprecedented opportunities to develop.

The princes, as contemporary sources show, were plainly dissatisfied with the record of the Bogd Khaan government: they were denied an effective role in the government; popular opinion held the Khutukhtu's court, and the Ekh Dagina in particular, responsible for the mysterious deaths of several senior banner princes; and the government had failed to pay salaries to these princes. More galling, perhaps, was the tower of privilege and wealth in which the churchmen lived, built with profits squeezed out of the banners.[22] By 1919 the princes were resolved to be governed again by China, if that would mean the end of Lamaist theocracy.

In August 1919 Tserendorj, the Mongolian Foreign Minister, approached Ch'en I with a message from 'representatives of the four aimags', declaring the unanimous intention of the Khalkha nobility to abolish autonomy and restore the old Ch'ing system.[23] Negotiations began almost immediately, and by 1 October Ch'en was able to send to Peking a draft of sixty-three articles detailing a new autonomous arrangement for Mongolia. The Bogd Khaan's court, although initially accepting these articles, suddenly reversed

[21] Natsagdorj, op. cit., p. 268. See also Dendev, op. cit., pp. 26–27; Ts. Nasanbaljir, 'Jibzandamba Khutagtyn san', *Tüükhiin sudlal*, vol. 8, 22, Ulan Bator, p. 150.

[22] See Natsagdorj, op. cit., p. 273. Chinese sources independently confirm the evidence published by Mongolian historians regarding the tyranny of the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu's ecclesiastical administration (the Shav' Yamen) over the nobles and the discontent it engendered. See in particular a secret telegram to Peking in August 1919 in which the High Commissioner detailed the various grievances of the nobles: *COKHSL: WMK*, no. 252, pp. 460–61.

[23] Ibid., no. 253, pp. 461–62.

its decision and sent two delegations of lamas to Peking to lobby against it. The Peking government, however, was not prepared to indulge in recondite arguments about whether a consensus really existed for the abolition of autonomy, and on 28 October a slightly amended version was approved by the National Assembly. It remained only for the government to accept the Mongolian petition, and the abolition of autonomy was official. But at this very moment Hsu Shu-cheng, a very prominent member of the ruling Anfu Club, intervened and changed the course of Mongolian history.[24]

It has been suggested that Hsu's intervention resulted from the desire of the unpopular Anfu government to enhance its sagging reputation in China by recovering Mongolia, especially since new lama resistance made abolition increasingly doubtful;[25] or that Hsu hoped to seize the glory for himself.[26] There is a more probable explanation. The evidence, circumstantial but compelling, suggests that Hsu planned to transform Outer Mongolia into a warlord base that would rival Chang Tso-lin's in Manchuria. Hsu had served earlier in the Fengtien army and seen first-hand how Chang's military power derived directly from the wealth and geographical isolation of Manchuria. As early as April 1919 Hsu had submitted to the government an ambitious plan for the social and, in particular, the economic development of Mongolia, with a thinly veiled suggestion that he implement it.[27] In June Hsu was appointed North-west Frontier Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of North-west Frontier Defence, making him the senior civilian and military officer of Mongolia. The enactment of the sixty-three articles would have compelled Hsu, not simply to revise his plans for Mongolia, but to abandon them altogether.

Hsu arrived in Urga on 29 October accompanied by the Eighth Regiment of his Third Brigade. (Estimates of the number of Chinese troops in Mongolia for this period vary wildly, many even reaching ten thousand; my own research indicates that there could not have been more than three thousand.) Hsu immediately cabled seven objections (*ch'i pu-k'e*) to the sixty-three articles, pushed Ch'en I aside, and began direct talks with the court. He drew up a document defining eight economic and social objectives (increase in population, development of commerce, industry and agriculture, and exploitation of Mongolia's natural resources) and presented

[24] On Hsu Shu-cheng see Boorman, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 143–46.

[25] For example, *The China Yearbook: 1921–22*, p. 531; Li Yü-shu, *Wai meng-ku ch'e-chih wen-t'i*, Taipei, 1961, p. 233.

[26] For example, Peter S. H. Tang, op. cit., p. 362; Chang Chung-fu, *Chung-hua min-kuo wai-chiao shih* 2nd edn, Taipei, 1957, p. 352; Ch'en Ch'ung-tsu, op. cit., pien 3, p. 3.

[27] The text is in *COKHSL: WMK*, no. 108, pp. 380–84. According to one source, in April Hsu had demanded that the Peking cabinet place Mongolia, Kansu, Shensi, and Sinkiang under his jurisdiction: T'ao Chü-yin, *Tu-chün t'uan-chuan*, Shanghai, 1948, p. 223.

them for the Bogd Khaan's ratification. In the event of his refusal, Hsu threatened to deport the Bogd Khaan and four of his closest advisers to Peking; to underscore this point, Hsu placed troops around the palace of the Bogd and the yurt of his chief minister. The Bogd Khaan surrendered.[28] On 17 November Hsu Shu-cheng, in the presence of only a few Chinese and Mongolian officials, formally accepted the petition for the abolition of autonomy. Mongolia had moved full circle: from vassalage, to independence, to autonomy, and now back to becoming once more a full member of the Chinese state.

It was not Hsu's two-fisted tactics in pushing through the abolition of autonomy, as has been so often maintained by Chinese historians, that forced the Mongols to seek help from Soviet Russia. The Mongols were angry, of course, but it was the objectives of his strategy for Mongolia that terrified them: total transformation and sinification. Anyone who doubted the seriousness of the Frontier Commissioner's intentions had only to reflect on the speed with which he demobilized the Mongolian army and seized its arsenal, locked the doors of the ministries of the Bogd Khaan government, formed a new government of eight departments, and reorganized the system of banner administration.[29] Eight years earlier, when the Ch'ing had sought to implement in Mongolia a programme not very different from this, there had been revolution.

Resistance to Hsu Shu-cheng was sparked neither by the princes nor the lamas, but by Urga officialdom. Ambitious and talented commoners had always been able to find employment in the lower levels of the Ch'ing administration; the creation of a national bureaucracy, however, the first in the history of Outer Mongolia, offered opportunities for social advancement that in the past had been found only in the church. Many of these men were deeply influenced by the reformism of the Bogd Khaan years; they in particular suffered, financially and emotionally, when it ended. Of every stratum of Mongolian society it was this one which was the most deeply committed to independence and self-government and it was from this class that nearly the entire membership of the early Mongolian People's Party was drawn.

Between late 1919 and early 1920 two groups, known later as the Consular Hill and East Urga groups and composed largely of

[28] This account has been based on *COKHSL: WMK*, pp. 574–96; *Ulsyn tüükh*, vol. 3, p. 64; Owen Lattimore, *Nationalism and Revolution in Mongolia*, Leiden, 1955, p. 120; G. Navaannamjil, *Övgön bicheechiin ügüülel*, Ulan Bator, 1956, p. 225; Dendev, op. cit., p. 175; Ch'en Ch'ung-tsu, op. cit., pien 3, p. 4; D. Gongor and Ts. Dolgorsüren, eds, *D. Sükhbaataryn tukhai durdatgaluud*, Ulan Bator, 1965, p. 71.

[29] Chang Hsing-t'ang, op. cit., pp. 130, 155; Ch'en Ch'ung-tsu, op. cit., pien 3, pp. 12–13; *Ulsyn tüükh*, vol. 3, p. 65; L. Bat-Ochir and D. Dashjamts, *Damdiny Sukhe-Bator: Biografiya*, Moscow, 1971, p. 34.

lower- and middle-level bureaucrats, were formed in Urga. The first owed its existence to a highly educated thirty-five year-old lama, Dogsomyn Bodoo (1885–1922); he was by this time already a prominent journalist who, it appears, held political beliefs quite radical by the standards of those days. Bodoo gathered around himself several other men, including Kh. Choibalsan and D. Losol, and formed what seems to have been a study club. This was the only group in Urga to have had contact with the Russian revolutionary movement, although a close study of the sources indicates that the extent of the association was considerably less than what we have been led to believe in the secondary literature.[30]

In contrast to the Consular Hill group, the origin of which is at least vaguely understood, the formation of the East Urga group has always been shrouded in total darkness. Communist orthodoxy, of course, identifies D. Sükhbaatar as its founder; this is incorrect. Its beginnings may be traced to mid-November 1919, when several members of the lower chamber of the Mongolian parliament, including Danzan (an official in the Ministry of Finance) and D. Dogsom (an official in the Ministry of the Army), tried to enlist the support of the Russian Consul Orlov and the Bogd Khaan against Hsu Shu-cheng. It is clear, moreover, that Danzan and Dogsom were the principal figures in this group, and that Danzan and Bodoo were to lead the Mongolian People's Party after its formation in June 1920 (Sükhbaatar emerged as a major figure only in February–March 1921).[31] While there is some basis to justify the suspicion that the Consular Hill group envisaged social reform for Mongolia, the activities of the East Urga group reflected more fierce nationalism than political idealism: plans were devised to seize the Urga arsenal in preparation for armed revolt, to assassinate Hsu Shu-cheng, and to put Danzan and Sükhbaatar in contact with the Soviets in Kyakhta. None of these efforts succeeded.[32]

[30] The only account of the birth of the Consular Hill group is to be found in Kh. Choibalsan, D. Losol, and D. Demid, *Mongolyn ardyn ündesnii khuv'sgal ankh üüsej baiguulagdsan tovch tüükh*, Ulan Bator, 1934, vol. 1, pp. 54–56. The later Russian edition, *Kratkiy ocherk mongol'skoy narodnoy revolyutsii*, Moscow, 1952, was altered beyond recognition to comply with the demands of Stalinist historiography. It should be pointed out that my description of this and the following events, indeed of the Mongolian revolution generally, will often differ from that of the standard histories both in content and in emphasis. A fuller discussion of these problems must await the publication of my book by Indiana University Press.

[31] This account was taken primarily from an obscure but invaluable article by A. Kallinikov, 'U istokov mongol'skoy revolyutsii (Materialy k istorii revolyutsii 1921 g. i MNRP)' (*Khozyaystvo Mongolii*, pt. 1: no. 2 (9), March–April 1928, pp. 59–82) which was in turn based on memoir literature, apparently still unpublished. It should be added that Kallinikov himself did not detect the link between the parliamentary conspirators and the origin of the East Urga group.

[32] Shirendev, *Mongoliya*, pp. 195–96; Bat-Ochir, Dashjamts, op. cit., pp. 36–42; Choibalsan, Losol, Demid, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 82–83; L. Dügersüren and G. Tserendorj, eds, *Mongol ardyn juramt tsergiin durdatgaluud*, Ulan Bator, 1969, p. 276.

The Russian revolutionary administration in Urga received information about Bodoo's group and in March 1920 decided that I. Sorokovikov, who was being sent to Irkutsk on other business, should take a report about these Mongols with him to Russia. The Mongols, misinterpreting this interview as a signal of serious Soviet interest, exaggerated their accomplishments by claiming that their 'party' had been in existence for two years and had several thousand members.[33] The sources are silent on the activities of these two groups after Sorokovikov's departure, but his return in June with the message that the Soviet government would give 'assistance of all kinds' to the Mongolian 'workers' and with the suggestion that representatives of the 'party' come to Russia for consultations generated enthusiasm and a new purposefulness.[34] At a meeting of both groups five days later, on 25 June, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) — renamed in 1925 the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party — was formally organized, a 'Party Oath' was adopted, and two members, Danzan and Choibalsan, were chosen as delegates to Soviet Russia.

Although the Marxist-Leninist vocabulary (or jargon) was missing in this 'Party Oath', when it is examined against the history of hereditary rule in Mongolia, it was nonetheless an authentic revolutionary statement. Article one, which defined the objectives of the Party, is particularly instructive:

> The goals of the Outer Mongolian People's Party are: to liquidate the foreign enemy which is hostile to our religion and race; to restore lost rights; to promote sincerely state and religion; to preserve intact our race; to improve and reform sincerely the internal government; to give total attention to the interests of the poor and lowly masses; to preserve forever our internal rights; and to live, neither oppressing nor being oppressed.[35]

These Mongols may not have been Jacobins, but they had an intuition of a different political and social order. It is clear, nevertheless, that deliverance of Mongolia from the Chinese was the first priority; this continued to be the case throughout the revolution.

Danzan and Choibalsan arrived in Verkhneudinsk, the capital of the pro-Soviet Far Eastern Republic, in the first part of July and met Boris Shumyatsky, then acting head of the government. As Shumyatsky himself confessed, he knew of these Mongols only from

[33] The main source for this meeting is a semi-stenographic report in Choibalsan, Losol, Demid, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 90–98. See also B. Tseden, *Mongol-Zövlöltiin nairamdal ba MAKhN (1920–1940)*, Ulan Bator, 1967, pp. 16–27; Dügersüren, Tserendorj, op. cit., pp. 298–301; Gongor, Dolgorsüren, op. cit., p. 74.

[34] G. Kungurov and I. Sorokovikov, *Aratskaya revolyutsiya*, Irkutsk, 1957, p. 84; Choibalsan, Losol, Demid, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 98.

[35] Text may be found in Choibalsan, Losol, Demid, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 100–2.

a letter which had arrived from the Soviet Consul in Troitskosavsk (a suburb of Kyakhta) a few days earlier. For the next three weeks Shumyatsky dodged their demands for a speedy Soviet decision with exhortations of patience, while apparently waiting for instructions from Irkutsk. Finally, and perhaps at Shumyatsky's suggestion, a telegram was sent to the members of the MPP remaining in Urga with a coded message asking for a letter, stamped with the seal of the Bogd Khaan, which formally requested Soviet help against the Chinese. When the telegram reached Urga five more delegates — Bodoo, Sükhbaatar, Dogsom, Losol, and Chagdarjav — were selected to go to Russia. The letter was obtained from the Khutukhtu's court, although with some difficulty, and by 10 August all the seven Khalkhas were reunited in Verkhneudinsk. They were then told by Shumyatsky that he had not the authority to take a decision on their request; they must proceed to Irkutsk.[36]

Almost immediately upon arriving in Irkutsk the Khalkhas were ushered into the office of I. Gapon, chief of the newly formed Section of the Eastern Peoples of the Siberian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (later reorganized as the Far Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern), and explained their requirements: military instructors, ten thousand rifles, cannon, machine guns, and a large amount of money. Gapon advised them to draft a new letter, signed only in the name of their party, specifying their objectives and requests. A few days later the seven were again summoned and told that they must go to Omsk — seat of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee, the chief civilian and military administrative organ of Siberia — where their petition would be considered.[37]

The Khalkhas then hurriedly divided themselves into three groups: Bodoo and Dogsom were directed to return to Urga, where they were to build up the membership of the party and form an army (this indicates that Urga, not Kyakhta, was to be the centre of the revolution); Danzan, Losol, and Chagdarjav were to leave for Omsk; Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan were to remain in Irkutsk, where they would serve as a communications link between the other two groups (the fact that this responsibility was the least important reflected the relative youth and inexperience of the two men). An appeal was addressed to the Section of the Eastern Peoples outlining the future political programme of the party — retain the Bogd Khaan as a limited monarch, deprive the hereditary princes of their power and form a democratic government — and concluding with a request for immediate assistance.[38] Before any progress could

[36] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 172–73.
[37] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 174–95.
[38] For text of the appeal see ibid., vol. 1, pp. 187–93.

be made, however, a White Guard invasion radically altered the military and political situation of the country.

In October 1920 Baron Roman Fyodorovich von Ungern-Sternberg entered Mongolia from the east with about one thousand men and from 26 October to 7 November laid siege to the Chinese garrison at Urga. Although heavy casualties forced him to withdraw, he struck again in late January after replenishing his losses. This time he was more successful. By 3–4 February both Chinese soldiers and civilians were fleeing the city in panic, savagely pursued by Ungern's troops, especially the Mongols. Hundreds of Chinese died that month. With the fall of Urga, the Chinese administrations and garrisons of Khovd and Uliastai departed quickly for Sinkiang. The Bogd Khaan was returned once again to his 'Bejewelled Throne', but it was now Ungern who ruled.

The consequences of Ungern's presence in Mongolia and his capture of Urga were felt immediately by the Mongolian revolutionaries. Bodoo and Dogsom, arriving in Urga around early December after the first assault, found the city under martial law and many MPP members, who were suspected by the Chinese of having invited the White Guards into Mongolia, either arrested or in hiding. As it was too dangerous for either man to remain in the city, Bodoo escaped eastwards (he was intercepted by Ungern's troops and forced, according to his own testimony, to join him); Dogsom found refuge in Darigangga (south-east Mongolia).

In Irkutsk Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan had grown despondent after two months of isolation and relative inactivity.[39] When they learned, probably on 31 October or 1 November, that Urga was under attack, they immediately drafted a second appeal to the Soviet government and the Comintern:

> Because we Mongols have already come to the Soviet government with a request for assistance and protection, we beg therefore that troops be sent immediately into our Mongolia to liquidate the soldiers of Semyonov and to free [it] from Chinese hands. Will you please have mercy on the suffering of our people and help.

The letter went on rashly to promise that, if Russia sent troops, Mongolian forces, for whom weapons were requested, would be assembled to help them.[40] An urgent telegram was sent to Danzan in Moscow asking him to speed up negotiations with the Soviets.

The Soviets, after weeks of uncertainty, were already very close to reaching a decision. After several meetings with the authorities

[39] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 230–35.
[40] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 239–41.

in Omsk, the Mongols were told, as they had been in Verkhneudinsk and Irkutsk, that the final ruling on such an important request must be made in Moscow. The Mongols departed for the Russian capital, arriving no earlier than mid-September and probably no later than early October. According to the testimony of Danzan and Chagdarjav themselves, for over a month they met Soviet and Comintern officials 'repeatedly', but inconclusively. It was only on or about 10 November that they were hurriedly summoned to a meeting with representatives of the Comintern and the Russian Communist Party and told that the Soviet government had decided to supply them with all the guns they required; the Mongols were advised to return quickly to the border, where they could enlarge the membership of the party beyond its present 'five hundred' and raise an army.[41]

Why had the Soviets, after lingering for a month or more, suddenly agreed to help? The answer must be found several hundred miles away, in Mongolia, where Ungern had besieged Urga from late October to 7 November. The overwhelming bulk of Soviet forces was still concentrated on the Western Front after the recent Polish campaign, and in the Trans-Baikal region Siberian partisans were occupied with White Guards, especially Semyonov. Had Ungern succeeded in establishing his control over Mongolia, the consequences for the security of all Siberia were incalculable. There was no choice but to act decisively and quickly: the Fifth Red Army was ordered to cross the Mongolian border and destroy Ungern;[42] and on 11 November — at almost the very moment when the Soviets agreed to help the Mongols — a note was sent to the Peking government explaining that Soviet troops had been ordered into Mongolia.[43]

Why, however, after the Urga garrison had repulsed Ungern and appeared once again in control, did the Soviet government on 28 November announce the withdrawal of this order?[44] The short answer is that the Soviets had compelling economic and military reasons for allowing China itself to deal with Ungern. As late as spring 1921 the army of the Far Eastern Republic was still pitifully exhausted. The situation was little better west of Lake Baikal: only the Fifth Red Army was left on the Eastern Front, and already

[41] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 242, 244–48.
[42] *Sovetsko-mongol'skiye otnosheniya, 1921–1974: Dokumenty i materialy*, Moscow, 1975, vol. 1, p. 464.
[43] Xenia J. Eudin and Robert C. North, *Soviet Russia and the Far East, 1920–1927*, Stanford, 1957, pp. 100–1.
[44] Text in *Dokumenty vneshney politiki SSSR*, Moscow, 1957, vol. 3, no. 192, pp. 55–56.

by late 1920 many of its more experienced units had been either demobilized, or sent west to fight in Poland, or assigned to the labour front, where they were needed to help repair the badly damaged Siberian economy.[45]

There were other, more complex, restraints. Defeat by the Poles, failure of earlier hopes for revolution in Europe, and the urgency of economic reconstruction after six years of war and revolution imposed a certain pragmatism on the Soviet leaders. The accent was now on recovering sovereignty over Russia's pre-1917 borders and ensuring the survival of the Soviet state. It followed that the Soviet government must seek, at best sympathy, at worst neutrality, from the governments of every country bordering Russia. China, of course, as the largest nation in Asia sharing the longest border with Russia, was particularly important; there were also special problems which required discussion with Peking. Mongolia, by contrast, was unimportant indeed. As his collected works show, Lenin had hardly given any attention at all to this country, nor had it excited interest among other Soviet or Comintern writers before 1921. Proletarian revolution in Mongolia, as one speaker in 1922 declared before the Congress of the Toilers of the Far East, was unimaginable.[46] Even in the early years, when hopes for world revolution burned hot in Moscow, Mongolia did not figure in the Russian strategy for revolution in Asia, as the Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated to a secretary of the Chinese Legation in Petrograd early in 1918:

> The Mongolian rustics are ignorant and closely resemble [the people of] the ancient autocratic state [of Ghengis Khan]. Naturally, in this century they are incapable of being independent and governing themselves. The best plan would be for the people of the Republic of China to civilize and educate them, and after the autocratic [system of the Bogd Khaan] is overthrown, to allow them again to become completely independent.[47]

If my argument — that the Soviets were infinitely more exercised by the White Guard military threat in Mongolia than by the prospect of installing a puppet regime — is correct, we should expect to see a swift decline of Soviet interest in the Mongolian revolutionaries once the Chinese had crushed Ungern in November.

[45] For descriptions see Jan M. Meijer, ed., *The Trotsky Papers 1917–1922*, The Hague, 1971, vol. 2, no. 669, pp. 401–3; I. I. Zyryanov, *et al.*, eds, *Pogranichnyye voyska SSSR, 1918–1928*, Moscow, 1973, no. 552, pp. 783–84; A. N. Kislov, *Razgrom Ungerna*, Moscow, 1964, pp. 23–26.

[46] Eudin, North, op. cit., pp. 228–29.

[47] *Chung-O kuan-hsi shih-liao: O cheng-pien yü i-pan chiao-she (1917–1919)*, Taipei, 1960, vol. 1, no. 126, p. 270.

This is precisely what happened. After returning to Irkutsk, Danzan frequently met Soviet and Comintern officials to hammer out the particulars of Russia's promised assistance. No decision was taken.[48] Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan, after arriving in Troitskosavsk in late November, did not immediately set about raising a partisan army in the northern banners as the standard accounts would have it. On the contrary, it appears that they languished in that Siberian village for two months, confused and frustrated.[49] One cannot detect any party activity at all until the second half of January, when Losol and Chagdarjav arrived in Troitskosavsk from Irkutsk, apparently with instructions to prepare a party congress at Gegeetiin datsan in Soviet Buryatiya for the coming spring.[50]

With the news of Ungern's seizure of Urga, however, the picture changed entirely. On 8 February orders were issued by the Command Staff of the Fifth Red Army and the Eastern Siberian Military District to reinforce Troitskosavsk immediately;[51] on 10 February at a plenary session of the Far Eastern Secretariat (Comintern) in Irkutsk, it was formally resolved to aid the 'struggle of the Mongolian people for liberation and independence with money, guns, and military instructors'.[52] Sükhbaatar and others immediately left Gegeetiin datsan for Troitskosavsk, where on 16 February it was decided to recruit a partisan army — Sükhbaatar, the obvious choice because of his military background, was appointed commander of this non-existent force — to expel the Chinese, and to occupy the northern region.[53] Three days later a small detachment of around fifteen Mongols, commanded by an ex-army colleague of Sükhbaatar, headed for the banners just to the east of Kyakhta, where for less than a week it clashed with Chinese detachments often three times its size. Around 24 February, however, Sükhbaatar had to transfer this unit — the nucleus of the future partisan army — to the western side of Kyakhta: Chinese pressure had become too intense, but more importantly the Far Eastern Republic, which

[48] Choibalsan, Losol, Demid, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 281. See the memoirs of G. G. Danchinov, who participated in these discussions, in R. F. Tugutov, *Oni vstrechalis' s Sukhe-Batorom*, Ulan-Ude, 1967, pp. 18–19.

[49] Sükhbaatar was not issued a border pass until 20 January, 1921. See B. Shirendev, ed., *D. Sükhbaatar: Barimt bichgiin tüüver (1915–1925)*, Ulan Bator, 1971, no. 78, p. 114. A letter written while Sükhbaatar was in Troitskosavsk strongly implies, moreover, that Urga and not Troitskosavsk had been his original destination. See G. Pürev and Ts. Sonomdagva, eds, *D. Sükhbaataryn üil am'draltai kholbogdokh barimt materialyn emkhetgel*, Ulan Bator, 1964, no. 18, pp. 37–38.

[50] Dügersüren, Tserendorj, op. cit., p. 61.

[51] *Sovetsko-mongol'skiye otnosheniya*, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 2.

[52] *Istoricheskiy opyt bratskogo sodruzhestva KPSS i MNRP v bor'be za sotsializm*, Moscow, 1971, p. 217.

[53] See the memoirs of L. Demberel in Dügersüren, Tserendorj, op. cit., pp. 248–49, and in Gongor, Dolgorsüren, op. cit., pp. 84–86.

was still seeking diplomatic relations with China, objected to the partisans using its territory as a refuge from Chinese pursuit.[54]

It was not until March, however, that these young Mongols seriously addressed themselves to the more pressing political and military needs of their revolution. By the end of that month they were no longer a band of quixotic dissidents concealed in a remote Siberian village, but were firmly established as serious contenders for power. Since its formation, the party had been a comparatively amorphous association, totally ill-adapted to the needs of national revolution; it required better organizational and ideological definition. A party conference, originally scheduled for later in the year at Gegeetiin datsan, was moved forward and met in Kyakhta from 1 to 3 March.[55] This conference — subsequently regarded as the first congress of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party — approved the organization of an army command staff (headed by Sükhbaatar and including two Russian advisers), appointed Danzan and Sükhbaatar to supervise party propaganda and recruitment, elected a central committee (chaired by Danzan and including a representative from the Comintern), and adopted a party proclamation *cum* manifesto, composed by the Buryat scholar Ts. Zhamtsarano.

This proclamation was a curious document indeed. Its lengthy introduction — not published until after the revolution — was a rigidly orthodox Marxist-Leninist essay, calling for the national and social emancipation of the Mongols. The text, by contrast, was written in the stiff chancellery style and outlined the objectives of the party in rather muted and contradictory terms. There were references to Pan-Mongolia, the restoration of 'autonomy', and remaining within the Chinese Republic, but they must not be interpreted, as many historians have, as proof of the conservative aims of the party. Marxist internationalism, when used as a yardstick for measuring the radicalism of these young Mongols, is irrelevant; nor can we dogmatically equate the restoration of autonomy with the restoration of theocratic and hereditary rule or

[54] Bat-Ochir, Dashjamts, op. cit., pp. 75–76; Choibalsan, Losol, Demid, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 10–11 (my thanks to Fujiko Isono for providing me with a copy of this second volume); A. Kallinikov, 'Vooruzhonnaya bor'ba za osvobozhdeniye Mongolii (Materialy k istorii revolyutsii 1921 goda i MNRP)' (*Khozyaystvo Mongolii*, no. 1 (14), January–February 1929, p. 87); *Mongol ardyn armiin 50 jil*, Ulan Bator, 1971, pp. 8–9. According to Ch'en Ch'ung-tsu, op. cit., pien 3, p. 52, these 'Mongolian bandits' numbered 'over a hundred or a thousand'.

[55] The principal sources for this conference are two similar, but by no means identical, stenographic reports, one in Russian and the other in Mongolian, published under the title *Mongolyn ardyn khuv'sgalt namyn negdügeer ikh khural (Undsen barimt bichgüüd)*, Ulan Bator, 1971.

Chinese suzerainty.[56] In the final analysis, the touchstone of revolutionary conviction must be the degree to which the old order was challenged: in earlier and later party documents, particularly those not intended for publication, that challenge was put forcefully and unambiguously.

Events moved swiftly after the conference. On 13 March a provisional government of seven men was formed, presided over by Chagdarjav (a puzzling choice; he was soon replaced, however, by Bodoo). On 18 March the Mongolian partisan army, its ranks now enlarged to four hundred through recruitment and conscription, seized the Chinese garrison at Kyakhta Maimaich'eng. Timely material assistance (especially a cannon) from the Russians and the utter demoralization of the Chinese troops contributed substantially to this victory. The defeat of the Chinese garrison was as much a psychological as a military triumph. A new confidence now animated the party, reflected by the increasingly bold, and even somewhat insolent, public declarations of its social and political programme.

March was also crucial in another, less dramatic way. The Moscow government had been anxious to establish diplomatic relations with China, and with the missions of I. L. Yurin in Peking and Change Ssu-lin in Moscow optimism in the autumn of 1920 seemed justified. But the Peking government's curt recall of Chang in late September 1920, its announcement that China's attitude towards Soviet Russia would be guided by that of the Allies, and its suspension of talks with Yurin in the following January were clear evidence that this hope had been misplaced.[57] If the Russians hesitated to aid the Mongolian revolution for fear of prejudicing the chances of diplomatic relations with China, by early 1921 such hesitations must have ended. The manifest incapacity of the Chinese in February to cope with Ungern and their refusal in early March to accept Soviet help[58] removed the second and final restraint on the Moscow government. It was then, and only then, that the Russians became firmly committed to the Mongolian revolution.

[56] The Mongols were evidently under a great deal of Russian pressure to acknowledge Chinese suzerainty over Mongolia. See L. Berlin, 'Avtonomnaya Mongoliya i RSFSR' (*Zhizn' natsional'nostey*, no. 8 (14), Moscow, 1922, p. 3).

[57] *Chung-O kuan-hsi shih-liao: I-pan chiao-she (1920)*, Taipei, 1975, no. 51, pp. 39–40, no. 160, pp. 100–1; and M. A. Persits, *Dal'nevostochnaya Respublika i Kitay*, Moscow, 1962, pp. 127–50.

[58] In early February, after the fall of Urga, talks had begun between Ch'en I and the representative of the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Troitskosavsk regarding the entry of Soviet troops into Mongolia. The Chinese did agree to a 'mutual-protection zone' of twenty-five *versts* (eight miles), but categorically refused to agree to Soviet forces beyond that. See *Chung-O kuan-hsi shih-liao: Tung-pei pien-fang, Wai meng-ku*, Taipei, 1975, no. 15, pp. 7–8, no. 17, p. 19; and A. N. Kheyfets, *Sovetskaya diplomatiya i narody vostoka, 1921–1927*, Moscow, 1968, p. 24; M. Kapitsa, *Sovetsko-kitayskiye otnosheniya*, Moscow, 1958, p. 65.

The material expression of this commitment was an increasing flow of advisers and weapons to the Mongols in March. The acceptance of the MPP into the Comintern in the latter part of that month although under limited membership as a 'sympathizing party' — another reflection, no doubt, of Bolshevik reservations regarding the authenticity of this revolution — was the first public recognition of a link between Moscow and the People's Party. The new Soviet thinking was reflected in a communication to Wellington Koo, the Chinese Minister to London, in late May: 'If China does not wish to abandon Mongolia, it should immediately contact this party and cooperate with it in opposing the Khutukhtu.'[59] The Soviets in effect were telling the Peking government that it could no longer presume to act independently in Mongolia; henceforth, Peking must work with the MPP — and with Moscow. This was new wine poured from an old bottle.

The first priority of the Moscow government was to prepare for the expected attack from Ungern. In March and April Soviet and Far Eastern Republican units were transferred to Kyakhta, while the Mongols doubled the number of their partisans to eight hundred. When Ungern, with a force of perhaps five thousand men, reached Kyakhta in the latter part of May, he was met by a combined Russian-Mongolian army twice its size. Fighting continued to mid-June, but the outcome was never in doubt. The White Guards were thrown back with heavy losses (Ungern was wounded), White officers began acting with an independence unthinkable a month earlier, and Mongolian political leaders nervously put as much distance as they could between themselves and Ungern.

On 16 June the Politburo, in a session chaired by Lenin, adopted a resolution ordering troops into Mongolia.[60] In a very real sense, however, this was simply the formal acknowledgement of a decision that had already been taken in March, when the order was given for the formation of a large army on the border with Mongolia. The Soviet objective had been, not simply to defeat Ungern's army, but to exterminate it; otherwise, in the natural course of events, the White Guards would have regrouped to threaten the borders of Soviet Russia again — the next time with possibly greater success. Once mobilized and poised, these troops had to be used. The decision to help the Mongolian revolutionaries followed logically from Moscow's perceptions of its security requirements: only a 'client state' could guarantee, with Red Army backing, Mongolia's buffer role.

[59] *Chung-O kuan-hsi shih-liao: Tung-pei pien-fang, Wai meng-ku*, no. 15, 1975, pp. 7–8.
[60] Kheyfets, op. cit., p. 25.

On 28 June the main Soviet expeditionary army crossed the border; on 6 July the first Mongolian and Russian units arrived in Urga; and on 11 July — celebrated as independence day — the Bogd Khaan was ceremoniously enthroned as a constitutional monarch. The death of the Khutukhtu in 1924 was an opportunity to dispense with the fiction of theocractic rule, and in that year the Mongolian People's Republic was declared.

There can be no doubt that the victory of the Mongolian revolution in the final analysis resulted from Soviet intervention; what is disputed is the degree to which it resulted from Soviet manipulation and conspiracy. Historians have often remarked on the continuity of tsarist and Soviet strategies in Asia. In the case of Mongolia both regimes sought to balance, on the fulcrum of autonomy, the economic and political importance of China against the military importance of Mongolia. But during the first four years of its existence the young Soviet government — beleaguered, its resources dangerously strained, and groping through a diplomatic wilderness — appears genuinely to have accepted Chinese claims to sovereignty over this area. The Asian policy of the Bolsheviks had not yet refined to the point where it included a place for Mongolia. Indeed, in 1920 the Bolsheviks treated the Mongolian revolutionaries with a mixture of indifference, scepticism and perplexity.

The sudden and unforeseen White Guard occupation, however, jolted the Bolsheviks from their torpor. While encouraging the Mongols with vague promises of co-operation, they looked more seriously to China to put its own house in order, either by checking Ungern or by accepting Soviet help. Only the failure of the Peking government to do either led finally to Moscow's unequivocal pledge to the Mongolian revolution.

The revolution may have triumphed only with Soviet help; its character, however, was shaped by the political and social upheavals in Mongolia after 1911. The experiment in independence and self-government, undertaken with such high expectations, had failed — perhaps because the bureaucratic experience of the Mongols was too limited, because corruption and self-indulgence were too deeply ingrained as corollaries of government employment, or because the abstractions of loyalty and service to the state were too unfamiliar. Nevertheless, out of this political wreckage survived the early commitment to reform and progress, felt most deeply by the new class of intellectuals and civil servants. This was the legacy of the Bogd Khaan era and the spirit that animated the social programme of the Mongolian revolutionaries.