

The state and trends of Mongolian historical studies

Dogmatism, lack of historical thinking and utilization of duplicating methods were three characteristics of Mongolian historical schooling for a long period. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s new approaches were introduced, and attention was focused on the dissociating of issues from politics and ideologies, and on looking at the problems objectively. The main factor that influenced this shift was a rejection of the Marxist approach and free access to archival materials.

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PREVIOUSLY, the periodization of Mongolian history followed the formation theory, and led from prehistorical primitive societies, through enslavement, feudal relations, to capitalism and ending up with the socialist ideology. However, after the 1990s, the periodization acknowledged by the majority of Mongolian historians was changed drastically; below follows the new scheme with an overview of the pertinent academic works published since 1990.

Ancient and early medieval period

This period covers the time of human settlement in Mongolia up to the 12th century AD. The Mongolian scholar, G. Sukhbaatar, writing in 1992, expanded current knowledge of the Mongolian Niryin state (330-555 AD). He argues that during the subsequent Turkic period (6th-10th centuries), Mongolian statehood did not disappear, but that the Mongolian Tatar Khanate continued to flourish in eastern Mongolia, while the Turks held sway over the western parts and beyond.

Medieval and post medieval period

This period includes a range of historical events, from the 13th up to the 20th centuries. This is a period of some 700 years. This period can be described as that of the rise and subsequent fall of Mongolian statehood. The period can be divided in three parts: imperial period; period of dissolution; and the Qing period.

The Mongol Empire (13th-14th centuries) – the imperial period

'The Mongol Empire' comprised some 230 different nations and states, and as such it was unique in the history of the world. A number of important works were recently published by Mongolian scholars, including *The Great Mongol Ulus, 1206-1260* (1994; by Academician Ch. Dalai; revised version 2006). Another work is called *Some Distinctive Features of the Great Mongol State, its history and ideology* (2000; by Academician Sh. Bira). In this study Bira introduces three periods of imperial history, namely the initial stage of the Mongol statehood (1206-1227); the imperial period or state development stage (1229-1259, time of Ögedei, Güyük and Möngke khans); and the period of imperial growth, or the Mongol Yuan period (1260-1368). In his book, Bira stresses the ancient Mongol belief that their khans were mandated by heaven, and thus they performed a worship of heaven or *Tengri*. Sh. Bira claims that the basis for the ideology of the Great Mongol State was *tengerism*.

The formation of the Mongol Empire has led to a series of academic studies. Some scholars believe that Mongol society during the imperial period was in a pre-state formation, without any state structure, and it was merely a union of tribes under the charismatic leadership of Chinggis Khan. These scholars also claim that there was no legislative document, such as the alleged *Great Yasa*. Others argue that the state established by Chinggis Khan could be defined as an 'early state'. Others again state that the Mongol Empire was a 'sort of early state', which was at its 'inchoate', 'typical', or in its 'transitional' stage. N. Kradin and T. Scrinnykova, in their joint book, entitled

Epoch of Chinggis Khan (2006), consequently believe that the predominant character of the Mongol Empire can be classified as an *early state*. Yet other scholars hold the opinion that the *Ike Monggol Ulus* included a population, a territory, statehood and state power, and could thus be classed as a state.

Other important studies by Mongolian scholars include *The Mongol Yuan State* (2006; by scholars at the Academy of Sciences); *The History of Mongolia, 1260-1388* (1992; by Ch. Dalai); *The Mongol State of the Golden Horde* (2006; by S. Tsolmon); *The Mongol State of the Chagadaids* (2006; by Ts. Enkhchimeg); and *The Mongol Ilkhanate* (2006; by D. Ankhbayar). These books were among the first attempts by Mongolian scholars to introduce the Mongol states as a separate subject matter. The monograph *The Mongols and the Armenians, 1220-1335* (2011; by D. Bayarsaikhan) represents a constructive work of the Mongol incursions into the Caucasus, Asia Minor and the Middle East. The work was written in English and published by Brill, Leiden.

Apart from the above studies, the study of Chinggis Khan has been continued. It is worth noting *Chinggis Khan's Ruling Principle (Tsadig)* (1991; by Sh. Natsagdorj), and a collective work, *The Great Chinggis Khan* (2012; edited by J. Boldbaatar).

Political dissolution (end 14th century to beginning 17th century)

This period was formerly known as the 'period of feudal dispersion'. The reason to abandon this term was its connection to the term 'feudalism', and that it was no longer thought appropriate to describe Mongolian society of that time in such a way. Therefore, having put aside the discussion of whether the medieval Mongolian society was feudal or not, scholars decided to rename the 14th-17th centuries as the time of 'political dissolution'. In general, when the (Mongolian) Yuan emperor Togoontumur was pushed out of Beijing in 1368, the pillars of the Mongol empire were shaken; the autocracy of Khan was undermined, and the individual *noyans* and nobles, using their economic powers, strove for political independence. A PhD dissertation, entitled *Revisiting the Dissolution Period in the History of Mongolia*, was recently written by D. Enkhtsetseg. Unfortunately this is the only academic publication to date that addresses this topic.

The Qing period (17th-20th century)

The Manchus from China took southern Mongolia in 1636, Khalkha Mongolia in 1691, and Oirat Mongolia in 1755. In this process Mongolia lost its independence to the Chinese Qing emperor, marking the gloomiest period in Mongolian history. Considering Mongolia as a 'colony' of the Qing Empire, however, would not be correct. There were three different stages: a client stage (17th to beginning 19th century); the semi-colony stage (mid-19th to end 19th century); and a transition stage towards total Chinese control (end 19th to beginning 20th century).

The study of the Qing period in Mongolia is connected to these different stages and other issues such as trade. Recent Mongolian scholarship includes the publication

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The Qing Policy towards the Mongols (2009; by O. Oyunjargal), and a PhD dissertation, *The 'jasaq' in Khalkha and Manchu Relations in the 17th Century* (by E. Jigmеддорж). It is also worth noting contributions made to the development of Mongolian-Qing studies by the Japanese scholar, Hiroki Oka, by the Inner Mongolian scholar Chimeddorj, and by their students.

Modern Mongolian history (beginning 20th century to present)

This period can be divided into the following stages:

- National liberation revolution
- Attempts to achieve democratic development (1924-1928)
- Leftist deviation or the imposition of Soviet socialism onto Mongolia by Komintern (1928-1932)
- New reform policies and their results (1932-1940)
- Pre-socialist activities (1940-1954)
- A shift to build socialism (1954-1966)
- Building socialism and its consequences (1966-1989)
- A transition to democratic development and market economy (since 1990)

The modern period of Mongolian history is the most well-studied. Many issues of this difficult period were recently studied from new perspectives. The study of 20th century Mongolia has gone through drastic revisions, due to the changes in historical paradigms. Important scholarly works have been written by L. Jamsran, J. Urangua, N. Khishigt, Ch. Dashdavaa, Ts. Batbayar, P. Bold, and others.

The transitional period toward democratic developments and the introduction of the market economy surely have caught the attention of historians, sociologists and anthropologists. The events that occurred in 1990 have been analysed, not within the frame of a Marxist understanding of 'revolution', but as a peaceful democratic 'reform' that was directed to change the quality of social life. This period also became the topic of scholarship abroad. Important publications include *History and Politics in Mongolia* (2004; by T. Kaplonski), *Modern Mongolia, From Khans to Commissars to Capitalists* (2005; by M. Rossabi) and a range of Japanese articles on the subject. From the works of Mongolian scholars we can add *Mongolian Political and Legislation History* (by J. Boldbaatar and D. Lundejeantsan).

Bright outlook

Since the early 1990s, more than sixty academic publications have been dedicated to the biographical study of famous individuals in Mongolian history. Apart from these, it should be added that historical philosophy and archival studies are flourishing. A new edition of thirty volumes with Mongolian primary sources was published as the result of the collaboration of many scholars. All what was said above is real evidence that Mongolian historiography is re-emerging. However, one should be aware that it is easy to slip backward toward subjective opinions and politicization.

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