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Soviet-Mongolian Commonwealth: Dynamics of Collective Memory in Post-Soviet Discourse

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The article is devoted to problem of historical memory about Soviet-Mongolian collaboration in 1966-1990 y.

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Introduction. This research is conducted in the form of analysis of the historic discourse that describes the Soviet-Mongolian relations. The prime attention is given to historical narratives on politic figures, who contributed to the development of bilateral relations. The work's aim is to study the practices of construction of hero images – the people whom historians ascribe a special status. In our case they are I. V. Stalin, G. K. Zhukov, P. E. Shchetinkin, R. F. Ungern and their place in the historiography of the Soviet-Mongolian Commonwealth.

On the modern stage Russian and Mongolian politic discourse uses the rhetoric of Soviet epoch as a resource in the development of interstate relations. An example of this is the signed Ulan-Bator and Moscow Declarations in 2000 and 2006. Definitely in these documents it is possible to follow the succession of the bilateral relations. Judging by the current political situation, it is important to follow the transformation of images

of heroes of the Soviet-Mongolian Commonwealth at the present stage.

The studied problem is one of the most politically biased, since the Soviet era and ending with the present time. In the Soviet period it was due to the ideological context of the development of “the world communist movement”, in that system Mongolia occupied a very significant place second in the world of the country that won socialism. The study of the Soviet political presence in the MPR (Mongolian People's Republic) in that period demanded particularly careful observance of the Party principle equivalent to the principle of science.

In the 1990-s, after the collapse of the CMEA and the USSR, Mongolia became one of the so-called Nationalizing States. During that time, a new genealogy of nationhood and a model of political succession were forming: present Mongolia has been leading its succession since the times of Chinghis Khan, the epoch

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of the Great Mongolian State. In nationalist discourse the following people are distinguished in the history as the key personalities: Chinghis Khan as the founder of the State, Zanabazar, Mongolian Leonardo da Vinci, and Sukhe-Bator, the revolution leader of 1921 (Kaplonski, 2004). This phenomenon is one of the most studied both in Russian and in foreign scientific literature. However, changing foreign policy context highlighted the study of the Soviet legacy in Mongolia.

In this context we are interested in commemoration practices as a tool for the constructing the image of the united historical and cultural space in Russia and Mongolia and also it is interesting how the memory of Soviet and Mongolian Commonwealth is becoming a part of contemporary political rhetoric. The background of our research is the author's observations, works of a number of funds of Mongolian museums, as well as works by Soviet historians devoted to Soviet-Mongolian relations (1950-1980s).

The basic historiography works about Soviet and Mongolian relations are the works by L. M. Gataullina, M. I. Golman, V. D. Dugarov, M. S. Kapitsa, U. V. Kuzmin, N. P. Shastina. Taking into consideration the European and American academic discourse, we note also the researches that emphasize the colonial character of the Soviet presence in Mongolia (R. Rupen, J. Murphy, C. Bowden, K. Kaplonski, T. Kent).

Materials and Methods. Given research work is fulfilled in the form of post Soviet research, appeared after the post colonial ones. Fundamental researches of the field are presented by works of M. Buravoy, M. Beissinger (Beissinger, 2006), A. Langenol, U. Slezkine, R.G. Suny and T. Martin. As for the region of Inner Asia, there are papers of such scientists as R. Hamayon, C. Atwood, U. Bulag, C. Kaplonski, L. Munkh-Erdene and C. Humphrey (Evans, Humphrey, 2002).

Methodologically, we are guided by works of Y. Assman, P. Nora, M. Halbwachs, P. Hutton. This research tradition lets fully reveal studied problems, adding the written narrative, handed by oral history.

The source basis of the presented research is the included observations of author, standard-legal acts, regulating Soviet-Mongolian collaborations, materials of Mongolian museum funds, and works of soviet historians devoted to Soviet-Mongolian co operations of studied period.

Method's:

- comparative method
- retrospective method
- systematic method

Results. In the national historical tradition the Soviet presence in Mongolia is considered to observe since the events of the national revolution in 1921. It is associated with the recovery of Mongolian statehood and the starting-point is the establishment of the Mongolian People's Republic (hereinafter MPR). The representatives of the Comintern and the leaders of the Red Army, participating in these events and fighting on the side of Mongolian revolutionists, became the first heroes in the history of Soviet-Mongolian Commonwealth.

The first place among those people took V. I. Lenin – the founder of the theory of capitalist development – the way, according to which Mongolia started the transition to socialism. In Mongolia there was opened a number of museums, streets and monuments to Lenin. His meeting with the Mongolian delegation on November 5, 1921 determined the development of the country for a long period¹.

In the Soviet historiography baron Ungern was treated as an antihero, he was a reactionary, Japanese and English spy (Kislov, 1964: 15). A number of whole chapters of books in the history of revolution and the theory of construction of socialism in Mongolia were devoted to the

exposure of his plans. Rigidity and violent requisitions were emphasized, which were carried out on his orders. For Soviet historians the figure of Ungern embodied the quintessence of the tsarist colonial policy itself towards Mongolia. With the color and scale of the personality of Baron there appeared an opportunity to show the contrast difference between the old tsarist and the new Soviet imperial policy towards the Asian countries. Soviet historical discourse had been forming under the conditions of the deliberate policy of silence. The specifics of the struggle inside the Party in the USSR and Mongolia have led to the systematic campaign to fight against the deviations of different kind. For instance, the fight with the right-wing and left-wing deviations was carried out in the MPR according to the Soviet sample. Many participants of Mongolian revolution, military captains and leaders of Comintern have been repressed.

Among the Red Army commanders, who participated in the battles with the White Army of Ungern, only Shchetinkin P. E. was mentioned in pages of Soviet books in history of the MPR (See: History, 1983). The monument to Shchetinkin is still in one of the main streets of Ulan-Bator. He was the commander of the Red Army partisans (it wasn't acceptable to talk about the open intervention of the regular troops of the Red Army in the Mongolian events of 1921). Since 1926, he served as a consultant in the State Internal Security of Mongolia (the analogue of "Cheka", GPU – MC – SPD – Member of Committee of the State Police Department) and died in 1927 while on duty in Ulan-Bator. In the history of Mongolia he went under the name – Timur Bator zhanzhin – Iron hero – the commander. Only in the 1990s the names of Blucher V. K., Neiman K. A. and Rokossovsky K. K. appeared in the pages of scientific and educational publications. The Soviet aid to the MPR was mainly presented as ideological, advisory and technical. They began

to write about Soviet help more open because of the events in Khalkhin-Gol. It was difficult to deny the fact of large-scale military aid. Due to these events Mongolia stood upon the chosen way of development. In 1945 Mongolia got the status of a recognized independent state. This 'acquisition' is associated with the names of 'the three marshals', who influenced the formation of the Mongolian State in the 20th century greatly. They are general-in-chief I. V. Stalin, Marshals H. Choibalsan. and G. K. Zhukov, thanks to whom Mongolia acquired an informal status of the 16th Soviet republic. The image of Stalin is more ambiguously interpreted in Mongolia rather than on the space of the former Soviet Union. This is due to his role in the MPR getting the international status of an independent state. In the early 1940s Stalin rejected the request of the leaders of MPRP Central Committee and the Mongolia to join the Soviet Union, thus maintaining the sovereignty of the country. In the spring of 1949 Mao Zedong turned to the Soviet leaders with the request to express their views on the possibility of accession of the MPR to China but was refused by Stalin (Mikhalev, 2009: 302). For Mongolia the period 'cult of personality' was characterized by the union of two leaders – Choibalsan and Stalin. Thus the latter had the monopoly to interpret the theory of Marxism-Leninism. Even at the beginning of the 1950s the basic works of Soviet scientists specializing in Mongolia were full of references to Stalin as one of the theorists of Marxism. The name of Stalin disappeared from the pages of historical literature about Mongolia just after the 20th Congress of Communist Party of Soviet Union, but his monument in the centre of the city was removed only on the wave of democratic reforms in 1990s. Besides, there was an attempt to expose the cult of marshal Choibalsan in the 1960s in Mongolia. However, the monument to Stalin as well as to Choibalsan still remain because Stalin's role was politically

recognized in the formation of the MPR as a sovereign state.

Monument to the “father of nations” was destroyed in 1990. In the late 1980s the name of Stalin in Mongolia has been mentioned in the context of repressive policy of the 1930s (Baabar, 1999: 356). For example, there is a separate chapter, devoted to it in remarkable work by Baabar B. There Choibasan is characterized in the literal translation from Mongolian as ‘marionette number one’. Baabar wrote that as a result of their policies Mongols lost the basis of their civilized identity, and the bulk of the Buddhist clergy had been shot. More over, he accused Stalin in annexation of Tuva-Uryanhaya, which was claimed by the MPR (Baabar, 1999: 275). In the 1970s Marshal Zhukov became a key figure in the system of construction ‘military cooperation of the Soviet and Mongolian nations’. The majority of scientific works on the history of the MPR and the history of formation of socialist statehood underline the special role of the events on Khalkhin-Gol. However, the name of Zhukov is mentioned rather seldom there, for example, in the history of the MPR in the chapter devoted to the events of 1939 “Marshal of the Victory” is mentioned among the number of Soviet generals only once. We assume that silence on his name is the legacy of the epoch of “cult of personality” when the basic merit of the defeat of Japanese army was ascribed to Marshal H. Choibalsan. “The restoration of rights” began only after new entry of Soviet troops as a result of the signing “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance” in 1966.

Zhukov museum in the capital of Mongolia was opened in 1979 with the conclusion of the ritual needs of the Soviet army. In political terms, it was a period when the number of Soviet troops in the country reached its peak. The reason for it is the aggravation of Soviet-Chinese relations, which began already in the 1960s. There were

Soviet military camps and garrisons on the whole territory of Mongolia. Joint exercises were held systematically and the Soviet press noted the local collision in the Mongolian-Chinese border. Beside the exercises, mutual parades in memory of different events (Mongolian and Soviet) were held. One of the essential attributes of the Soviet time was laying of wreaths at the memorial to Zhukov. Today, on May 9, this ritual is held by Mongolian soldiers with Russian diplomats and veterans.

In this situation we point out the divergence between the official historiography and the everyday commemoration practices. This gap was in the episodic references to the Marshal in the academic and scientific literature and in the presentation his key role in the museum complex. L. Undarmaa, museum director gives the following interpretation of the history of the memorial: “On one of the central prospects of our capital there is a small grey one-story building surrounded by a low fence, at the entrance sorokapyatki stand on the pedestal. According to the resolution of the Central Committee of the MPR Party to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet and Mongolian troops in the war of 1939 on the banks of the Khalkhin-Gol, in that house in August 1979 Zhukov memorial house-museum was opened as a sign of deep gratitude of the Mongolian people to the great commander. There are many memory dates in the history of friendship of the Mongolian and Soviet nations, but the fight in the Khalkhin-Gol region occupies a special place. In far 1939 when there was a threat to the independence of our Motherland the troops of the Red Army came to the rescue. It should be mentioned that this house-museum is the world’s first one that is dedicated to the memory of a great commander. These houses were built with the hands of soldiers of the Red army. They merged with new buildings in recent years organically. In the house, where the museum is, G. K. Zhukov lived with his family,

his wife and two daughters from September 1939 till the mid of May of 1940. Today the dimensions of the construction are the same, even the brick walls are left untouched, the internal and external wall facing of the building and the interior were changed. Then there were small living rooms and now there are three spacious halls, where the museum is situated. Near the museum is a monument to G. K. Zhukov. Architect N. Urtnasan is the author of the sculpture composition, and the author of the bronze bust is an Honored Artist of the MPR sculptor S. Dorzhpalam. Behind the bust there is an arrow, embedded in the ground, symbolizing that the enemy will not go through our territory and will be destroyed. The basement of the monument was laid the same year when the museum was opened. The opening was devoted to the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the defeat of the fascist troops near Moscow in December 1981. In 1980 the museum was given to the patronage of the Department of Defense of the USSR³.

Discussion. Soviet historic discourse about the heroes of the international mission in Mongolia is a complex set of “layers” of different political directions of that time. To some point, the memory of the heroes is the “remains” of the memory, some kind of depriving elements of such great ideological campaigns as: “non-capitalistic development”, “the new democracy construction”, “the fight against Japanese military force”. After some time the images of heroes were taken out from local and political contexts and were written in the narrative of ‘great’ history and became abstract symbols of the epoch.

Soviet rituals and their social base Most of the rituals and practices of memorial character were considered to be for Soviet specialists, who arrived in Mongolia, in order to as Lenin said: “. . . to give cultural disinterested support to these (to Mongolian people in our context – A. M.) more backward and oppressed people than we are”.

Judging by this statement, the Soviet people were positioned as “an elder brother” to “younger” Mongolian one (Mikhalev, 2009, 305). It was a time when most of Mongolian elite had Soviet education and 90% of the country population in varying degrees understood the Russian language. As for Soviet specialists, the majority of them when coming back home after several years of work in the friendly country for the most part did not know the Mongolian language.

In the 1960-80s the number of civilian experts from the SU in the Mongolian People’s Republic reached its peak. Every year almost five thousand people were sent on an official journey to Mongolia and than the business trip used to be prolonged, according to the data of 1985 – 5827 people. Besides the civil specialists, two million of Soviet military people for the entire period (20 years) had served in the army in Mongolia (with the Mongolian population of three million people). They all served for ‘the international mission to support brotherly Mongolia in the constructing of socialism’. Schools, kindergartens and museums were built in the country. With so many Soviet citizens there ‘arose’ the necessity to organize civil rituals. The holidays November 7 (the Day of Great October Socialist Revolution), May 9 (Victory Day), May 19 (Day of the Pioneers) were attached to various objects in the capital of Mongolia. In particular, Victory Day was attached to the memorial to Zhukov, the Day of the Pioneers – to Lenin museum, November 7 – to the museum to Lenin and to the Revolution museum. All mentioned regulated and formed style strategies that were called “Soviet way of life” in the Soviet ideology.

The images of heroes: revolutionists, soldiers, who were carrying out international duty, would support the Soviet identity and be an example for citizens of the USSR. For Mongolian residents they were supposed to possess the characteristic features of the Soviet people – ‘the elder

brother’, ‘great and wise’ that help on the way of transformation from feudalism to socialism. The statement by I. V. Lenin illustrates this direction more completely: “...with the help of proletariat of the leading countries the backward countries can transmit to the Soviet system and through the definite stages of development – to communism, passing away capitalistic stage of development”².

However, by the 1970s the Soviet mission in Mongolia has lost romantic features of the construction of socialism, the country became a basement for carrier and an access to material values. De-romantisation and de-heroisation happened while being in Mongolia. Observance of rituals became a formality. Keeping “the Soviet life style” – the rule of behavior became the main task of that time, it included observation of the rituals and reproduction of rhetoric of international mission. The embassy and the Organization of Soviet citizens in Mongolia observed the rules and maintained the moral image of Soviet citizens. These institutions were responsible for filling the every day life of Soviet citizens in the MPR with ideology. Deviations from the norm could be punished with ‘sending to the large land’ – to the USSR. This in its turn was associated with the loss of a number of preferences in the form of checks and possibilities to get the access to the deficient goods. By the way, the formation of system of prestigious consumption in the sphere of Soviet specialists in Mongolia, that was linked with the system of privileges, led to the gap between every day practice and ideology. According to K. Kaplonski, who conducted researches in Mongolia at the beginning of the 1990s, the majority of Mongols characterized the Soviet presence as colonial (Kaplonski, 2004: 36). The reason for that was the whole system of privileges and special shops, set up for Soviet citizens, had the right of extraterritoriality.

These two cuts-off by the mid-1980s existed independently and while anti-Soviet spirits were

increasing in the country, the work in Mongolia was becoming only the form of personal ‘profit’. But for long period of being in the country a lay of people formed, who were fully integrated in the given social-and-economic system. For them, who have lived in the country for several decades, the Soviet rituals became a part of their ordinary life style. In fact, in Mongolia there were two realities: Soviet and Mongolian, between which by the end of the 1980s have grown a social tension. Democratic revolution of 1989-1990 caused massive leaving Mongolia. This process was accompanied by the increase of extremism and crime. During that time many Soviet monuments and museums were destroyed.

Conclusion

The post Soviet period in the history of Mongolia formed new loyalties and transformed the old ones. This transition was in substitution of the brotherly Commonwealth of the Soviet and Mongolian nations for Diaspora project. All the symbols and meanings of the epoch of construction of socialism, which endured the reforms of the 1990s, have changed and have become in demand in the project ‘Compatriots’.

The concept “Soviet-Mongolian Commonwealth” under present conditions is a political resource, demand for guarantee of Russian presence in Mongolia. In this situation the canon of historical memory and the policy of commemoration play up scenes, connected with the role of the Soviet Union in ensuring the sovereignty of the MPR. Therefore, G. K. Zhukov is the most acceptable figure.

In 2000s the pantheon of heroes went down to the level of Diaspora needs, the only reminding of the Soviet presence are memorials to Soviet soldiers. In this context, the image of Marshal Zhukov is universal. Unlike the leaders of the revolution and its ideologists, he was the easiest to naturalize in the frame of new political project.

¹ V.I. Lenin, *Full Collected Works, Vol. 43 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1958-1965), 233/*

² L. Undarmaa "Zhukov's Museum in Mongolia", *Bulletin of Moscow-Ulaanbaator Center*, 7-8 (2006), 8.

³ V.I. Lenin, *Full Collected Works, Vol. 44 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1958-1965), 246/*

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Советско-Монгольское содружество:

динамика коллективной памяти

в постсоветском дискурсе

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Данная статья посвящена проблеме коллективной памяти о Советско-Монгольском содружестве 1966-1990 гг.

Ключевые слова: коллективная память, Монголия, СССР, Советско-Монгольское содружество, историография.
