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FIELD REPORTS IN MONGOLIAN ETHNOLOGY

(1960-1971)

[I]

Edited by
Sampildondovyn Chuluun

With Introductions by
Gelegjamtsyn Tserenkhand
and
Uradyn E. Bulag

ULAANBAATAR
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Field Reports in Mongolian Ethnology (Vols. I–XI)

(Studia Ethnologica Document Series, Tomus I–XI)

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ӨМНӨТГӨЛ

Монгол улсын Шинжлэх Ухааны Академийн Түүхийн хүрээлэнгийн угсаатан судлал, Нийгэм-соёлын хүн судлалын салбар нь 50 гаруй жилийн түүхэн уламжлалтай энэ чиглэлийн ууган тулгуур судалгааны газар юм. Монгол улсад угсаатан судлалын үндэсний боловсон хүчин бэлтгэж, монгол угсаатны түүх-соёлыг цогцоор нь судлах ажлыг гардан зохион байгуулж, хээрийн судалгааны ажлыг тасралтгүй зохион байгуулж ирсэн юм. Тэрхүү судалгааны ажлыг явуулахдаа цуглуулсан хээрийн судалгааны тайлан, эх хэрэглэгдэхүүн нь тус хүрээлэнгийн Түүхийн баримт мэдээлэлийн санд хадгалагдаж байна. Нийт 90 орчим хээрийн судалгааны тайлан эх хэрэглэгдэхүүн нь Монгол улсад энэ чиглэлд хийсэн судалгааны үр дүнд цугларсан гол өв юм. Тус тайлан хэрэглэгдэхүүнд тулгуурлан “Монголын угсаатны зүй” 1-3 боть суурь судалгааны бүтээлийг 1987-1995 оны хооронд нийтлүүлсэн нь өнөөг хүртэл Монгол улсын угсаатны судлалын тулгуур бүтээл хэвээр байна.

Тус хүрээлэнгийн Угсаатны судлалын салбарын эрдэмтдийн нөр их хөдөлмөрөөр бүтсэн эдгээр тайлан, эх хэрэглэгдэхүүнүүд нь 1990-ээд оноос хойш цагийн аясад алга болох, үрэгдэж алдагдах, хуучирч муудах зэрэг олон шалтгаанаар нэлээд нь устсан байдаг. Мөн өнөө үед Монгол угсаатны соёлыг судлах сонирхол монгол болон гадаадын монгол судлаачдын дотор ихээхэн өргөн хүрээтэй болж буйг ч бас харгалзан үзэж эдгээр тайлангаас тодорхой хэсгийг нь хэвлүүлэх ажлыг эхлүүлсэн юм. Энэхүү тайланг хэвлүүлэх ажлыг анх Кембрижийн Их сургуулийн Нийгмийн хүн судлалын салбарын багш, профессор Урадын Булаг, угсаатны зүйч Гэлэгжамцийн Цэрэнханд нарын санаачилга гаргасныг Түүхийн хүрээлэнгийн Эрдмийн зөвлөлөөр хэвлүүлэхийг зөвшөөрсөн билээ.

Энэхүү тайлангуудыг дахин нийтлүүлэхдээ бид уг эх ямар байдалтай байгааг гол болгож, алдаа мадаг буйг төдий л засаж өөрчлөлгүй тэр хэвээр нь оруулахыг чухалчилсан юм. Мөн 1950-аад оноос 1990-ээд онд хамрагдах тайлангуудын байдал, угсаатны зүйчдийн товч намтар, тодорхойлолыг Г.Цэрэнханд гуай, Монголын угсаатны судлалын үүсэл хөгжил, өнөөгийн байдлын талаар эрдэмтэн У.Булаг нарын бичсэн дэлгэрэнгүй оршлыг монгол, англи хэлээр нийтлүүлсэн болно. Судалгааны энэхүү эх хэрэглэгдэхүүн нь Монгол угсаатныг судлагч хэн бүхэнд гарын авлага болох бөгөөд тус хүрээлэнгийн баялаг сангаас өргөн олон судлаачдад бэлтгэж өгч буй судалгааны хэрэглэгдэхүүн төдийгүй цаашид улам өргөжих тус салбарын судлаачдад баримжаа болох нэгэн үүд гэж үзэж байна. 2010 оноос эхлэн түр завсарласан хээрийн судалгааг бид өргөн хүрээтэй дахин эхлүүлж олон судлаачид идэвхийлэн ажиллаж эхэлж байгаатай ч зорилго давхцаж байгаа юм.

Ийнхүү тус эх хэрэглэгдэхүүн нь цаашид үргэлжлэн гарах бөгөөд энэ удаагийн тайланд өмнөх үгийг бичиж, бидэнтэй хамтран ажилласан Англи улсын Кембрижийн Их сургуулийн Нийгмийн хүн судлалын тэнхимийн багш профессор У.Булаг, тус тэнхимийн дэргэдэх Монгол ба Дотоод Азийн судалгааны төвийн захирал Караолин Хамфри гуай, судалгааны ажлын зохицуулагч Либби Пичи, Түүхийн Хүрээлэнгийн салбарын эрхлэгч Б.Баатархүү, Д.Түвшинзаяа, судлаач Б.Отгонбаатар, Ч.Мөнхтөр, Г.Бямбарাগчаа, Т.Билэгсайхан, Н.Алтантөгс, номын санч Ц.Болормаа, Л.Алтантуяа нартаа цагаа зарцуулж уйгагүй ажилласанд гүн талархаж ажлын амжилт хүсэж байна.

Алдсан эндсэн, ташаарсан зүйл байх аваас судлаач та бүхэн бидэнд харамгүй саналаа ирүүлнэ үү.

Түүхийн хүрээлэнгийн захирал, доктор, дэд профессор С.Чулуун

FOUNDATIONS OF MONGOLIAN ETHNOLOGY

Uradyn E. Bulag
(University of Cambridge)

In the past few years, there emerged two institutions in Mongolia devoted to the study of social and cultural anthropology: the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Mongolian National University (2006), and the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Institute of History, Mongolian Academy of Sciences (2010). They are not new departments, but built on old departments of 'ethnology'. This 'rectification of name', like the change of the state name from the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) to Mongolia in 1992, represents a 'regime change'. Similar to the state name change which signalled a radical break with the socialist ideology and the Soviet Russian domination, the departmental name changes were attempts to move away from the Soviet style ethnology to the Western style social and cultural anthropology, a move eventuated by the fading away of the older generation of ethnologists and the injection of new blood of anthropologists trained in EuroAmerica and Japan.

The new disciplinary orientation undoubtedly calls into question the entire tradition of Mongolian ethnology which was born in the 1920s, institutionalized in the 1950s and 1960s, and flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. Should the writings during this *longue durée* be swept into the dustbin of history, as the Mongolian National Library threw out many of the old books deemed too communist and propagandistic in the early 1990s? Or should they be locked away only for the few curious eyes interested in idiosyncratic cultural rhetoric? Or should they be treated as constituting a unique heritage of Mongolian intellectual exercise in the twentieth century, and therefore be made accessible to the wider public? This is a matter of pressing concern.

Western social-cultural anthropology certainly enjoys critical edges, but it has its own drawbacks, both ideological and practical, as has been amply demonstrated by the post-colonial critique. The recent effort to 'decolonise' 'Western' anthropology to promote so-called 'world anthropologies' is an open acknowledgement that anthropology is not, and ought not to be, a western monopoly, even though it is hegemonic in the world. One of the key problems confronting western anthropology has been its lack of public voice, struggling between maintaining a 'critical distance' and yearning to exert greater 'impact' on the social and cultural processes of the cultures and societies under study. In contrast, Mongolian ethnology has been enjoying the privilege of being centrally

involved in the study and transformation of the society and economy as well as the history of Mongolia. As 'native anthropologists', Mongolian ethnologists, together with historians, literary scholars, and many others, have delineated and fashioned Mongolian national culture, defining both its boundary and its contents. For better or for worse, their works have had direct bearing on the conceptualization of Mongolia's ethnicity, and on the introduction and/or 'revival' of *ovog* now used as family-cum-clan names.

An understanding of this ethnological impact on Mongolian society is essential for those interested in Mongolia, especially the rural area where 'traditional culture' is widely believed to be preserved. In fact, the seemingly rugged herders in the countryside do not necessarily have many 'traditional' views of the ancient past, for much of their cultural conceptualization has been processed and reprocessed throughout the 20th century by Mongolian ethnologists. It thus behoves anyone studying modern and contemporary Mongolian cultural formations and dynamics to closely engage with the writings of Mongolian ethnologists produced in the socialist period.

In winter 2009 the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU), Cambridge University, invited Professor G. Tserenkhand from the Institute of History, the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, for a two week visit to Cambridge, during which she and I explored the state of ethnological research in Mongolia. In autumn 2010 during my short visit to the Institute of History, I proposed that the ethnographic field reports in the archives of the Institute be dusted down and published, a proposal enthusiastically supported by Professor S. Chuluun, director of the Institute. Chuluun's visit to MIASU in spring 2011 sealed an agreement of collaboration between the two institutions, of which the publication of the multi-volume Mongolian ethnographic reports would be the first fruit.

The significance of this publication cannot be over-emphasized. The original field reports dating back to the 1960s formed the basis of many of the Mongolian ethnological publications after the 1960s until the beginning of the new millennium. As we all know, published works in Mongolia, as elsewhere, are usually edited, but in Mongolia, until recently scholars had an added layer of ideological censorship to conform to. It would thus be particularly interesting to read the original reports to see what was left out and what was added. These reports were also stand-alone ethnographies in their own rights, containing rich data on various themes, which are no longer recoverable by doing fresh fieldwork. This does not mean that they contained any explosively sensitive information with potential to cause a big stir; nor were they 'raw data'. They were processed reports submitted to the Institute of History for filing on the completion of field expeditions, following a certain format and theoretical frame, as well as exercising some commonsense self-censorship.

The practice of filing field reports started in the 1960s, but it was not strictly enforced in the early years. Some field reports are thus missing from the archives and it is unclear whether they were never written or they were lost. Clearly the economic and political crisis in the 1990s also took its toll on the institutional tradition. We publish here the available ethnographic field reports in the archives of the Institute of History, which represent the practice of Mongolian ethnology at the Institute of History, Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

To facilitate reading the reports, I chart here a brief historical outline of Mongolian ethnology, focusing particularly on that practiced at the Academy of Sciences. The selection of ethnologists and their writings and the analysis made here reflects the perspective and limited knowledge of myself only. No interpretations of the reports have been attempted.

THE BIRTH OF MONGOLIAN ETHNOLOGY

Mongols have been an object of immense fear, curiosity and fascination ever since their conquest of Eurasia in the thirteenth century. Their customs and way of life were documented by papal envoys and Chinese travellers and scholars, which now serve as a unique source for understanding medieval Mongols. Unlike most conquerors, Mongols did not appear to have written about the conquered peoples, but this does not mean that they did not classify and rule, thereby leaving powerful imprints of their cultural practices in many ways. Medieval Mongols seemed to be content to allow court historians to document their rise and conquest of the world, producing arguably the world's first 'world history'—*Compendium of Chronicles*—written by Rashid al-Din in the Ilkhanid court. Where they themselves wrote, it became 'secret' only for the eyes of Mongol Khans and princes. It was not until the 17th century when the Mongols began to be conquered by the Manchu that a native historiographical tradition emerged at the same time when the Manchu documented and legislated to rule the Mongols according to Mongol customs. Although these writings contained rich information about the Mongols, they were not ethnographic or anthropological in the modern sense. In contrast, travelogues produced by European and Russian explorers from the mid-19th century contained the first seeds of Mongolian ethnology. It is in this historical context that we should appreciate the rise and development of Mongolian ethnology practiced by the Mongol scholars themselves.

Institutionally, native ethnology of Mongolia began to develop at the same time when the Institute of Scriptures and Manuscripts (*Sudar Bichgiin Hüreelen*), forerunner of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences was established in 1921, the year when Outer Mongolia established a people's government. It was initiated by Jamsrangiin Tseveen (a.k.a. Jamtsarano), a Buryat Mongolian who founded

the Institute and served as its academic secretary from 1921 to 1932.

Tseveen's interest in Mongolian ethnology dated back to 1903 when he started expeditions to various Mongolian regions including Buryatia, Halh Mongolia, and Inner Mongolia, supported by St. Petersburg University and the Russian Committee for the Investigation of Central and Eastern Asia. His early travel and writings show that he was a pan-Mongolist, believing in the gathering of all Mongols in one unified state of Mongolia, a position typical of Buryat nationalists and intellectuals at the time who, however, differed among themselves about the basis of pan-Mongolism. This vision led Tseveen to devote his energy to the building of the new Mongolian nation and to enlightening the Mongolian population after the founding of the independent state of Mongolia in December 1911. In the 1910s he edited Mongolia's first newspaper and magazine, and ran the nation's first modern school. In 1921 he wrote the Ten Aspirations, the platform of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) at the party's founding congress.

A scholar-politician with a broad vision for developing Mongolia's modern sciences, Tseveen showed a particular interest in ethnology as demonstrated by his early writings and his Mongolian translation of Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* in 1926. He organised numerous expeditions together with Russian scholars, the routes of which are shown in *Ethnographic and Linguistic Atlas of the People's State of Mongolia* (Rinchen ed. 1979). In a 1930 article outlining the five year cooperation plan signed between the Mongolian Institute of Scriptures and Manuscripts and the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Tseveen mentioned 12 research teams set up for cooperation, one of which being an 'ethnographic studies team' (Tseveen 1930 [1997]: 55). In an undated article elaborating the vision for research opened up by the new cooperation which was jointly written by Tseveen and Byambyn Rinchen, a young Buryat Mongolian scholar later to become an iconic literary figure in Mongolia, they divided the article into two parts: the first part was about geography, geology, ethnobotany, animal husbandry, and agriculture, and the second part discussed '*ard hümüüsiin shinjilgee*' (study of humans) (Tseveen and Rinchen n.d. [1997]). The second part is worth some extended introduction as it was arguably the first discussion by Mongolia's two founding ethnologists on what they meant by ethnography.

Tseveen and Rinchen translated 'ethnography' (*etnografiya* in Russian) as '*hün aimgiin sudlal*', defining it as 'the study of numerous human aimags and *ovogs* and their culture and civilization, life, customs, laws etc.' (ibid. 68). They suggested that ethnography was useful not only for understanding the culture and civilisation, and the rise and development of human societies, but for understanding their interactions with their neighbours, and that it was referenced extensively by other disciplines such as sociology and linguistics. Themes they deemed appropriate for ethnographic studies included 'law,

customs, religious belief and worship, superstition, ethnogenetical differences (*ovog ündesnii yalgaa*), folk literature narrative, stories, epics, songs, and poetry' (ibid. 69).

Apparently there was some resistance in Mongolia to ethnography, as Tseveen and Rinchen tried to debunk their shortsightedness by citing Marx and Engels' example of using ethnographic materials in their writings. Ethnography, they argued, was useful in preserving the healthy elements and eliminating the elements that might have adverse social effects. Ethnographically studying dress-making among the people in comparison with that done in factories, for instance, would have significance for Mongolia's economy, for it could show how much time was wasted in making dresses by hand. Ethnographic studies of the themes mentioned above would help medical doctors, teachers and students understand the true situations and carry out their tasks effectively. Studying lineages (*ovog yas*), customary laws and family would be useful for drafting national laws, but it would also help understand situations concerning children. Folkloric items such as games, stories, puzzles, for instance, would be useful in preparing reading materials for children (ibid. 69–70).

Tseveen and Rinchen then gave a history of Mongolian ethnographic studies, starting with travelogues written by 13th–14th century travellers to Mongolia: John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck, and Marco Polo, followed by Russian travellers to Mongolia in the 19th century including Timkovskii, Bichurin and Klements. While praising these studies as useful and interesting, they also criticised the writings for being non-scientific and error-laden due to the authors' incompetence in languages. The really genuine ethnographic studies of the Mongols were, they said, those by Potanin and Pozdneyev in the late 19th century, and they singled out for praise Grjmailo's 1930 anthropological study of the physiology and character and ethnographic studies of the customs, way of life, and government administration of the Soyod, Hasag (Kazakh), Torguud, Hoshuud, Dörvöd, Bayad, Myangad, Ööld, Zahchin, Hotgoid, Hoton, and Halh *ovogtons* in western Mongolia. These studies, they regretted, had not been available in Mongolian translation.

Tseveen and Rinchen's article gave little indication about the political background to their ethnographic operation, but it was clear that most of the ethnological expeditions were conducted in Western Mongolia. A key concern of the young Republic was how to deal with the twin institutions of nobility and the Buddhist church which had a tight grip on the Mongolian population. Mongolia was organised along a banner and league system instituted by the Qing dynasty which gave feudal power to aristocrats, and this administrative division was superseded by the Buddhist church headed by the Jebtsundamba Khutagt based in Ikh Khüree, present-day Ulaanbaatar, who had formed patron-client (*hamjilga*) relationships with the lay people across Mongolia. These relationships were deemed exploitative. In addition, the MPRP identified a 'national problem',

that is, the Halh Mongols were a powerful oppressor group dominating and discriminating against other small groups who were concentrated in Western Mongolia. The MPRP programme in 1925 read:

Completely wipe out the discrimination between Halh and other national small *aimags* in the MPR, in particular get rid of the discrimination shown by the Halh against other national, small and weak *aimags*; respect the people's genuine freedom and the rights of the other national, small and weak *aimags* without discrimination. (quoted in Bulag 1998: 39)

Badamhatan, a distinguished ethnologist, wrote in 1980:

In the first few years of the revolution, repeated meetings convened by the party and state took [various peoples] into consideration and issued clear instructions and resolutions about promoting the life, culture and education of the Urianghai frontier people; the Hoton, Darhat and Urianghai were liberated from the *hamjilga* of Dürbet Zorigt Wang and the Jebtsundamba Hutagt. This was a great step taken to grant political equal rights among the *yastans*. (Badamhatan 1980: 17, quoted in Bulag 1998: 38-39)

It is clear thus that the early ethnographic studies of various groups in Western Mongolia were not just an intellectual exercise; they were in fact part of a larger political operation aimed at destroying aristocratic and ecclesiastical domination in Mongolia through 'liberating' smaller Mongolian groups who were called 'small ethnic groups' (*baga yastan*). This operation not only created 'ethnic groups', but also created ethnic hierarchy in terms of number, dividing the population into two categories, majority and minority, following the Western model of nation-state building.

Admittedly, Tseveen and Rinchen were writing at a very critical moment of Mongolia's political life. When Anandyn Amar, a former prime minister of Mongolia (1928–1930), assumed the presidency of the Institute of Scriptures and Manuscripts in 1930, its name was changed to the Institute of Sciences, embarking on a comprehensive cooperation with the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Dozens of Russian scientists were sent from Moscow to work in the Mongolian Institute of Sciences. In early 1931 Tseveen was denounced for being a rightist, trumpet-blower for feudalism and capitalism, and he was exiled from Mongolia in 1932 to work at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Leningrad University. In 1937 he was arrested and he died in 1942. Rinchen was also arrested in 1937 but was released in 1942 surviving the Great Purge.

During his stay in Leningrad, Tseveen wrote arguably the first book on

the MPR's ethnic minorities entitled *Darhad, Hövsgöl Nuurn Urianhai, Dörvöd, Hoton, Bayad, Ööld, Myangad, Zahchin, Torguud, Hoshuud, Dariganga, Altain Urianhai, Hasag, Hamnigan naryn garal ündes baidlyn ögüülel* (An Essay on the Ethnogeneses of the Darhad, Hövsgöl Nuurn Urianhai, Dörvöd, Hoton, Bayad, Ööld, Myangad, Zahchin, Torguud, Hoshuud, Dariganga, Altain Urianhai, Hasag, and Hamnigan), and it was published in Ulaanbaatar in 1934. The same year saw the publication a number of key history books in Mongolia, including A. Amar's *Mongolyn товч түүх* (A Brief History of Mongolia), L. Dendev's *Mongolyn товч түүх* (A Brief History of Mongolia) and H. Choibalsang, D. Losol, & G. Demid's *Mongol ардын үндэсний хув'сгалын үүсэж байгуулагдсан товч түүх* (A Brief History of the Emergence and Establishment of the Mongolian People's National Revolution). These books marked the 10th anniversary of the founding of the MPR, but the relatively strong nationalist overtone in these books has to be understood in the new Comintern and Soviet policy toward Mongolia in the wake of the establishment of Manchukuo by the Japanese and Japan's pan-Mongolist overture to the MPR. Instead of highhanded pressure for assimilation and identification with the Soviet Union as in the preceding years, the MPR was now encouraged to develop its own identity and culture for the purpose of offsetting the Japanese pan-Mongolist encroachment. Thus, I tentatively suggest that Tseveen's book benefited from this Comintern and Soviet sanctioned Mongolian nationalism centring on the MPR, but also contributed to the building of a narrowly imagined Mongolian nation. In other words, instead of a communist pan-Mongolist vision to incorporate Buryatia and Inner Mongolia, seeing the latter as languishing under the Chinese and Japanese rules, the Comintern now began to treat the Mongols in Inner Mongolia as potential tool of Japanese fascism, a threat to the existence of socialist Mongolia. In this context, it is not surprising that Tseveen's book focused exclusively on non-Halh groups found within the geographical confines of the MPR.

Tseveen's ethnography was an amalgamation of information from past published sources and reports from expeditions including his own. Each group was given a profile with some rudimentary information about their origin and composition. Although it was not a book of pan-Mongolist nature, to his credit, he treated these groups as essentially Mongols.

Of particular interest are the categorical terms Tseveen adopted to refer to these groups. The Darhad who received the most detailed description were said to 'have the same bone (*yastai*) as the Urianhai who belong to the Turkic root (*ündes*)' (p.78). The Dörvöd were a branch (*salbar*) of the Mongolian nation (*ündesten*) (p.92). Where he used the term '*yastan*', Tseveen referred to those ancient 'clans and bones' (*ovog yas*) such as Choros, Hoshuud, Hoid, and others within the Dörvöd (p.93). Regarding the Bayad, he called them '*Mongol ündesten*' which existed in the era of Chinggis Khan, and noted a 'bone-group (*yas aimag*) called Bayad within the Turkic *ündesten*' (p.101). Only once did he use the term

'*yastan*' to refer to the Darhad, Halh, Hotgoid, Bayad, etc. (p.102). He wrote that Ööld was 'the name of a big *yas*' (p.103). He then concluded, 'generally, the above mentioned Dörvöd, Ööld, Torguud, Zahchin, Hoid, Hoshuud are all *aimags* of the four Oirats....The majority of all these are Mongol *ündesten* with only small differences in dialects and customs' (p.108).

It is important to note that in his works published prior to this book, Tseveen did not appear to have used the term '*yastan*'. The Mongol groups such as the Halh and others were all referred to as Mongol *ovogton* or *aimag*. The only order I can make out of them is that these three terms were used interchangeably, and they all referred to the constituent lineages of the Mongols who were said to have one root (*ündes*). From his perspective, the Dörvöd *yastan*, for instance, were nothing but a 'Mongol *yastan*', a group having a bone lineage, one of the many Mongolian bone-lineages. Thus, *yastan* as used by Tseveen did not actually have the sense of 'ethnic group' as it is meant today. In other words, his writing did not imply that the Mongol *ündesten* was a modern organisation, a political and cultural formation, coming into being only in the capitalist stage or socialist stage. Rather the Mongols were a large kinship group, or rooted-people (*ündes* + *ten*) formed in ancient times, as were the Turks, and they had many lineage branches variously named *obogton*, *yastan*, or *aimag*.

These terminological usages in Tseveen's works were surprising indeed, for *yastan* had already become an official term to refer to ethnic groups in the 1920s. The terminological inconsistency challenges the assumption that Tseveen was the inventor of the term *yastan* (Bulag 1998: 31). As far as I can tell, the term first appeared in Buryatia where it was used as an adjective to modify the term '*zon*' (group) to designate the Buryats as an ethnic group in Russia in the late 19th century, as indicated by the title of a Mongolian document written by a Buryat called Shiravnimbu Hobituyev in 1886/87: '*Oros ih gürnei züün Shibirin hori Buriad hemeen yastan zonoï tergüün garsan ba tүүний 11 omgiin түүх бичиг оршвои*' ('The History of the Genesis of the Ethnic Group [*yastan zon*] called Hori Buryat of Eastern Siberia in the Great Russian Empire and their Eleven Lineages [*omog*]', quoted in Tserenkhand 1987 [2005]: 103).

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES

Mongolia did not have its first professionally trained ethnologist until 1957 when Sandagsürengiin Badamhatan graduated from the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography, Moscow University and began to work as a researcher in the Department of History of the Mongolian Institute of Sciences. At the time, the Department of History had branches of archaeology and ethnology, an institutional arrangement that lasted until mid-1980s when archaeologists splintered from the Institute of History to form a separate Institute under the

Academy. In the early years, the Department (Institute) of History had many outstanding archaeologists and historians whose works would fall into the rubric of ethnology. For instance, archaeologist H. Perlee's '*Mongol түмний гарлыг тамгаар haij sudlah n': түүх-угсаатны зүйн туршits судалгаа*' (An experimental study of the ethnogenesis of the Mongols through their clan markings) published in 1975 has had far reaching influence on the study of Mongolian ethnogenesis. The Institute of Language and Literature, of course, had the renowned scholar B. Rinchen who was a 'researcher of language, folk literature, and ethnology' according to his job description. I will come back to Rinchen's ethnographic study in a moment.

It was the arrival of Badamhatan that genuinely ushered in the professional ethnological tradition in Mongolia. Unlike many other scholars who were simultaneously archaeologists, historians, and poets or anything else, Badamhatan was committed to ethnographic research. The discipline was consolidated by the arrival of yet another ethnologist, Gelegjamtsyn Tserenkhand, who graduated from Moscow University in 1963 as an ethnology major. In 1966 they were joined by Gonchigiin Batnasan, who also graduated in ethnology from Moscow University. In 1967 Badamhatan did his Kandidat degree (equivalent to PhD degree) in ethnology at Moscow University, while Tserenkhand obtained her Kandidat degree in ethnology at the Leningrad based Institute of Ethnology in 1976.

Badamhatan's career started with strengthening ethnological research at the local level, for which he wrote a short piece entitled '*Etnografiin судалгаа hiih arga барилын тухай*' (On the Method of Conducting Ethnographic Research) in 1958. It was a handbook for researchers at the regional studies offices (*oron nutgiin судлах кабинет*) in provinces (*aimag*), advising them to collect ethnographic materials about particular aspects of the way of life and cultures of ethnic groups in each province with a view to upgrading the regional studies offices into ethnographic studies sections (*угсаатны зүйн тасга*).

Starting from 1957, the Department of History also organised ethnological expeditions to Hovd, Uvs, Choibalsan, Bulgan and Hövsgöl provinces to study the ethnogenesis, material and spiritual cultures and shamanism of the Dörvöd, Zahchin, Torguud, Altain Urianhai, Myangad, Buriad, Halh, Darhad ethnic groups (*yastan*) and the Tsaatan people (*ard*). The key ethnologist organising these activities was again Badamhatan, whose main focus at the time was on the Tsaatan and Darhad of Hövsgöl Province, spending on average 2–4 months in the field every year. In 1962 he published his first monograph *Hövsgöliin Tsaatan ardyn aj baidlyn toim* (An Outline of the Way of Life of the Tsaatan People in Hövsgöl) based on his ethnographic fieldwork. In 1965 he published his second book *Hövsgöliin Darhad yastan* (The Darhad Ethnic Group in Hövsgöl) in 1965, which became the basis of his Kandidat dissertation defended in 1967.

Badamhatan's ethnographies covered five main areas: ethnohistory,

economy, material and spiritual cultures, and religion, categories derived from Soviet ethnology, which dominate Mongolian ethnographic literature even today. His main interest at this stage was to document the distinctive aspects of the Darhad defined as an ethnic group (*yastan*). His interest in Darhad and Tsaatan shamanism is worth particular attention, for his intention was not to eliminate it as superstition; rather he believed that the Darhad and Tsaatan preserved the original form of shamanism and totem worship, such that a detailed study of their shamanism 'would be significant for studying some important questions concerning the ancient shamanic cosmology and ancient worships' (Badamhatan 1962: 73).

From the early 1960s, the newly reconstituted Academy of Sciences charged ethnologists to study the formation of socialist 'new man' and socialist relationships effected by 'the total victory of socialist relations of production in rural economy' declared by the MPRP in 1959. This refers to collectivization and abolishment of private property. In the 1960s through the 1980s Mongolian ethnologists were mainly engaged in the study of the new way of life of the herders in the collectives and the ethnic processes and socialist way of life in Mongolia. Tserenkhand, for instance, embarked on a field expedition in 1964 to study two districts (*sum*)—Chuluut and Tariat—of Arhangai Province focusing on three issues: 1. the historical development and the characteristics of the ethnos (*ugsaatan*) under study and the land and locality they inhabit; 2. the change in the life and consciousness of the herders during the people's revolutionary years; and 3. new material items introduced into herder families during the revolutionary years (Tserenkhand 1965 [2005]: 206). This research resulted in a monograph published in 1972 under the title *Hödöö aj ahuiin negdelchdiin örh ger, ger ahui*' (Households and Domestic Life of the Collective Members in Rural Economy).

In the 1970s Tserenkhand's research was concerned mainly with the formation of the socialist way of life among Mongolian herders and the extent to which they developed a new psychology as a result of engaging in collective production. Particular attention was paid to the changes in the families and households of herders. The main change, she discovered, was in the women's status within households where they now enjoyed equality with men. Tserenkhand also documented the increasing number of women becoming household heads, based on ability rather than gender. This was lauded, for gender equality meant that women were liberated from all kinds of stricture, customary and religious, and could actively participate in the socialist production. In 1981 she published this research in a monograph with the title *Negdelch malchdyn aj baidal* (Mode of Living of the Collective Herders).

Mongolian ethnologists were not simply celebrating new life. They were in fact documenting the 'processes' of social change of an epical scale. To a certain degree, they were also helping the MPRP to build new socialist Mongolian

rituals and symbols. Tserenkhand, for instance, justified her research by quoting words from a speech made to propagandists by B. Lhamsüren, the secretary-general of the MPRP Central Committee: 'In our (country) there have been no fixed rules in people's customs with regard to marking anniversaries, marriage, awarding of medals, and receiving education and developing professional skills. Since properly marking the special events encountered in people's lives is significant for the education of our citizens, especially our youth, with proper morality it is correct to retain a progressive tradition of national customs and enrich them with new content' (Tserenkhand 1972 [2005]: 20). Such articulations from the party leadership gave ethnologists an opportunity to study ancient customs without too much constraint, though always following the principle of what is called '*avah-geeh*', determining what to retain from the past and what to eliminate.

It is notable that most of the researches conducted during this period were carried out among the Halh. Tserenkhand's research was conducted among the Halh Mongols in Arhangai and Övörhangai provinces, the heartland of the Halh, formerly the banners of Sain Noyon Khan League. This focus on the Halh is interesting, for ethnology in Mongolia began its career by studying so-called ethnic minorities. As early as 1962 Badamhatan suggested in a survey article that more ethnographic studies were needed among the Halh (Badamhatan 1962: 73). His suggestion reflected the wider intellectual environment in Mongolia where the Halh became the focus of some of Mongolia's leading historians. For instance, Academician Sh. Natsagdorj, who headed the Institute of History for thirty years from 1962, published his landmark book *Halhyn tüüih* (The History of the Halh) in 1963. D. Gongor, the academic secretary of the Institute, published a two volume *Halh товчоон* (A Concise History of the Halh) in 1970 and 1978, respectively. It is not surprising that upon his return from Moscow in 1967, Badamhatan also began to work on the Halh, publishing an article entitled 'Borjigin Halh' in 1972.

This ethnographic focus on the Halh was in fact part of a larger socialist nation-building project. Prior to the early 1960s, as noted, ethnologists were interested in the particularity of ethnic origins and the material and spiritual cultures of some small *yastans*. In the 1970s, however, they began to assess 'ethnic processes', the formation of the united socialist Mongolian nation (*ündesten*), following theories developed by the Soviet ethnologist Yu. Bromley. Badamhatan, in a theoretical piece published in 1982, attempted to chart a Mongolian 'ethnic process'. Here he translated *ethnos* as *ugsaatan* in Mongolian, writing that the ancient Mongol *obog* and *aimag* together form an *ugsaatan*, which has a basically biological definition and continues to exist in all times. He elaborated:

Ündesten was formed at an historical stage, when capitalist society destroyed feudal society, in particular. *Ugsaatan* [on the other hand]

formed a unified descent group from the feudal period, and persisted throughout the development of society under the names of *aimag* and *yastan*. In the socialist period, as a result of social development and of changes in the culture and economy of *yastan* and *ugsaatan*, their consolidation forms a new ethnic unit, and further develops into socialist *ündesten*. (Badamhatan 1982: 9)

What this means is that the socialist Mongolian *ündesten* is achieved by the smaller *yastans* having to renounce their own identities to merge into what Badamhatan called 'the socio-political unit of the socialist Mongolian *ündesten*, which is based on the language, literature, and culture of Halh, the core group (*büleg*) of the Mongolian *ündesten*' (ibid. 10).

Accounting for such ethnic processes of forming the socialist Mongolian *ündesten* based on the Halh became the key project of the Institute of History when Badamhatan returned to the Institute to lead the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology in 1978, after a stint serving as second secretary-general of the Central Committee of the Mongolian Youth League from 1972 to 1977. For this purpose, in 1980 the Institute recruited some new researchers, including Tömörbaatarын Disan, an art designer graduated from the Leningrad Industrial Art College and Dugaryн Nansalmaа, an ethnology graduate from Leningrad University. These new recruits were to participate in a three volume book project initiated and directed by Badamhatan starting in 1981. The first volume was an ethnography of the Halh published in 1987 under the title *Halhын угсаатны зүү* (The Ethnography of the Halh) (Badamhatan ed. 1987).

In the introduction to the volume, Badamhatan justified the reason for choosing the Halh, writing that 'the Halh *yastan* are a core group among many Mongolian clan groups (*ovogton*) and ethnoses (*ugsaatan*); they played a special role in the formation of the numerous Mongolian ethnic groups (*yastan*) of the feudal era in the history of the Mongolian people, especially after the fourteenth century; and the culture of the Halh *yastan* embodies the cultural composition of all the Mongolian clan groups, hence the significance of studying Halh ethnography' (Badamhatan ed. 1987: 6).

Badamhatan called the Halh a *yastan*, an ethnic group, which appeared to be a significant departure from Sh. Natsagdorj and D. Gongor, who did not actually give any 'ethnic' designation to the Halh. And unlike Gongor who traced the Halh origin to the 8th century, Badamhatan insisted that the 'Halh Khanate' established in the mid-16th century laid the foundation for the formation of the Halh *yastan*, and 'the formative process of the Halh becoming a "*yastan*" embodying all the characteristics of "*ugsaatan*" of the feudal society took place in the 17th–20th centuries' (ibid. 48). In other words, the Halh *yastan*, as defined by Badamhatan, were not a clan-based (*ovog*) kinship group as popularly understood by many Mongolian historians, but one that had assimilated many

small groups. Badamhatan was suggesting that the Halh were a political ethnic group with its distinct territory and administrative boundary, thereby having a capacity to absorb the remaining non-Halh groups within the MPR to form the socialist Mongolian nation.

The volume was a comprehensive historical-ethnological celebration of the Halh cultural heritage at the turn of the 20th century, which was not to be discarded, but passed on to the younger generation. The importance of possessing this knowledge lies in, Badamhatan argued, enabling the Mongols to develop self-confidence in developing their own culture, while exhibiting internationalism to respect and appreciate the 'progressive' culture of other nations. The 'progressive' culture was a sanitised culture, which was not just for preservation but also to be put into good use. Thus, for instance, the knowledge of traditional kinship rules would enable people 'to know well and follow the blood line distance between relatives' (Badamhatan ed. 1987: 411).

Drawing on data collected over twenty years by the principal ethnologists of the Institute of History, and new fieldwork data collected specifically for the project between 1981 and 1984, the volume consisted of four parts: ethnogenesis, economy (pastoralism, hunting and gathering, agriculture, transportation, community and settlement), material culture (dwellings, clothing, food, and handcraft), and spiritual culture (marriage, weddings and households; folk customs and habits; folk knowledge and symbolism, folk music, folk games, festivals, and traditional worship). In the field, researchers were armed with more than 500 questions, which were then divided up between individual researchers in charge of different themes. Fieldwork was conducted in two districts (*sum*) that correspond to the old banners which had been abolished in the 1930s, particularly those where key branches of the Halh, such as the Hatagin, Urianhan, Eljgin, Olhonud and Hariad, still kept their identities.

It took another nine years to publish the second and third volumes in 1996. Originally, the second volume was planned to be on the Oirats and the third volume the Kazakhs. When they appeared, however, the third volume covered the non-Halh and non-Oirat groups: Buriad, Barga, Üjemchin, Dariganga, Tuva and Hoton. The Kazakh volume remains unpublished to date.

In 1997 the Mongolian ethnographic trilogy won the year's best book prize awarded by the Ministry of Culture. Based on decades of fieldwork, the books recorded the life and culture of the Mongol groups in the late 19th century and early 20th century, which now constitute the intangible heritage of the Mongols. Written by Mongolia's best ethnologists, the three volumes hold a special place in the scholarly history of Mongolia.

RINCHEN AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC AND LINGUISTIC ATLAS

Not all ethnologists were based at the Institute of History. B. Rinchen, who laid the foundation for Mongolia's ethnology together with Tseveen, was based in the Institute of Language and Literature. In 1963 Rinchen led a research team to study the dialects and ethnology of the Buryats in Mongolia. The key publications of this research included Sumyabaatar's *Buriadyn ugiin bichees* (Buryat Genealogies) published in 1966 and Rinchen's *Mongol Ard Ulsyn Hamnigan ayalguu* (The Khamnigan Dialect in the People's State of Mongolia) published in 1968.

A monumental achievement in the 1960s was the publication of a two volume *Mongol Ard Ulsyn ugsaatny sudlal, helnii shinjleliin atlas* (Ethnographic and Linguistic Atlas of the People's State of Mongolia) internally printed in 1969 and officially published in 1979. Edited by Rinchen, the key contributors of the *Atlas* included linguists, historians, and geographers. No ethnologists from the Institute of History participated in it.

The first volume of the *Atlas* contains two parts. The first part is a general atlas, containing the locations of the source-providers, routes of foreign and Mongolian scholars' expeditions from 1921 to 1970 when the book was completed, organised by the Institute of Scriptures and Manuscripts and its successors. The second part is the 'ethnographic studies' mapping the following items: ancient states beginning with Hunnu (Xiongnu) to the MPR administrative divisions until 1970, monasteries and temples, lineages (*ovog*), dairy products, wild roots, fruits and vegetables, agriculture, Mongolian yurts, transportation, literary monuments, including stone inscriptions, the spread of the Square script, Tod script and Arab script, and finally epics and their distribution. The second volume is the atlas of Mongolian language, its phonetic (vowel and consonant) variations and their geographical distributions.

In the original publications, there was a lot more information, containing, for instance, the original Uyghur, Square, Tod, and Soyombo scripts and their Latinization, to facilitate 'the teachers and scholars who study the rich literary heritage of the Mongolian people' (Rinchen ed. 1979: 8). This was, however, omitted in the 1979 edition, which also deleted the list of names of those who provided information for the *Atlas*. The original purpose of listing the names was to demonstrate the collective undertaking of the project, a show of patriotism, and also to demonstrate the enthusiasm of the Mongolian public in collecting and preserving Mongolian cultural heritage.

What is fascinating was his discussion of the names of *ovog*, also known as *nala*, *etseg*, *eligen*, *otog*, and *yas* among various Mongolian groups. As Rinchen wrote, the ancient *ovog* names, even those appeared in the *Secret History of the Mongols* have survived until now. Some of them remain in the original places as mentioned in the book, but others have been found in other places, which 'raises numerous questions for scholars studying the ethnic origin, language, culture

and history' (ibid. 9).

The *Atlas* was a unique product. A truly collective undertaking, it cartographically illustrates the ethnographic and linguistic diversity of Mongolia, drawing on data from three sources: published books, expeditions conducted between 1921 and 1970, and most importantly Mongol individuals from all over Mongolia. On the 9th January 1967, Rinchen published on 'Ünen', the country's flagship newspaper, an article entitled 'Olny tuslamjaar бүтэх atlas' (An Atlas to be Made with the Help of the Many), in which he asked the Mongolian public, including teachers, students and pioneers, to send information for two questions: 1. what *ovog* and *yas* are there in your district? 2. What long stories and epics do people tell in your district? He then gave detailed instruction on how to collect such information. Further appeals were published in *Utga Zohiol, Urtlag* (24 March 1967), *Hödölmör* (4 April 1967), *Ünen* (21 March 1968), *Zaluuchuudyn Ünen* (1968), and *Hödölmör* (12 December 1968), where he asked the public for information about different items, such as monasteries, dairy products, and so on. In all these appeals, he promised to publish the names and addresses of all the contributors in the appendix to demonstrate that it was a collective undertaking and a work of patriotism.

Apparently, the project encountered some resistance from no other than local professional researchers. In his appeal published on *Ünen* (21 March 1968), Rinchen wrote:

Here, although there are museums and offices devoted to the study of local regions in all provinces, no single piece of information has been sent by their directors. Why is it that those who have duties to study local regions remain dead silent at the request of scientific institutions for vitally important relevant information? This is shocking and I trust that the Ministry of Culture will remind the directors of those museums and offices that they should participate and provide assistance in the study of the themes which are unavoidably related to the study of sciences and the work of studying local regions. (Rinchen 2002: 233–34)

It is not entirely clear whether the reticence was caused by a rivalry between the two Institutes, for the local regional studies offices were answerable to the Institute of History as noted above. Nor is it clear whether the Ministry of Culture actually exerted any pressure. But it is important to note that the bulk of the information in the *Atlas* pertained to so-called 'feudal' themes, ranging from monasteries to *ovog* names, to epics. The nation was, however, on the road to socialist Mongolian nation building, by-passing capitalism, a process studied by the professional ethnologists at the Institute of History.

One particular issue to which Rinchen devoted much attention, and which may indeed be the *raison d'être* for the entire project was the question of

Mongolian family. Much of Rinchen's rationale in compiling the *Atlas* can be found in a fascinating article entitled 'Urag törliin uchir' (The Matter of Kinship) published in the magazine *Zaluu Üye* (Younger Generation, No.4, 1968). There, he noted a crisis developing in the Mongolian kinship system. One particular example he mentioned was the emergence of the term 'hüühen' (girl) now used extensively in Mongolia to refer to adult women, including married women. He believed that the term was first used by monks and Chinese traders in Ikh Khüree, i.e. Ulaanbaatar, who slept around with prostitutes, who were called by the Chinese term 'yanhan', or the Mongolian word 'hüühen' euphemistically, i.e. girl. Since monks and traders enjoyed higher prestige in Mongolia, he argued that 'commoners and poor people imitated the rich monks and traders, beginning to call their own wives *hüühen*, and increasing numbers of commoners and poor people began to say that one's *hüühen* or this one's *hüühen*' (Rinchen 1968 [2002]: 238). He further wrote that many children did not know who their fathers were, thereby causing enormous kinship confusion.

Thus, for Rinchen, the purpose of ethnological studies in Mongolia was to revive kinship rules, in particular the *ovog* system, which was legitimate as it was scientific. He wrote:

Kinship rules exist among human beings, and they are called in Russian *ethnologiya*, a compound word made up of the Greek word *ethnos* meaning *ugsaatan* and *logos*, meaning *sudlal*. This compound was developed by a scholar called Mozin in 1842, and in Mongolian, it became *ugsaatny sudlal* following the compound rule. According to this discipline, there are two sets of marriage rules: endogamy and exogamy.' (ibid. 239)

Regardless of whether ethnology was solely about kinship rules, it is important that Rinchen had such a view. He complained about the increasing loss of *ovog* names, attributing it to the 'hidden and malicious policies of the Manchu conquerors' who deliberately made the Mongols use banner (*hoshuu*) names in the place of *ovog* names. The consequence was not only that the Mongols forgot the basic distinction between the Mongolian kinship categories of *yas* (bone) and *mah* (flesh), but more importantly the confusion led to close kin endogamous marriages, which often resulted in congenital diseases. He argued that in the past Mongolian genealogy books contained detailed information about diseases, and they helped Mongols to maintain a healthy stock. This tradition, he insisted, was in line with the principle of modern medical science.

THE TWILIGHT OF MONGOLIAN ETHNOLOGY AND ITS REVITALIZATION

The 1990s were an exciting decade in Mongolia's modern history when Mongolia became a democracy after seventy years of communist rule. But for Mongolian ethnology at the Institute of History, it was a year of enormous loss. Nansalma left in 1991 to work for the Mongolian National Museum, and Batnasan departed in 1998 to work as a teacher in a private university. Badamhatan passed away in 1999. The Department of Ethnology completed its mission in 1996 when the second and third volumes of the Mongolian ethnography were published and won the best book prize in the following year.

The main driving force in the 1990s was Handyn Nyambuu, a Mongolian language and literature specialist turned into a prolific ethnologist specializing in Mongolia's new ritualism. He participated in Rinchen's *Atlas* project, and he worked at the Institute of History from 1969 to 1972. After a stint as a teacher in the Hovd Province Teachers College from 1985 to 1989, he began to teach at the National University of Mongolia, where he set up a social sciences laboratory under the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1991, and in 1993 the laboratory was upgraded into a Department of Ethnology attached to the Department of History. It was not until 1995 that it became an independent department, taking over some students from the Department of History, and recruiting new students from autumn 1997.

However, Nyambuu's untimely death in 1998 left the department in limbo. Tserenkhand who was teaching a course on world ethnology was then invited to head the department in 1998, while directing the Department of Ethnology at the Institute of History after Badamhatan's death. In the next eight years, much of her energy was devoted to building this new department by introducing new Russian ethnology curriculum, following the Moscow University model she was familiar with. Among the new courses were: world ethnology, world religion, Asian-Siberian ethnology, material culture, Mongolian religious customs, Mongolian ethnography, history of psychology, Museum studies, and ethno-demography.

After Tserenkhand's retirement in 2006, the Department was headed by Lh. Munkh-Erdene, a social anthropologist trained at Japan's Hokkaido University, who initiated a new round of reform. The name was changed to the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, introducing new curriculum modelled on UK social anthropology. Under the current head, D. Bum-Ochir who obtained a PhD degree in social anthropology at Cambridge University, the Department has recently established institutional cooperation with the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU) in Cambridge to assist in the training of four of its PhD students.

Meanwhile, after more than a decade's hiatus, the Department of Ethnology at the Institute of History also began to reform under the new directorship of S.

Chuluun, a historical ethnologist who obtained his PhD degree from the Moscow University of Education. Starting in 2010 the Department changed its name to the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, and launched new fieldwork programmes. The Institute has also signed an agreement with MIASU.

While looking forward to exciting new anthropological researches in the newly revamped departments both at the National University and at the Academy of Sciences, I end this introduction by mentioning an interesting debate launched by L. Bilegt and Tserenkhand, two of the senior ethnologists at the Academy.

In the 1990s Rinchen's wish to turn *ovog* names into family names in Mongolia finally materialised when the Parliament passed a law legislating that everyone has to register with an *ovog* name, which must be printed on one's citizen's identification card. Ayuudain Ochir, a cultural historian and archaeologist, who served as director of the Institute of History from 1991 to 2001, and who was a major proponent of the revival of *ovog*, wrote a small book with J. Serjee in 1993 entitled *Hentii aimgiinhny ovgiin tovch lavlah, ugiin bichig sergeeh zövlömj* (A brief reference of *ovogs* of the people in Hentii province: advice for reviving genealogy books), and in 1996 the two authors published *Mongolchuudyn ovgiin lavlah* (Reference of Mongolian *Ovogs*) listing hundreds of ancient *ovogs* spread across Mongolia. This became a reference handbook for many Mongols to adopt their *ovog* names.

Bilegt and Tserenkhand strongly disagreed with Ochir's view on *ovog*. In a joint article entitled "*Ovog*" *hemeeh ner tomyoony orchin üyeiin oiloltyg sudlasan urdchilsan düngees*' (From the early result of a study of the contemporary understanding of the term '*ovog*') published in 2003 (Tserenkhand and Bilegt 2003 [2005]), they argued that Mongolian scholars have been misled by the famous Russian Mongolist scholar Boris Vladimirtsov's interpretation of *ovog* in the 11th–12th centuries as a unit of social organisation consisting of members sharing the same kinship in his book *The Social System of the Mongols: Mongolian Nomadic Feudalism* posthumously published in 1934. 'The *ovog* name', they argued, 'was the name of a unit of social structure of the nomadic herders in the era concerned; it was not an ethnonym, nor a name of kinship relationship, still less a "familiya, surname"; its origin and customisation was not just related to a person's name, it was a category of social relationship served to clarify the name of an individual' (ibid: 140). They did not think that Mongol herders actually remembered or had *ovog* names after the founding of the Great Mongolian State in the thirteenth century, so the recent attempts to revive *ovog* names were, in their view, founded on a shaky academic ground. The article included some interesting data based on interviews with some senior Halh Mongols born as early as 1918 in Hentii province. When asked about the *ovog* names mentioned in Ochir and Serjee's 1993 book, none apparently remembered that any *ovog* names were in use when they were young. Their knowledge of the *ovog* names came exclusively from books and newspapers.

Bilegt and Tserenkhand's research was fascinating not because they were disputing the findings of another scholar, but because ethnologists in Mongolia were involved in debating an issue of vital social and political importance. Academic debates of this kind should be encouraged to stimulate further research. And it is in such debates that ethnologists and anthropologists find common ground to promote critical scholarship in Mongolia.

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