



Russian Policy Towards Mongolia, 1911–1952

When Mongolia Fought the
Red

Batsaikhan Ookhnoi Emgent

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Dedicated to my grandfather Byamba Darjaa, and my grandmother Khunbish Suren; to my father Ooknoi Chuluun and my mother Dulmaa Byamba, who shaped me into the person I am today. Your unwavering belief in me has been my greatest strength. I am deeply grateful for your patience, wisdom, and unconditional love.

FOREWORD

Dr in Mongolian history and Professor B. Ookhnoi Emgent presents to you, dear reader, a monograph on a highly critical subject in Mongolian history—the struggle for independence and sovereignty.

The topic of Mongolia's fight for self-determination has remained largely unexplored by historians and researchers. Although Mongolia restored its sovereignty in 1911, the lack of recognition from both China and Russia led the international community to remain passive observers. Nevertheless, Mongolian leaders firmly believed that securing Russian support was of paramount importance in their struggle for independence. Consequently, in 1912, Mongolia signed the Mongolia–Russia Friendship Treaty, albeit under conditions that included numerous concessions to Russia.

Following the signing of this treaty, Tsarist Russia engaged in secret negotiations with China, culminating in the 1915 Khiagta Tripartite Treaty. This agreement relegated Mongolia to the status of a self-governing autonomy under Chinese suzerainty. Russia and China maintained this stance until the 1940s, and Mongolia's full sovereignty was not officially recognized until 1946.

Given the limited historical research on this subject, the significance of this monograph is particularly noteworthy. Professor Batsaikhan delves into this underexplored topic by meticulously examining crucial historical sources. Notably, his analysis of a letter sent by His Excellency Bogd Khan to the Emperor of Japan introduces a novel perspective on Mongolia's

diplomatic efforts, offering valuable insights not only for historians and researchers but also for the general reader.

Additionally, this monograph examines the stance of the Outer Mongolian authorities, the role of Bogd Khan and the motivations behind his policies, as well as various accounts of Russian General R. F. Ungern's activities in Mongolia. Furthermore, it provides a critical reassessment of Soviet Russia's policies toward Mongolia from the 1920s onward, along with an analysis of the geopolitical strategies of world powers and their consensus on Mongolia's status.

In sum, Professor Batsaikhan's monograph is a comprehensive academic contribution that significantly advances the study and understanding of Mongolian history. While no work can satisfy every reader, I am confident that this research will serve as a valuable resource for those seeking a deeper understanding of Mongolia's complex historical trajectory.

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PREFACE

In this study, I seek to explore the correlation between the concepts of the “nation-state” (in English) and “государство-нация” (in Russian) in the context of Mongolian national independence and sovereignty. The concept of the nation-state emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, referring to a political entity that exists as an autonomous and independent state within clearly defined borders. This framework encompasses elements such as language, culture, and national traditions.

It is evident that nation-states are fundamentally rooted in national movements. Mongolia, too, was established as a result of the Mongolian national movement, which began in the early 20th century. Throughout this period, Mongolians faced numerous challenges in their struggle to attain and maintain nationhood. They not only forged a distinct national identity but also actively defended it.

In this monograph, I aim to present my perspective on key historical events that shaped Mongolia’s national trajectory, including the national revolution of 1911, the Kyakhta Treaty and its role in defining Mongolia’s international status, Mongolia’s geopolitical situation following the treaty’s conclusion, the liberation of Urga from Chinese occupation by Baron Ungern, the establishment and functions of the new government, the activities of the Soviet Red Army in Mongolia, Soviet Russia’s policies toward Mongolia, the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern’s approach to Mongolian affairs, and Mongolia’s involvement in Soviet Russia’s broader Far Eastern strategies.

I argue that the policies pursued by Soviet Russia and its leader, Joseph Stalin, toward Mongolia and the Far East represented a continuation of the Russian Empire's eastern diplomacy at the turn of the 20th century. The central objective of this study is to examine whether historical evidence supports or challenges this hypothesis.

Previous studies on Russian policy toward Mongolia in the early 20th century have tended to overlook the significance of Mongolia to Russia as early as the 19th century. As a result, the prevailing view has been that Russia only began to show considerable interest in Mongolia during or after the national revolution of 1911. In this study, I seek to present and analyze the policies pursued by both Tsarist and Soviet Russia up until the mid-20th century and their impact on Mongolia's political development. Additionally, I aim to address and correct misconceptions in the historiography regarding Soviet policies toward Mongolia in the 1920s.

I argue that Russia's approach to Mongolia was primarily driven by economic interests, with political considerations playing a secondary role.

Through this research, I contend that during the Mongolian national revolution of 1911, the Mongolian people's aspiration to restore national independence coincided with Russia's economic and political interests. Throughout the 20th century, Mongolia's struggle for national independence and sovereignty was fundamentally a struggle for the establishment of a Mongolian nation-state. This process unfolded in several stages, ultimately leading to the consolidation of Mongolia as a distinct nation that successfully freed itself from Qing influence. In this regard, I argue that contemporary Mongolia fully meets the criteria of a modern nation-state.

While Mongolia's national independence was ultimately achieved through the efforts and determination of the Mongolian people, the role of its northern neighbor, Russia, was also significant, providing crucial support throughout this process. This study further examines the internal struggle within Mongolia between national democratic leaders who sought to develop the country along a non-Communist path and those who aligned with the Comintern and the Soviet Communist Party, advocating for a socialist model of development.

In this study, I examine the strategic interests and policies of the Soviet Union regarding Mongolia, with particular focus on whether Joseph Stalin, the supreme leader of the USSR, had a clear understanding of the situation in Mongolia. Additionally, I explore why Mongolia's independence was among the first conditions Stalin put forth at the Yalta Summit in exchange for the Soviet Union's declaration of war on Japan.

While numerous Mongolian and foreign scholars have addressed these issues, I aim to contribute to this discourse by utilizing newly released archival materials to clarify the nature of the contacts between Mongolian leaders and Stalin, how they informed him about Mongolia, and his broader strategic vision concerning the country.

For this revising investigation, I have drawn upon a range of sources, including recently declassified archival documents from the Russian Federation and Mongolia, records on Japanese foreign relations, and newly published works by Japanese historians.

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
March, 2025

Batsaikhan Oookhnoi Emgent

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I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor, and Academician Badamyn Lhamsuren, for his invaluable guidance; to Professor Sanjin Damdinsuren, a distinguished scholar of Mongolian history; to Professor Oka Hiroki, a renowned Japanese Mongolist; and to Professor Zorigtyn Lonjid of the National University of Mongolia, who edited this book in Mongolian. I am also profoundly grateful to Dr. Balázs Szalontai of Hungary, who edited the English version of this work.

Furthermore, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, the staff of the Institute of International Studies, and the Center for Northeast Asian Studies at Tohoku University for their support. I am especially grateful to Makoto Tachibana and Nakamura Masaki, Japanese Mongolists, for their assistance in collecting archival and library materials. My heartfelt thanks also go to my close friend Ravjiryn Davaajav for his efforts in preparing the manuscript and to Dr. Lubsanvandan Ouyngerel and Ouyngerel Adiya for their work in translating this book into English. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Zolboo Dashnyam, Director of Institute of International Studies, MAS and Mr. Gantulga Lkhagva, the Mongolian Libraries Consortium for their support in this publication and to Mr. Jacob Dreyer, Senior Editor and Ms. Ashwini Elango, Editor, Palgrave Macmillan company for the publication my book by Springer Nature.

Declarations The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this monograph.

ACRONYMS

This study examines the strategic interests and policies of the Soviet Union regarding Mongolia, with a particular focus on Joseph Stalin's understanding of Mongolia's geopolitical significance. It explores why Mongolia's independence was among the key conditions Stalin set at the Yalta Summit for the Soviet Union's declaration of war on Japan. While previous research has addressed aspects of Soviet-Mongolian relations, this study utilizes newly declassified archival materials from Russia and Mongolia, as well as Japanese sources, to clarify the interactions between Mongolian leaders and Stalin and to assess his broader strategic vision for Mongolia.

The research argues that Soviet policy toward Mongolia was primarily driven by economic interests, with political considerations being secondary. It also highlights the convergence of Mongolian national aspirations and Russian strategic objectives during the 1911 revolution. Additionally, the study investigates the internal political struggle between Mongolian democratic nationalists and Communist-aligned leaders.

By incorporating previously unexplored sources, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Soviet-Mongolian relations and the role of Mongolia in broader Soviet Far Eastern strategy. The findings provide insight into Mongolia's historical path to sovereignty and its significance in regional power dynamics.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prof. Batsaikhan Ookhnoi Emgent is a distinguished historian specializing in Mongolian history. He is a Senior Research Scientist and Head of the Russian Department at the Institute of International Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Born in Bayankhongor, Mongolia, he has made significant contributions to the study of Mongolia's political and diplomatic history.

Professor Batsaikhan earned his Sc.D. in Mongolian History from the Mongolian Academy of Sciences in 2002 with a dissertation on 'Mongolia's independence and the Kyakhta Treaty of 1915'. He previously obtained a Ph.D. (1995) from the same institution, focusing on 'Mongolia's national democratic development (1921–1932)', and an M.A. in History (1985) from Irkutsk State University, Russia, where he studied 'Mongolian-Soviet relations'.

With an academic career spanning nearly four decades, he has held key positions, including Director General of the National Archives of Mongolia (1996–2000) and Senior Researcher at the Institute of History. He has also been a visiting scholar at institutions such as Cambridge University, Humboldt University, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Shimonoseki City University, Tohoku University, and the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies.

His major publications include "Mongolian Independence and the Kyakhta Treaty of 1915" (2002), "Mongolia: Becoming a Nation-State

(1911–1946)” (2005), and “A History of Mongolia: Bogdo Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, The Last Emperor of Mongolia” (2008, 2011). His research continues to shape contemporary understanding of Mongolia’s modern history.

Website: <http://iis.ac.mn>.

ABBREVIATIONS

CC	Central Committee, refers to the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
CCC	Central Control Commission, a key organization within the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party responsible for overseeing discipline and ensuring party members followed the party's policies
Comintern	Communist International, an organization founded in 1919, aimed at encouraging worldwide communist revolution and guiding communist parties in different countries, including the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP). It played a central role in the spread of Bolshevik influence throughout Asia
CPSU	The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, at some points known as the Russian Communist Party, All-Union Communist Party, and Bolshevik Party, and sometimes referred to as the Soviet Communist Party (SCP), was the founding and ruling political party of the Soviet Union

ECCI	Executive Committee of the Comintern, responsible for overseeing and coordinating the activities of communist parties across the world, including Mongolia
KMT	Kuomintang
Manchukuo	A puppet state established by Japan in 1932 in northeastern China, which was not recognized by the Soviet Union or Mongolia
Mongolian Commission of the ECCI	Executive Committee of the Comintern, the body that oversaw the implementation of Comintern policies in Mongolia. It included several Soviet officials and played a key role in guiding Mongolia's transition to socialism
MPP	Mongolian People's Party, was formed in the town of Khyahta, influenced by Soviet ideals. A precursor to the MPRP, this organization was founded under Soviet guidance, with the assistance of the Mongol-Tibetan Division, to promote communism in Mongolia before the formal establishment of the MPRP. The political party that played a central role in the Mongolian revolution and early governance
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic, the socialist state of Mongolia from 1924 to 1992, closely aligned with the Soviet Union
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, a political party formed in Mongolia in 1921, which later played a leading role in the Mongolian revolution and the establishment of a socialist government aligned with the Soviet Union
MPRP CC	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee, the ruling communist party's highest decision-making body in Mongolia at

	the time, responsible for responding to the rebellion
Politburo	Political buro, the highest decision-making body of the Communist Party of Russia, which made critical decisions regarding the course of the Mongolian Revolution and Soviet intervention. The Politburo discussed and decided on policies, including support for rural leftists in Mongolia
RC(b)P	The Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
Red Party	Bolshevik Party, refers to the Soviet Communist Party that overthrew the Tsar in Russia and sought to spread its ideology to Mongolia. The term is used pejoratively in the context of Mongolian resistance
RGANI	Russian State Archives of Modern history
RGASPI	Russian State Archives of Social and Political History
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, commonly known as the Soviet Union, was a transcontinental country that spanned much of Eurasia from 1922 to 1991

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The Policy of The Russian Empire Toward Mongolia in the Beginning of the 20th Century

A detailed historical analysis shows that as early as the pre-1911 period, when Mongolia was still under Manchu domination, the issue of Mongolia was already in the focus of Russian foreign policies. There is a note that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia sent nine expeditions to Mongolia. Also at the end of the nineteenth century, more precisely in 1893, P.A. Badmaev, who was an advisor to Emperor of Russia wrote a proposal “About unifying Mongolia, Tibet and East China with Russia” and delivered it to Tsar 3th Alexander.¹ Between 1870 and 1920, over 150 different expeditions visited Mongolia.

The Tsar personally authorized² a loan that Da Lama Badamdorj and Soivon Tseren-Osor, the Bogd Jebtsundamba’s secret representatives, had asked from the Russian government in 1900.

The issue of Mongolia was not only a matter of independence. On the one hand, some Russian politicians wanted to establish a line of demarcation between Mongolia and Manchuria and conclude an agreement with Japan; on the other hand, other politicians proposed a rapprochement between Mongolia and China. Some Russian leaders thought that

¹ E.M.Daryevskaya Sibiri i Mongoliya. Ochyerki russko-mongoliskix svyazyei v koncye XIX nachalye XX vyekov-Irkutsk., 1994 g. s. 264; U.V.Kuzimin. Vostochnye proekty doctora P.A.Badmaeva, Irkutsk, Izdatelstvo BGUEP, 2006.

² Rossiiskii gosudarstvyennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Fond 560.,Op.28., Ed. xr. 176.

Mongolia and China should fight against Japan, while others concluded that Mongolia and China should be offered to Japan. This divergence of opinions prevailed after 1911. This is why archival sources contain different opinions concerning the Mongolian question as it was discussed during sessions of the State Duma. The Russian military establishment, which had suffered a defeat in the Russian-Japanese war, regarded the events of 1911 “as the most favorable condition for unifying Mongolia with Russia.” Thus, they tried to persuade the government not to lose this opportunity.

They thought that unifying Mongolia with Russia would bring great benefits, and explained that “there are Mongolians who themselves wanted to enter into the orbit of Russian influence and concluded that there will not be other solution than that of unifying Mongolia [with Russia- O.B] forever.” Among those who were following this line were Minister of Defense A.N. Kuropatkin and various representatives of the military establishment, such as Yu. Kushelev, V. Tomilin, Volodimerov, and so on. They wanted to extend the borders of the Russian state as far as the Gobi Desert; Kuropatkin drew this scheme of new borders in his private notebook. The nationalist Volodimerov, a member of the Third State Duma, made the following critical speech in April 1912: “The Foreign Minister did not conduct a policy that reflects the national interests of Russia. We think that there will not be more favorable conditions to change these long borders which were established in a wrong way through the policies pursued by the Foreign Minister. It’s absolutely necessary to eliminate this triangle of land that intersects our territory, and now we just have the most favorable conditions for doing it.” At that moment, someone interrupted his speech by shouting, “It is not there, it’s not Manchuria,” but he did not pay any attention to this interruption.³

Russian Foreign Minister S.D. Sazonov did not support the opinion of the military establishment. He argued that the artificial change of borders was not in the interests of Russia, and pointed out that “historically Khalkha is not prepared to be an independent country. The reason is that there are no military, financial, and state leaders. Complete separation of Khalkha from China may result for us in a [Russian] invasion or in losing it forever. That’s why we agreed to be an intermediary between Mongolia and China. The goal of our intermediary [role] is to reach a

³ Rossiiskii gosudarstvyennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Fond 560.,Op.28., Ed. xr. 176 p. 264.

Mongolian-Chinese agreement that meets, on the one hand, the aspirations of the Mongols to maintain their independence, and on the other hand, the will of China to restore its integrity. It meets our goal to take into consideration the interests of the Mongols and simultaneously not to violate our good neighborhood relations with China.”⁴

V.I. Denisov, A.N. Arkady-Petrov, A.I. Leparsky, and other representatives of big Russian commercial and industrial interest groups believed that “Russia must handle [well] this situation which is unique in history. We must recognize a keen desire of the Mongols to achieve their independence and help them and make [Mongolia] a restored state under our protection, and that’s all. The import of Mongolian cattle is more important than the export of our goods to Mongolia,” argued the commercial interest groups at the Export Chamber meeting of the State Duma. “Mongolia must be a country that would supply Russia with nomadic livestock for centuries,” said Arkady-Petrov.⁵

Among those who were against the idea of a united Mongolia and favored transforming it into a Russian protectorate was P.N. Miliukov, a representative of the Kadet Party. He supported the opinion of the Foreign Minister that “Khalkha is not prepared for becoming an independent state,” and argued that if the Foreign Minister had decided to support the independence of Mongolia, “we shall support in a considerable dimension. We must understand that it may give a signal that Mongolia will be a protectorate.” The Kadet Party’s newspaper wrote in 1912–1913 that “we should not enter into disputes with China over Mongolia. We have no reason to transform Mongolia into a protectorate of ours.”

The representatives of the commercial groups trading with Mongolia had a different approach to this question. D.P. Pershin, the assistant of the General Governor of Irkutsk and a close friend of a rich tradesman named I.I. Lushnikov and Popov, supported Sazonov’s program to establish an autonomous Mongolia under Chinese suzerainty.

⁴ Gosudarstvyennaya дума: Stenogr. otchyety. 3-i sozyv. Spb. 1912. Syes.5 Zasyedaniye 104.13 apryelya 1912 g. s. 2167–2171.

⁵ Dyenisov V.I. Rossiya na Dalinyem Vostokye. Spb., 1913., Lyeparskii A.I. Mongoliya i myaso-prodovolistvyennoye dyelo v Rossii. Pg., 1915, Arkadii-Pyetrov A.N. Mongoliya kak mirovoi myasnoi ryezerv (Russkii export. 1912. ¹ 7, Kyuncyeli Vl. Nastoyashyeye i budushyeye torgovli s Mongoliyeyi) Prom-sti i torgovlya. 1912. ¹ 19., s. 253–257.