

Mongolia in 20th century: Socialist Modernization and Economy

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Abstract. In contemporary Mongolia democracy is considered to be the main modern criterion of the political Modernity, which distinguishes socially «developed» countries from «backward» ones. Mature democracy is supposed to be the most important achievements of Mongolia after two decades of post-socialism. This phenomenon can be explained in different ways. Some authors appeal to the historical civilizational and religious factors, which identified «the predisposition» of the Mongols to democratic values. Others tend to find the answer to the question in the politics of Mongolian reformists, who adopted effective resolution procedures. And still others pay great attention to the external factor towards Mongolia, stimulating the country to democratization.

1 Introduction

In contemporary Mongolia, democracy is considered to be the main modern criterion of the political Modernity, which distinguishes socially «developed» countries from «backward» ones. Mature democracy is supposed to be the most important achievement of Mongolia after two decades of post-socialism. This phenomenon can be explained in different ways. Some authors appeal to the historical civilizational and religious factors, which identified «the predisposition» of the Mongols to democratic values. Others tend to find the answer to the question in the politics of Mongolian reformists, who adopted effective resolution procedures. And still others pay great attention to the external factor towards Mongolia, stimulating the country to democratization [1-4].

In this context, the socialist period in the *Mongolian People's Republic* is not featured. Some authors don't see much difference between traditional Mongolia and socialist Mongolia, saying that «one autocratic system replaced another, directors replaced lords, the *General Secretary* replaced the *Bogd Khan*, partocracy – autocracy, communism - Buddhism» [5]. Socialism is regarded as the period during which the country did not follow «the way of natural historical course», having fallen behind a lot of countries for decades [6]. Generally, these works also characterize the socialist period as a meaningless and even harmful one for the development of democracy in Mongolia.

In our opinion, the socialist period formed some basic elements in the political system of the modern Mongolian society. However, problems that the current Mongolian society and the government face with today also come from the epoch of building socialism. This very thesis is going to be discussed in the paper.

2 Revolution, High Modernism and Socialist Modernization

People's Revolution of 1921 is traditionally considered to be an event which led to the socialist period of 70 years in the history of Mongolia. Although initially the goals of Mongolian revolutionists were not to build socialism and commit to the experience of the Soviet Union straightaway, the early 1920s marked the start of the fundamental changes in Mongolia. The Mongolian People's Party (MPP) under strong ideological influence of Russian bolsheviks during 1920s-1930s incorporated goals and objectives into the program directives, which would have resulted in building «an equal classless society» through breaking «the vestiges of the past», i.e. basic principles of socio-political and economic system of Mongolia during the *feudal epoch*[7].

These directives were a part of the movement, named “*High Modernism*” by American anthropologist J. Scott. It implies ambitious plans of leaders to rebuild the society and it is also based on the belief in the scientific and technological progress and a possibility in principle to create a sustainable society structure [8]. Nevertheless J. Scott mostly studies the experience of different countries of the 20th century; the ontological roots of modernism come from the Age of Enlightenment with its naive faith in eliminating negative aspects of human nature by transforming the social structure through a social revolution. Thus there arises the conviction of modernism ideologists in the necessity to neutralize everyone who interferes the process which eventually causes governmental mass terror and the suppression of individual freedom (for example, Jacobins in France at the end of the 18th century).

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Modernism is politically embodied in *mass democracy*, the triggering event of which is mass formation as one of the most important factors in the political struggle. A closed hierarchized social and political structure is typical for traditional societies with the estate system of stratification. It means that only upper estate has the full scope of political rights while the subservient mass stays mainly excluded from the political system. Meanwhile the Modernism offers the model of participatory political process according to which civil electoral rights are granted to the whole population of the country and the new configuration of political institutes based on the political participation of the masses is formed. Mass democracy, according to Ya. Shimov, is inclined to contrast traditions with novations, interests with ideals, representativeness with ideology as a form of creating new common values [9]. To this extent, radical forms of mass democracy are autocratic regimes of the 20th century, ideologically aimed at socialism and communism as well.

Another indispensable attribute of modernism has been *the emergence and institutionalization of nations* as an ideological impersonation of the masses. A. Smith, speaking of the modern nation, calls it "a modernist ideal type". In his view, the nation is an ideological movement with a set of rules: the adoption of the nation as the basic unit of the world, its recognition as the only source of political power, the right of the nation to self-determination and autonomy, as well as the priority of individual's responsibilities toward the nation [10]. Creating nations, contemporary industrial states sought to a highly simplified (transparent) structure of the society without any tribal, ethno-confessional, regional, class and other social categories. The main term of the nations' emergence, as a rule, is the development of industrial economies, democratization and the popularization of mass education [11].

The feature that distinguishes high modernism from modernism is the assurance of the omnipotence of scientific and intellectual (mainly technocratic) elite, capable of changing the natural and social conditions [8]. The ideologues of high modernism in their policy, as a rule, proceeded from the utopian ideas for the reconstruction of the society, denying other alternative legitimate ways of development so this fact has become an important prerequisite for the establishment of autocratic and totalitarian regimes.

Another important feature of high modernism is moving away from the history and tradition, ignoring the past and its heritage. In contrast to high modernism with its belief in the progressive nature of social development the tradition is characterized by the regression model of time: the world is moving away from the ideal state to decay and destruction, and therefore, any changes are dangerous and destructive.

Thomas W. Robinson outlined three features of revolutionary modernization in Asia in the 20th century as one of the variants of "high modernism". The first one is applying the western ideology (mainly the ideas of scientific, technological and social progress) to the Asian societies. Revolutionary modernization in Asian countries in particular had a collision when "this modern type of

revolution threw of the shackles of a traditional society and strove toward a better material and societal life". The second feature was manifested in equaling the concepts of "revolution" and "modernization". "States and peoples became modern only because and when, they underwent this kind of revolution". The task of performing modernization in the shortest period of time was the third feature of revolutionary modernization in Asian countries [12]. This, in turn, determined its high social and environmental cost.

Any theory of modernization is based on the ideas of developing. Socialist theories of modernization associate developing with the formation of political regimes, which control the production and distribution of resources, with the guarantees of education, healthcare and provision of basic consumption [13]. Following this the political regime in Mongolia was performing the modernization of a socialist type for most of the 20th century. Ideological positions largely determined the position and orientation of modernization in Mongolia in the 20th century. Soviet and Mongolian science interpreted revolutionary changes in Mongolia from the Marxism perspective as overcoming colonial underdevelopment, moving from feudalism to building a socialistic society.

The authors share the view that in Mongolia, as in many other countries, the state acted as the initiator and the leader of modernization during the socialist period, moreover this was caused not only by political, but also general historical factors.

The article describes socialist modernization in Mongolia being the process of emerging social institutions of a modern type through the variables that express the modernization impact on the state: constitutional directives and state-building, nation building and constructing a socialist modernized identity, sedentarization and collectivization, industrialization and urbanization, secularization.

3 Nation-building and construction of socialist modernized identity

Building a modern state demanded the formation of a political community which was new to Mongolia - the nation. During the socialist period a new model of political identity based on the communist ideology was developing. Creating state institutions of a modern type made the formation of a common political loyalty of the population necessary. The integration of social groups in Mongolia of the early 20th century previously separated by class and ethno-territorial boundaries, was launched with a series of constitutional reforms and continued by the government policy aimed at the political assimilation of the clergy, aristocracy and sub-ethnic groups.

It should be noted that ideological searching for national identity started in Mongolia in the late 19th - early 20th centuries and it proceeded largely under the influence of the Buryat bourgeois-democratic national movement, which considered the development of the Buryat-Mongols in the context of either assimilation and full integration into the Russian nation or development of Pan-Mongolian nation due to the synthesis of the

Buddhist and Western cultures. Representatives of the Buryat intelligentsia had a significant impact on the “discovery” of the Mongolian nation. By 1905 they had offered their view of the national development of the Buryats and further they actively participated in the creation of the Mongolian People's Republic.

Pan-Mongolism can be defined as national ideology, the basic idea of which is to unite the Mongolian-speaking peoples for the purpose of building an ethnically homogeneous state. The platform of this ideology mythologized memory of the medieval history of Mongolia, the modern symbol of which is the image of Genghis Khan. The main founders and followers of Pan-Mongolian mythideologeme are artistic and scientific intelligentsia - those “... classes, that have a monopoly on the world map formation...”. Pan-Mongolism made the group identity of the Mongolian-speaking multiethnic community actual. Being the first modern political ideology in Mongolia it called the community for the integration in the situation of political mobilization at the time of the empire decline.

4 Industrialization and urbanization

Mongolian authorities considered industrialization and the formation of the working class as the basic parts of the socialist society and the social supportive mechanism of a new government. According to the Report of the Party Central Committee the aims of socialism building were the following:

... development of industry and transport according to the needs of the economy, further development of the working class and development of national culture.

It should be mentioned that external forces in the face of the Soviet Union and the Comintern played the large (and perhaps even defining) role in socialist (non-capitalist) development of Mongolia. In particular, the VI Congress of the Comintern adopted the program which reported:

.. escaped from imperialism colonies economically converge, get gradually united with industrial centers of the world socialism, and resume the course of socialist construction, bypassing the phase of further development of capitalism as the dominant system, and get the opportunity of rapid economic and cultural progress.

It should be clarified that the main emphasis in these areas was made only after the Second World War with the support of the Soviet Union. This was determined by both geopolitical interests of the two countries, and increased material and technical potential of the Soviet Union. It was in 1950-1970-s when leading industrial enterprises of the country were founded, and new cities (Darkhan, Erdenet) were built up around the largest of them.

Urbanization became an integral part of industrialization. From 1926 to 1989 the population of the capital - Ulaanbaatar increased from 1.5 thousand people (0.22% of the total population) to 548.4 thousand people (26.8%). Throughout the country the proportion of urban population increased from 13 % (1927) to 57 % (1989) (1166.1 thousand people) whereby the Mongolian society of that period could be described as of the industrial type.

The growth of urban population led to appearance and institutionalization of new not nomadic types of employment. This contributed to radical changes in the social structure of Mongolia. In the 1960s the social structure of the Mongolian society takes many features of developed industrial countries. The development of economy and political system led to human wellbeing, increased life expectancy and reduced mortality. The country had a system of medical and educational institutions, financial and transport systems mostly corresponding to the average level of production and consumption in the socialist and capitalist countries.

Along with arats-cattle-farmers a large number of factory and white collar workers (civil servants, doctors, teachers, students, scientists, artists and others) took place in the economically employed population of the country. In 1956-1985s the proportion of workers, employees (and their families) increased from 25.9% to 65.1%. Along with the change of residence and occupations economic and social preferences, needs and expectations, the consumption structure of the Mongols were changing. Among other things, creating a class of urban “modernist” population, the authorities contributed to the emergence of a new political culture based on various forms and methods of political participation. Representatives of urban educated population with a politically active stance who formed the authoritative class took leadership in the protesting movement in the end of the 1980s that led to radical changes [14].

Industrialization and urbanization in Mongolia caused the destruction of the natural process in agriculture and the majority of the Mongolian population got involved in the process of goods exchange and consumption. Retail trade turnover in the 1950-1985s increased more than 12.5 times, when in 1960 it increased 3.4 times, and industrial products made 60% of retail turnover. This transformed the economy of the country into one strong unit and established a direct relationship between the macro-economic situation in the country and the welfare of the population. In this respect, the situation was not changed even after rejecting command and planning methods in the management of the country's economy after the revolution of 1990. The state and dynamics of economic development and mainly industrial sectors remained the important factors in the daily life of the population of Mongolia, and therefore had an impact on social and political processes in the country.

5 Conclusion

In spite of the opinion widely spread in the Mongolian and foreign research community, Mongolia was relatively ready to adopt a model of democracy in its modern sense not due to the political system of Genghis Khan Era, the Buddhist identity or the psychology of nomads, but much more due to the seven decades of the socialist period. These political (largely declarative) standards of the socialist regime, which often forced them, proved to be closer to the standards of Western democracy: people as the source of power and support of the state, elections as a mechanism of power legitimation, social justice

conveying the political and legal equality of citizens, civil law as the main source of political action, secularity of the policy. In particular, during the socialist period, the traditional basis of the Mongolian society which was founded on the clan principle in receiving and possessing the power was reduced. The new social structure organized during the years of socialism, social preferences and values different from those typical of the traditional society laid the foundation for the Mongolian post-socialist society. The crisis of the socialist system in the second half of the 1980s shattered the legitimacy of the ruling party ideology of and the socialist system as a whole, but not the foundation of the political culture formed in the era of socialism. Denying the presence of democracy during the socialist period we have to add: the socialist period in Mongolia cannot be characterized by liberal democracy which is based on broad individual rights of citizens to the freedom but it was a mass democracy.

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