Wither Mongolian Consciousness?
Or, Ethnic Politics in Mongolia in Early 20th Century

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Introduction

On 29 December 1911, the elites of Outer (“Khalkha” in Mongolian) Mongolia declared their country’s independence from the Qing empire or, in the words of Mongolian historian Uradyn E. Bulag, restored their independent ulus (Mongolian, meaning country or realm) prior to submitting to the Manchu emperors in 1691.1 From the outset, the Urga government sought to form a state comprising all the Mongols from Outer Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Tangno Uriyangqai, and Hulun Buir. However, this Pan-Mongolian movement, the first of its kind in the twentieth century, ended up in failure because, among other things, the Inner Mongolian elites refused to join their brethren in the north and chose to remain in the newly established Republic of China that succeeded the Qing empire.

This essay seeks to probe why the unification process of the Khalkha Mongols ended up in failure. Specifically, I would examine why the Inner Mongolian elites, despite their enthusiastic support for the independence cause during early 1912, chose to remain in the Chinese Republic in the end. For this reason, I would leave aside the Mongols in other parts of the Mongolian Region.

Background

In the early seventeenth century, the lands nomadized by the Mongolian peoples

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across the Inner Asian steppe were roughly divided by the Gobi Desert into Eastern
Mongolia and Western Mongolia. Eastern Mongolia, which is the subject of this
essay, could be further sub-divided into Southern/Inner Mongolia and Northern/Outer
Mongolia, depending on their location relative to the Gobi Desert/Chinese heartland.

Except for the brief interludes of unification under the rules of Chinggis Khan
and Dayan Khan in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively, the Mongols of
this region were, in the words of Owen Lattimore, a collection of tribes rather than a
people and, as typical of all tribal politics, they were at chronic war with each other.²

Notwithstanding the internal divisions, the Mongols of the Qing period shared
among them the consciousness of being members of the Mongolian ulus, which was
rooted in their common customs, language, lineages, and traditions of rule. Mongolian
chronicles of the time showed that, through the Qing period, the Mongols continued
to see the Mongolian banners set up by the Manchus as collectively forming single
ulus, on a level with that of Han China, Tibet, and Korea. Neither political disunity
within the ulus nor its incorporation into the larger Qing empire disrupted their sense
of a historically continuous domain.³

The Wuchang uprising in October 1911 and the subsequent independence
movements (which in effect meant secession from the Qing court in Beijing, not
standing alone as independent states) that broke out in many provinces of China
proper on the eve of the empire’s collapse were basically a racial revolution
undertaken by the Han people, who generally considered themselves as conterminous

² Owen Lattimore and Urgungge Onon, Nationalism and Revolution in Mongolia (New York: Oxford
³ Christopher P. Atwood, “National Questions and National Answers in the Chinese Revolution; Or,
How Do You Say Minzu in Mongolian?” Indiana East Asian Working Paper Series on Language
and Politics in Modern China 5 (1994), p. 44.
with the Chinese nation. There was little role, in the views of Han nationalists, for the non-Han ethnic groups (mainly comprising Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans and Huis) to play in the new Chinese state that was to succeed the Qing empire. Nor did these Han nationalists think highly of these non-Han ethnic groups, as evidenced by the writings published in Chinese press during the late Qing/early Republican era. For example, an article in the leading revolutionary newspaper Minlibao 民立報 stated,

“Although China is composed of five peoples, actually only the Han have national consciousness and political understanding. The Manchus and Huis lag behind. The Mongols and Tibetans are like a herd of animals, primitive, simple-minded, and isolated. They have no idea what national politics are all about.”

The rising Han racial nationalism, no doubt, would cause great anxiety among the Mongols, and would intensify the Mongolian consciousness, which could evolve into Mongolian nationalism and bring all the Mongolian people together to form a state of their own. However, this failed to materialize as the Inner Mongols chose to remain in the new Chinese Republic instead of joining the independent Outer Mongolian state.

This begs the question, Why the Inner Mongols refused to join the Pan-Mongolian movement led by the Khalkha Mongols in the early twentieth century? To answer this question, we must examine how the Chinese Republican government and the Inner and Outer Mongolian elites interacted with one another during the early twentieth century. First, we would look at how the Han Chinese changed their views about the roles of non-Han ethnic groups in the new republic.

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4 “Zhonghua minguo zhiding xin xianfa zhi xianjue wenti,” 中華民國制定新憲法之先決問題 [Problems that must be solved before deciding on a new constitution for the Republic of China], Minlibao 民立報, 27 Jan. 1912.
“Great China vs China Proper” Debate

Shortly after the Wuchang uprising a debate emerged in China between proponents of the Greater China principle (namely, the new republic should encompass the five major ethnic groups—Hans, Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and Huis) and those of the China proper position (namely, the top priority of the new republic was to preserve China proper whilst the rest could be included or not). Eventually, it was the Greater China principle that prevailed.⁵ For example, the above-quoted Minlibao stated in a front-page editorial in early November 1911, “Once we have wrought our revenge and the republic is established, then we must combine the Huis, Tibetans, Mongols, and Manchus into one state with equal rights.”⁶

However, as Joseph W. Esherick notes, the arguments that favored the integration of the five races into a single nation had two prominent themes: the loss of the frontiers would expose China proper to partition; and the Mongols and Tibetans were too weak and backward to protect themselves from foreign control, so they should be assimilated and modernized under Chinese leadership.⁷ In this respect, the views of the Han intellectuals of the early Republican period were no different from those of the Qing officials who implemented xinzheng reforms (1901-1911) in the borderlands, or the Qing emperors since Kangxi. That is, Mongolia (and other frontier regions) must be retained as China’s screen against foreign invasion. These arguments are best summarized by the following:

“Mongolia, the Hui lands (i.e. the Eastern Turkistan or Xinjiang), and Tibet have

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⁶ “Minguo qingzhu wen,” 民國慶祝文 [In celebration of the Republic], Minlibao, 7 Nov. 1911.

long been included in our territory. Together they formed China’s *pingfan* (border screen). If Mongolia were lost, it would be impossible to protect the lands north of the Yellow River. If the Muslim frontier were lost, then the *Guanzhong* (literally meaning “Inside the Passes”, referring to the region between Shaanxi and Henan provinces) could not rest in peace. If Tibet were lost, the southwestern provinces could not sleep easily. If we wish to defend China proper and the northeastern provinces, we must first defend Mongolia, the Hui lands, and Tibet. But in terms of race, religion, and customs, these lands are different from us. If we do not first promote the ideal of nation-state and explain the relationship of the races, once the old regime is overthrown and the new state is established, the Mongols, Huis, and Tibetans may secede from our country and follow some foreign powers.”

Though the “Greater China” principle prevailed in the end, no convincing arguments could be put forth by the Chinese as to why the five races should be united to form a new state. Moreover, considering the disparaging views expressed in the Chinese press about non-Han ethnic groups and, particularly, the Mongols (it was commonplace in the Chinese press to refer to the Mongols as *YuMeng* (ignorant Mongols)), no wonder that the latter would find the promises of equal citizenship in the new republic empty slogans. For some Mongolian elites (most of whom were from Inner Mongolia) stationed in Beijing, their distrust of Republicanism and the concept of *Wuzu yijia* (五族一家) was strong. With a view to taking concerted action to protect their interests against the upcoming monumental changes, these Mongolian elites formed a *Menggu Wanggong Lianhe Hui* (蒙古王公聯合會, Federation of Mongolian Princes and Dukes) in the capital city on 24 October 1911. They first

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8 “Lianhe Han-Man-Meng-Hui-Zang zhuzhi mindang yijianshu,” 聯合漢滿蒙回藏組織民黨意見書 [Memorandum on uniting the Han, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans in a People’s Party], *Minlibao*, 21-22 March 1912.
sought to support the Manchu royal house against the republic and when this failed, some of them, including the reform-minded Prince Gungsangnorbu, even threatened to declare Inner Mongolia’s independence from China.⁹

**Republican China Seeks to Woo the Mongols**

Initially, most Chinese did not take Outer Mongolia’s declaration of independence in 1911 seriously as they were under an illusion that the Khalkhas would, sooner or later, join hands with other rebellious provinces in the heartland to form the new Chinese state. However, when the Chinese government subsequently realized that the Outer Mongols were committed to separating from China and to establishing their own state, it tried to woo the Mongols back by means of coercion and persuasion. In addition to threatening military suppression of Mongolian uprisings for the independence cause, one of the measures of persuasion, taken by the Chinese Republican government, first the Provisional government in Nanjing and later the government in Beijing, was the promotion of the concept of *Wuzu yijia.*

On New Year’s Day 1912, Sun Yatsen, the provisional president of the newly established Republic of China, declared,

“The foundation of the state lies in its people. Uniting the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and the Tibetan regions in one state, and the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan nationalities as one people—this is national unification.”¹⁰

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¹⁰ *Zhonghua Minguo Linshi Da Zongtong Xuanyan Shu* 中華民國臨時大總統宣言書 [The...
On 12 February 1912, the Nanjing Provisional Government announced seven clauses of favorable treatment to the Manchus, Mongols, Huis, and Tibetans. According to these clauses, the four non-Han ethnic groups were to enjoy a status equal to that of the Han Chinese, receive protection of private property, hold original inherited degrees of nobility, obtain assistance for impoverished princes and nobles, and be free to practice traditional religious beliefs.\(^{11}\)

The provisional government’s call for uniting the five races was echoed by the Manchu court, as evidenced by a document attached to the Imperial Edict of Abdication issued by the new Empress Dowager in the name of the boy-emperor Xuantong on the same date. The document, entitled *Conditions of Treatment for the Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan Races* 滿蒙回藏各族待遇條例 read,

“They (the Manchus, Mongols, Huis, and Tibetans) enjoy equal status with Han Chinese; their existing private properties are protected; the hereditary titles of these princes and dukes remain unchanged; (the State) would help those princes and dukes whose livelihoods are in distress; …..Manchus, Mongols, Huis, and Tibetans are free to practice their existing religious beliefs.”\(^{12}\)

This was followed by an order issued by Yuan Shikai, who assumed presidency of the Republic of China after reaching a compromise with the revolutionaries in southern China. The order stated,

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“Now the (Chinese) State is a republic of five nationalities. Since Mongolia, Tibet and Manchuria are part of China’s territory, and the Mongolian, Tibetan and Manchu peoples are all citizens of the Republic of China, usage of the imperial term “fanshu” (vassal state) should be discontinued. Now we should prepare a comprehensive plan to unify administration of the Mongolian, Tibetan and Hui areas with the goal of minzu zhi datong (Great unity of all peoples).”

Notwithstanding the Republican government’s repeated propagation of concepts such as wuzu yijia and minzu datong, etc., it was highly doubtful whether the non-Han peoples really enjoyed a status equal to that of Han-Chinese in the new state. As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, Han Chinese had long held a disparaging view about the frontier peoples, and that the latter’s inclusion into the new Chinese state was premised on their assimilation of Han culture. No wonder that Mongolian-Chinese scholar Zhou Jinghong has argued that the various policies executed by the Republican government showed that wuzu yijia and minzu datong were, in essence, a national assimilation led by the Han race, not a datong under the principle of national equality.

To back up its words, the Republican government started to strengthen the civil administration of Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. On 12 April 1912, Yuan Shikai issued an order to the effect that Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang should no longer be treated as vassals and, hence, the Lifanyuan (reorganized as Lifanbu in 1906) should be abolished and its responsibilities taken up by the Interior Ministry. A MengZang Shivuchu (The Office of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs) was

13 “Linshi da Zongtong Yuan Shikai mingling,” 至時大總統袁世凱命令 [Provisional President Yuan Shikai’s order], The Eastern Miscellany 東方雜誌, vol. 8, no. 12, June 1912.
established on 8 May 1912 under the Ministry. On 9 July 1912, the Office was reorganized into the MengZang Shiwuju 蒙藏事務局 (Bureau of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs) under the direct supervision of the prime minister, with a view to demonstrating the importance the central government attached to the management of Mongolia and Tibet.

To allay the uneasiness of the Mongols about the new republic, the Beijing government, in addition to the seven clauses of favorable treatment to the four non-Han ethnic groups, further emphasized its intention to preserve the rights and privileges of the old Mongolian ruling classes by issuing the Regulations of the Treatment of the Mongols 蒙古待遇條例 on 21 August 1912. This was probably made in response to the requests submitted by the Menggu Wanggong Lianhe Hui. The Regulations stipulated that the Mongolian tribes would no longer be treated as vassal states but as a part of neidi 内地 (the inner provinces) and, hence, documents from the central government to Mongolian offices should not use terms like lifan 理藩 (managing vassals), zhimin 殖民 (establishing a colony), or tuozhi 拓殖 (colonizing); the ruling power of the Mongolian princes and nobles would remain intact; the Mongolian princes and nobles would inherit titles and ranks, and enjoy privileges in their banners as before; the titles of the Mongolian khutukts (living Buddhas) and lamas would remain the same; while only the central government had the right to negotiate with foreigners and to take charge of foreign affairs regarding Mongolia, it would ask local administrative organs to discuss important issues of their jurisdictions with the concerned banners and to carry out the resolutions; the hereditary salary of the Mongolian princes and nobles would be paid liberally; etc.15

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With the promulgation of the Regulations, the Republican government, by means of legislation, assured the Mongolian noblemen and lamas of the preservation of their traditional privileges and rights, and the protection of their ruling power. It also defined the relationship between the State and Mongolia. Moreover, the Regulations sought to refute the Outer Mongols’ propaganda that the new Chinese government was out to destroy Mongolian political system, traditions, and religion. An indication of the success of the Regulations was that, on 9 September in the same year, Prince Gungsangnorbu accepted the Republican government’s appointment as the Director of MengZang Shiwuju, an act that symbolized the trend that the Inner Mongols had finally opted to return to the Chinese regime in their pursuit of greatest interests.

The above regulations were, in Bulag’s words, part of the Chinese Republican government’s “going imperial” strategy that sought to appease the Mongols by tapping into the heritage of the former Qing empire’s techniques of rule in the service of nationalism, even though such measures violated the very sensibility of nationalist ideology. During 1912-1913, the Chinese government, like its Manchu predecessor, repeatedly conferred titles and material benefits to Mongolian noblemen, jasaks (banner chief), and lamas who supported the Republic, and this practice continued.

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17 Huang Lisheng, Menggu yi shi yu Zhongguo ren tong de jiu ge : min chu wai Menggu du li yun dong yu nei Menggu de fan ying [An Entanglement between Mongolian Consciousness and Identification with China: The Independent Movement of Outer Mongolia and the Reaction of Inner Mongolia during Early Republican Period], (Taipei: Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, 2002), pp. 63-64.

until 1915. For example, the sixth Janggiya Khutuktu, who was the most senior lama in Inner Mongolia, was awarded the title of “Hongji guangming da guoshi” (Great State Master with Complete Benediction and Radiance) and a yearly salary of 10,000 yuan, and his family members were awarded nobility titles in recognition of his allegiance to the Republic. It was reported that, between 1912 and 1915, a total of 240 khutukts and lamas, 135 princes and dukes, and 301 tajis (Mongolian nobleman) had been conferred titles and material benefits by the Republican government.19

In addition, Beijing also moved to familiarize the Inner Mongols with the idea of a republic. In November 1912, as a measure to counteract Urga’s appeal for national unification of Outer and Inner Mongolia, the Republican government started to send out representatives as Comforting Emissaries to Inner Mongolian leagues to explain the meaning of the republic. The message was that president of the republic was chosen by the people for his talent and virtue and, under the principle for equality of the races, an appropriate and qualified Mongol could become president of the republic as well.

**Inner Mongols’ Response to Republican China’s Overture**

The various measures taken by the Republican government to placate the Inner Mongols appeared to have worked. Between 28 October and 1 November 1912, the ten banners of the Jirem Leagues held a conference at the Changchun city of Jilin, which was also attended by representatives of the Chinese government. At the

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conference, the state representatives repeatedly assured the Mongolian banners of the validity of the Regulations of the Treatment of the Mongols and the concept of *wuzu gonghe* 五族共和. Finally, upon the State’s promise that the banners would be maintained (i.e. no further expansion of cultivation on Mongolian land) and no establishment of provinces, the Inner Mongolian representatives agreed to accept the various proposals put forth by the Republican government, including, among others, the stationing of State garrisons at strategic points in the Mongolian frontiers; Mongolian princes and *jasaks* would not borrow foreign loans without the Central government’s permission; Mongols would not mortgage their properties to foreigners so as to protect (the nation’s) territorial integrity; Mongols’ implementation of *xinzheng* reforms must be approved by the State; Mongols should abide by the laws of the Republican government; etc.²⁰

Judging from the agreements reached at the Changchun conference, it was clear that the Inner Mongolian elites were further drawn to the orbit of Republican China. In other words, they were distancing themselves from the Urga government.

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the measures taken by the Khalkhas in their tug-of-war with Republican China over the allegiance of Inner Mongolia.

**Khalkhas’ Overture to Inner Mongolia**

Since their declaration of independence, the Khalkhas continuously kept their brethren in Inner Mongolia informed of the developments in Outer Mongolia and encouraged them to join the new Mongolian state. One of the documents dispatched from Urga to the Inner Mongols accused Chinese officials of “unjustly managing their

internal affairs, exploiting the Mongolian masses, destroying their religion, and ignoring their old traditions.”21 Apparently, the Urga government was appealing to the Inner Mongols by exploiting the latter’s Mongolian consciousness. Moreover, like the Chinese government, Urga also resorted to “going imperial” measures to woo Inner Mongolian nobility by promising titles and material benefits to those who were willing to pledge allegiance to it. On the face of it, Urga’s appeal was quite successful because, according to one source, 38 out of the 49 Inner Mongolian banners had expressed their wish to join the newly independent Mongolian state.22 There were also reports that the Jalait Banner of Inner Mongolia had secretly purchased firearms from Germany with an intention to expulse the Han Chinese settlers out of their territory.23

The following submissions by Inner Mongolian banners should give us a glimpse as to why they chose to join the Khalkhas’ independence movement. For example, a petition from the Avga Nar banner of the Xilingol League (which was close to Outer Mongolia geographically) expressed their worries about the erosion of Mongolian tradition and religion under the new Chinese regime:

“In the sixth month of this year, we were frightened after receiving an order from the government of Yuan Shi-kai to cut our pigtails if we have them….and the lamas were ordered to grow their hair and become laymen on the pretext that Buddhism is


23 First Historical Archives 中國第一歷史檔案館 (Beijing), 75-573, ‘Jilin xinanlu fenxunbingbeidao Meng Xianyi zhi Zhao Erxun han’吉林西南路分巡兵備道孟憲彝致趙爾巽函 [A Letter from Meng Xianyi, bingbeidao (rectifying officer) of Jilin Southwestern Circuit to Zhao Erxun], Zhao Erxun dangan 趙爾巽檔案 [Archives of Zhao Erxun], 12 Aug. 1912.
I cannot find any independent source that would substantiate the above allegation. Also, judging from the above-mentioned measures taken by the Republican government that sought to woo the Inner Mongols, I am inclined to disbelieve the complaint. I have quoted this complaint merely as an illustration of the grave concerns harbored by many Inner Mongols about the risks of losing their religion and traditional way of life under the Republic.

Another commonly cited ground put forth by the Inner Mongols for submitting to Urga was their memory of their glorious past under Chinggis Khan, as evidenced by the petition of the Jasagtu banner of the Jirem League, which claimed

“We treasure the sacred heritage of the Great Chinggis Khaan who was the founder of Yuan dynasty. We have decided to submit to our former ancestral nation and we shall pray for the everlasting fortune of this nation.”

Generally, the banners adjacent to Outer Mongolia (such as those in the Xilingol league) were more eager to join the new state than those neighboring China, especially the leagues (e.g. the Josotu league) that had been swamped by Chinese farmers because of their close proximity with China proper. Some Inner Mongolian noblemen, such as Rashminjuur, even went to Urga in person, bringing their subjects along with them, to support the independence movement.

As a matter of fact, some of the staunchest supporters and eager activists of the independence cause, such as Khaisan and Togtoh, were from Inner Mongolia. Khaisan was one the members of Khalkha delegation dispatched to Moscow in July 1911, whilst Togtoh was a fugitive wanted by the Manchu court for organizing armed

24 Onon and Pritchatt, Asia's First Modern Revolution, p. 35.
25 Onon and Pritchatt, Asia's First Modern Revolution, p. 31.
resistance to the state’s reclamation activities in the Gorlos Front Banner. An Inner Mongolian nobleman Udai, the *jasak* of the Horqin Right Front Banner, together with the *jasaks* of Jalait and Horqin Right Rear Banners, declared independence of their banners in response to Urga’s appeal in August 1912, and attacked Taonan in eastern Inner Mongolia, causing a lot of damage to the local Mongols. According to a letter from Zhao Erxun to President Yuan Shikai on 3 September 1912,

“Udai rebelled and repulsed the State’s soldiers at Taonan, where he burned, killed, and plundered with a lot of cruelty and savage. If we do not suppress the Mongolian bandits in Taonan as a warning to others, all the banners will follow suit, then all the *zhou-xian* (Chinese administrative units) in Manchuria will fall into enemy hands, and the hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese who live in these *zhou-xian* will lose their lives and properties…”

From Zhao’s letter, we can tell how precarious the situation in Inner Mongolia was, and how much distrust existed between Han officials and the Inner Mongols.

Based on the above discussion, it would seem that a deadlock was reached in the tug-of-war over Inner Mongolia, with neither the Khalkhas nor China emerging victorious. However, I would argue that the signing of the Russo-Mongolian Agreement on 3 November 1912 would break the impasse.

**Russo-Mongolian Agreement**

The Russo-Mongolian Agreement was a diplomatic agreement initiated by Russia designed to put pressure on China for its refusal to recognize Russia’s interest

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26 First Historical Archives 中國第一歷史檔案館 (Beijing), 75-575, ‘Fengtian dudu Zhao Erxun zhi Yuan Shikai hangao’ 奉天都督趙爾巽致袁世凱函稿 [A Letter from Zhao Erxun, Governor of Fengtian, to Yuan Shikai], *Zhao Erxun dangan* 趙爾巽檔案 [Archives of Zhao Erxun], 3 Sep. 1912.
in Outer Mongolia. From the outset, the negotiations between Russia and Outer Mongolia were acrimonious. On the one hand, Urga insisted on full independence of the new state, and its inclusion of Inner Mongolia (and Barga). However, Russia explained that it was unable to support the Mongolian request for full independence as it was obliged to keep its promise to respect China’s territorial integrity. Regarding the Mongolian request for inclusion of Inner Mongolia, I. Y. Koroskoveta, the Russian plenipotentiary representative, explained, “Uniting all Mongolian nationalities is not in the policy of the Russian Government. Since it is very important for Outer Mongolia to attain a self-rule first, it is (in) appropriate to consider that issue now.”

The Mongols were given a choice between cooperating with Russia and the preservation of their existing autonomy and a return to their previous status. Eventually, the Mongols had to accept Russia’s terms in exchange for the latter’s financial and military aid. In addition, a rumor that the negotiations between China and Russia over Mongolia were going smoothly in Beijing also helped force the Khalkhas to compromise. In return, the Russian representative also made compromises in the texts of the Agreement, such as agreeing to the use of the term “Mongolia” instead of “Outer Mongolia” (without any provision on its territory) in the Russian text, and the use of “Mongolian nation” in the Mongolian text.

The agreement was signed on 3 November 1912. Article 1 of the agreement provided that Russia would help Mongolia to uphold its autonomy, to maintain its national army, and to prevent the penetration of Chinese troops and immigrants into its territory. (The Mongolian version of the agreement contained a provision that the two sides mutually recognized each other’s government, thereby implying the new Mongolian state was independent and internationally recognized.) Article 2 provided

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that Mongolia would give Russian subjects all the privileges enumerated in the attached commercial protocol, and would not let people of another country enjoy more privileges than the Russians. Article 3 provided that Mongolia was obligated not to conclude with China or other countries any treaty that would infringe upon or modify the clauses of the agreement and its attached protocol without Russian concurrence.

The commercial protocol annexed to the Agreement provided Russian subjects privileged economic position in Mongolia, granting them the right to move freely from one place to another throughout its territory, to engage in every kind of commercial, industrial, and other business, to enter into agreements of various kinds, to import and export without payment of custom dues, and to freely develop their private business and Russian credit institution and open branches. No wonder that a Russian scholar E.M. Darevskaya observed that the Russo-Mongolian Agreement of 1912 had provided the Russians a complete freedom to expand their activities in Mongolia, “leading to the rummaging and domination of Mongolia in many ways.”

**Inner Mongols’ Reaction to the Agreement**

As can be seen from the above discussion, ambiguity of the terms used in the text of the Agreement (such as naming “Mongolia” instead of “Outer Mongolia” as its signatory) had given rise to an impression among the Inner Mongols that the Urga government was selling out their interest to Russia without their consent. Consequently, the Agreement helped convinced many undecided Inner Mongolian elites that siding with the Republic of China would be in their best interests.

On 23 November 1912, the *Menggu Wanggong Lianhe Hui* issued the following

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statement:

“The Menggu Wanggong Lianhe Hui considers that the Russo-Urga Agreement was the work of a few persons in Urga. The whole Mongolia has long supported republicanism. We neither recognize the Urga government, nor its right to sign agreements with foreign governments. The signed agreement is therefore void.”

This statement was followed by resolutions reached by the four eastern Inner Mongolian leagues of Xinligol, Jirem, Juu Uda, and Josotu, which unanimously condemned the Russo-Mongolian Agreement and vowed to resist Russia’s invasion of Inner Mongolia. Moreover, Prince Gungsangnorbu, in his capacity as the director of MengZang shiwuju, told a group of foreign reporters that Mongolia was part of China’s territory, and that the Mongols would firmly resist Russia’s occupation of Mongolia and its infringement on their freedom.

On 23 January 1913, the banners of the Yeke Juu and Ulan Qab leagues in western Inner Mongolia held a conference at the Suiyuan town. Lasting over three months, the conference passed five resolutions, namely: (a) (they) support republicanism; (b) they do not recognize the Russo-Urga Agreement, and would dissuade Urga from declaring independence; (c) they would request the Republican government to dispatch troops to protect important places of the western leagues, and the expenses would be borne by the State; (d) plans should be drawn up to improve the Mongols’ livelihood, and the misrule resultant from years of reclamation activities

29 “Zhongguo dashi ji,” 重要事件 [Important Events of China], *The Eastern Miscellany*, vol. 9, no. 7, Nov. 1912.


should not be repeated; and (e) promotion of the Mongols’ education.\footnote{32}

Apparently, the Russo-Mongolian Agreement would be enough to alienate all the six Inner Mongolian leagues even without the Khalkhas’ military campaigns in Inner Mongolia in 1913. The destruction caused by the campaigns further reinforced the Inner Mongols’ belief that remaining with the Chinese Republic would be a smarter option than joining the Mongolian state.

**Military Campaigns in Inner Mongolia**

Soon after signing of the Russo-Mongolian Agreement, the Urga government began to launch military campaigns into Inner Mongolia with a view to driving out the Chinese armies stationed there. The Khalkhas also appealed for Inner Mongolian banners’ cooperation in resisting the Chinese armies. In their response to Urga’s appeal, the Yeke Juu Mongols refused to cooperate on the following grounds,

“In the areas adjacent to the Great Wall, we and Han cultivators have long mixed together and, as such, it would be difficult to differentiate the good from the bad. Moreover, since our League has long engaged in nomadism, our land is bordering (China) on the south, and our strength is feeble, it would be quite difficult for us to protect ourselves (against China).”\footnote{33}

At the initial stage, the campaigns for the Khalkha expeditionary forces were generally victorious. However, by the autumn of 1913, shipments of weapons, ammunitions, and provisions to the Mongolian troops, which were supplied solely by

\footnote{32} Xi meng wang gong zhao dai chu ed., *Xi meng hui yi shi mo ji* [The Whole Story of the Western Leagues Convention], in *Minguo jing shi wen bian* [Collected Writings on Statecraft of the Chinese Republic], 1913 (reprinted Taipei: Wen hai chu ban she, 1971), pp. 2333-2352.

\footnote{33} Xi meng wang gong zhao dai chu ed., *Xi meng hui yi shi mo ji*, p. 2332.
Russia, almost completely ceased, and this made further military operations nearly impossible. Soon some of the Mongolian soldiers began to flee. In late October, Chinese troops began to mount counter-attacks after more reinforcements had arrived. By late 1913, they had recovered most of the lands previously lost to the Mongolian army.

The military conflict between the Mongolian forces and Chinese troops had seriously ravaged various parts of Inner Mongolia in terms of human life and property. In a letter to the Chinese Senate, the Menggu Wanggong Lianhe Hui noted,

“Since Urga’s declaration of independence, Inner and Outer Mongolia have been ravaged by successive wars for two years. Of late, telegrams from Baotou, Chahar and Jehol warned that an area stretching several thousand li from east to west has been infested with bandits. The lives and properties of our Mongols are being devastated every day.”

The extent of the damage in Inner Mongolia was so great that the local people characterized the military conflict as “the disturbance of year of the cow”. Rather than uniting Inner and Outer Mongols into a new state, the Khalkhas’ military campaigns had the opposite effect of pushing their southern kinsmen further into the arms of the Republic of China.36

Why Inner Mongolia Favored Republican China

Following the Suiyuan conference held 1913, the Yeke Juu and Ulan Qab leagues also published a joint statement, which, in my opinion, best summarized the reasons

34 “Beijing dianbao,” 北京電報 [Telegram from Beijing], Minlibao, 20 June 1913.
36 Huang, Menggu yi shi yu Zhongguo ren tong de jiu ge, p. 78.
as to why the Inner Mongols opted to side with the Republic of China:

“Mongolian territory and Chinese heartland are mutually dependent on each other as if they were lips and teeth. For hundreds of years, Han and Mongols have long been one family. …Now that the Republic has just been set up, that the five races are one family, and that there are no quarrels between the South (China proper) and the North (Mongolia)….We Mongols, as a member of the Chinese nation, should contribute our effort to sustain the Republic….

Since the establishment of the Republic, the State has treated us kindly by abolishing all the harsh rules and regulations previously in force, and granting us all kinds of preferential conditions. Moreover, our traditional customs, such as nomadism, religion, etc., are preserved. We are now free of all shackles and enjoy freedom together. When we take in money from all over the country, our desolate and cold lands will become rich and populous….Should we seek to secede (from the Republic of China) and form a state of our own because we have already declared independence, we should first look at our present situation very carefully: we lack households and manpower everywhere; our finance is deficient and our revenue is meagre; we have long engaged in nomadism and have never had any military training or war. We are incapable of defending ourselves just for the sake of self-esteem.

Should the Republican government dispatch an army to punish us, what can we rely on to defend ourselves?

One may suggest that we can temporarily turn to the Russians for assistance if we are unable to defend ourselves. This is something that most frightened and upset the princes and dukes of these leagues, something that would be inadmissible in any event. The Russians have plotted to annex our land for a long time….Once our land becomes part of their (Russian) territory, all our real powers will fall into the
Russians’ hands. When we become Russia’s vassal, will it be too late to repent?”

Simply put, the Inner Mongols opted to remain in the newly established Republic of China because: (a) Inner Mongolia’s close proximity with China proper geographically; (b) the Chinese government’s undertaking to preserve the Mongolian elites’ traditional privileges and rights, ruling power as well as Mongolia’s culture, customs and religion; (c) staying with the Republic of China would bring Mongolia prosperity and wealth; (d) Mongolia was too weak and poor to defend itself against China; and (e) their distrust of Russia’s scheme in Mongolia.

Conclusion

Mongolian consciousness began to grow steadily in the late nineteenth century, as evidenced by the Mongols’ widespread anti-Manchu and anti-Han Chinese sentiments. The xinzheng reforms no doubt further fostered its growth by inadvertently fanning the Mongols’ resentment against the Manchus and Han Chinese with measures that infringed upon the Mongols’ political and economic interests (such as large-scale land reclamation activities and imposition of Chinese style administrative units) and other measures that sought to assimilate the Mongols (e.g. educational reforms).

Hence, for the Republican government who sought to succeed the territories and peoples of the Qing empire, its chief task was how to pacify the sentiments of the Mongols and make them accept their new identity as a member of the Republic. To this end, the Republic government discarded Han nationalism in favor of Wuzu yijia. In addition, the Republican government also implemented practical measures to woo the people of Mongolia, including “going imperial” ones and repeatedly assuring

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37 Xi meng wang gong zhao dai chu ed., Xi meng hui yi shi mo ji, “Fulu” 附錄 [Annex], p. 2355.
Mongolian elites of the protection of their vested interest. Understandably, some of the Inner Mongolian elites were still suspicious of the conception of Wuzu yijia and a Han-dominated republic. Consequently, many Inner Mongolian banners responded enthusiastically to Urga’s independence initially. On this point, Makoto Tachibana notes that there were Inner Mongolian nobles showing obedience both to the Republic of China and the Boghd Khan government simultaneously, just to wait and see how the situation would develop. He therefore argues the number of banners that expressed submission to the Urga government (38 out of 49 banners) did not reflect the actual reaction of Inner Mongolia. His view was borne out by the fact that many Inner Mongolian princes and jasaks, who had initially pledged their allegiance to Urga, subsequently gave their support to the Republican Government. For example, Prince Gungsangnorbu sent a representative in early 1912 to discuss the unification of Inner and Outer Mongolia and, for this reason, he was appointed by the Urga government as the Chief Minister in charge of the affairs of the forty-nine banners of Inner Mongolia. However, Prince Gungsangnorbu later shifted his allegiance and joined the Republican government and became president of MengZang Shiwuju in September 1912.

The shifting of allegiance of the Inner Mongolian elites could be attributed to several contingent factors. First, the repeated assurances given by the Republican government to the Inner Mongolian noblemen of the preservation of their traditional privileges, rights and ruling power had convinced the latter that siding with the Chinese Republic would serve their best interest. Second, the Russo-Mongolian Agreement and its commercial protocol had antagonized the Inner Mongolian elites,

who feared that Urga had sold out their interest to the Russians. Third, the military campaigns launched by the Khalkhas and Udai, and the destructions resultant therefrom further alienated the Inner Mongols.

However, I would argue that a more fundamental cause of the eventual split between Outer and Inner Mongols was the great differences in social and economic developments between them. The differences were undoubtedly the result of the Manchu court’s differential policy towards the Outer and Inner Mongolia, but the disparities between the two were further aggravated by the xinzheng reforms implemented during the first decade of the twentieth century. Historically, Inner Mongolia, being close in proximity to China proper, was closer to China politically, economically and socially than Outer Mongolia. Consequently, the reforms introduced in Inner Mongolia were much more intensive in depth and extensive in scope than those in Outer Mongolia. Particularly, the spectacular growth in the number of Han Chinese settlers and proliferation of Chinese-style administrative units among the Inner Mongolian banners during the xinzheng decade would make it much more difficult and risky for the Inner Mongols to seek either independence or unification with Outer Mongolia. Intellectually, the Inner Mongolian elites, because of their personal experiences, were more susceptible to new ideas than their Khalkha counterparts. As a result, they were much more receptive to the New Policy reforms than their northern brethren. Some of them, such as Prince Gungsangnorbu, even introduced reform measures in their own banners. The differences in outlook between Inner and Outer Mongolian elites would certainly make it difficult for the two to cooperate, even in matters involving Mongolian unification.
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