

Introduction: Some Conceptual Remarks

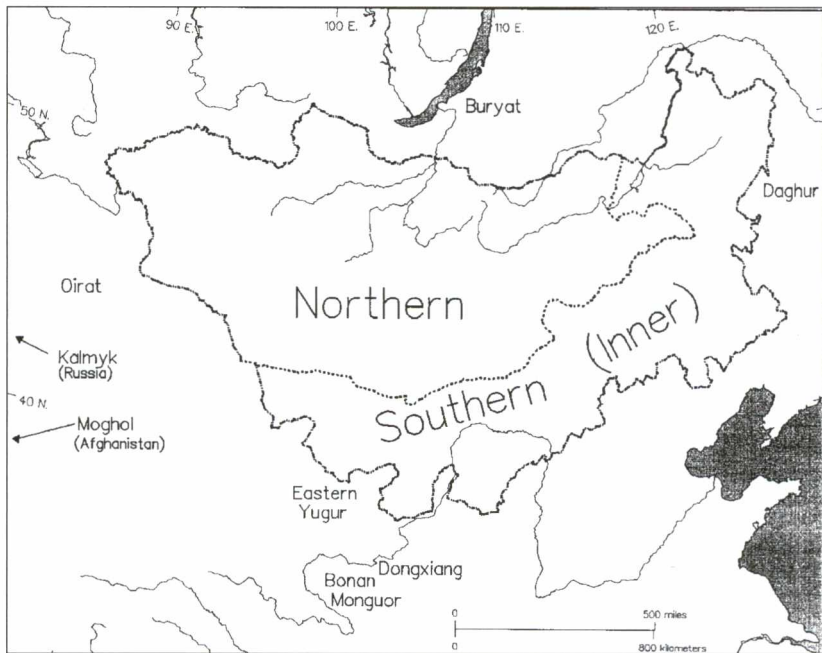
Henry G. Schwarz

My contribution to our common endeavor is quite modest. Aside from editing this book, I will attempt in this introduction to offer a few general conceptual remarks about culture, society and globalization and how they apply to Mongolia. Torrents of ink have been spilled over each of these three concepts, so much so in fact that everyone seems to have his own take on them. As the authors in this volume embark on a pioneering effort to explore the linkages between culture, society and globalization in Mongolia, I believe it is important to get back to basics and try to describe these three terms as precisely and economically as possible. I should like to say that my remarks are not intended to be guidelines for this conference or this book, but rather it is my hope that they may help stake out the parameters of future research into the subject of globalization and its effect on Mongolian culture and society.

To start out with, by culture I mean a complex of objects and values that affects a person's sense of identity with a group or society. It is, therefore, clear that culture and society are inextricably intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. In the broadest sense, culture is a society's way of life, and conversely, any society is the arena in which culture resides. It is identified by race, ethnicity, language, religion, or other social categories or groupings.

Cultures and societies have both temporal and spatial dimensions. There is little disagreement about their temporal dimensions.

We all know that what is understood as Mongolian culture today was not the same at any time in the past, and the same holds true for society. However, one does not always find the same unanimity of opinion when it comes to the spatial dimensions of cultures and societies. While there is common agreement that the size of a society can range from very small, such as a street gang, to all of humanity, that agreement sometimes disappears when analysis of a society and its culture is focused at a level that straddles political borders.



Mongolia

(Adapted from Henry G. Schwarz, *Mongolia and the Mongols: Holdings at Western Washington University* (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1992), frontispiece).

Mongolia is a case in point. Among the several dozen of transnational cultural areas on this planet, there is perhaps none more suitable for gauging globalizations's impact on culture and society than Mongolia. In the first place, Mongolia in any sense of the word other than political/economic is much larger than the

country by that name. When one focuses on cultural matters such as ethnicity and language -- in my considered opinion more important than political matters because they are much more enduring -- one discovers that Mongolia covers a huge area stretching from the Russian border to the Ordos Bend of the Yellow River and from the Xing'an Mountains in the east to the Altai Mountains in the west.¹

When one speaks of one Mongolian culture and society from Lake Baikal to the Ordos, many people of different walks of life, even some Mongolists, instantly object that almost a century of political separation between the state in the north and the Chinese-administered southern part has created two Mongolian cultures and two Mongolian societies. The interesting thing is that advocates of this view readily agree that Mongolian culture and society can be fruitfully investigated at lower levels but most of them find it very difficult to acknowledge publicly the existence of one Mongolian culture and society stretching from Lake Baikal to the Ordos. Moreover, there was a time not long ago when native residents of ethnic Mongolia were pressured by their respective governments to keep quiet on this subject, and even today, although political controls have been greatly relaxed on both sides of the border, public acknowledgment of one ethnic Mongolia is still viewed as politically incorrect by many Mongols both north and south.

In order to place this deplorable state of affairs in its proper historical context, we need not go any farther back than the beginning of Mongolia's present political division which occurred when the Manchu dynasty fell in early 1912,² less than a century ago. For

¹ It is rarely possible to completely match a political entity with a cultural entity, and our map is no exception. It combines the current political boundaries of the Mongolian state in the north with Chinese-administered Southern, or Inner, Mongolia. By doing so, it includes large numbers of Chinese within the southern border and a Kazakh minority in the northwestern corner but leaves out Mongols living beyond the northern and southwestern borders. On the other hand, unlike almost any other map in print today, it includes practically the entire contiguous area of cultural Mongolia.

² During the time of the Manchu empire (1644-1911), there were administrative divisions within Mongolia, just as there were in the other countries and territories taken over by the Manchus, like China, Tibet, and later Dzungaria and East-

the next eight years, called the period of autonomy, the northern part of Mongolia succeeded in establishing a rump state with some of the trappings of sovereignty including a limited degree of foreign relations, but that changed all too soon.

Meanwhile, the southern part of Mongolia, often referred to as Inner Mongolia, with more than twice the number of Mongols than in the northern part, was unable to resist the attacks throughout the 1910s by a succession of Chinese warlords in Beijing who masqueraded as the Republic of China. As a result, the southern part of Mongolia has eventually become completely integrated into the political and economic framework of China.

Toward the end of the 1910s, a Chinese warlord clique then in control of Beijing made an attempt to annex the northern part of Mongolia and might have actually succeeded in its land grab had it not been for an entirely unforeseen event. The civil war in Russia had steadily moved eastward, bringing to northern Mongolia first troops under the command of Baron Sternberg and then, hard on their heels, the ultimately victorious Red Army. This event had two effects. The immediate result was that Chinese troops were chased home and prevented the warlords and their various successors from trying again. The second effect was that with the naming of the northern portion of Mongolia a "people's republic" in 1924, a process began that over the next seventy years completely subordinated the territory to policies made in Moscow. They affected not only the political, economic, and military fortunes of Mongols living in this rump state but, most relevant to our discussion, also the Mongols' view of their own culture and society.

Stalin and his colleagues were well aware of the strong sense of ethnic identity among all Mongols and the fact that more than two-third of them lived beyond Moscow's control in China. Stalin feared that these Mongols might be used by China or some third country to undermine his hold over the newly created rump state in the North.³ The Soviet leaders sought to solve this perceived

ern Turkestan. The important point is that Mongolia was governed *in toto* by the central Manchu government through its Lifan Yuan.

³ This fear was not as far-fetched as it had first appeared because after invading China, the Japanese created an autonomous Mongolian state under Demchug-

problem in two major ways. They sought to reorient Mongolian culture through close integration with the Soviet Union and its East European allies. The results included higher education for Mongols mostly in institutions in those countries, fluency in Russian, the adoption of the Cyrillic script, and the introduction of Western art forms, notably European opera.⁴ Moreover, the Soviet leaders drastically reinterpreted Mongolian history and culture both in the classroom as well as among the general Mongolian population. The greatest embodiment of a unified Mongolia, Chinggis Khan, practically became an unperson. When he was portrayed at all, it was always in the darkest hues.⁵ It was not only political leaders like Chinggis Khan who became all but banned but also major cultural figures, especially those who lived beyond the latter-day borders of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR). For instance, I know of no book by or about Injannasi (1837-1892), arguably the greatest Mongolian literary figure of the nineteenth century and native of southern Mongolia,⁶ that was published in the MPR during its lifetime, 1924-1991. The Soviet leadership also banned the use of clan names, thereby hoping to weaken an

dongrub which they hoped would, *inter alia*, be attractive to the Mongols in the MPR.

⁴ The Buriat and Kalmyk Mongols, as citizens of the Soviet Union, had of course already been Russified, but the Soviet leadership would go even so far as to remove the word "Mongolian" from the official name Buriat-Mongolian ASSR.

⁵ Another probable reason for the Soviets' degrading of Chinggis Khan, accompanied by a drastic deemphasis on the entire period of the Mongol world empire, was their desire to obscure the fact that the Mongols had conquered Russia. The Chinese, also conquered by the Mongols, had a different "solution" to the same problem. They declared Chinggis Khan and his successors Chinese emperors and gave the Chinese portion of the Mongol world empire a thoroughly Chinese name, Yuan.

⁶ Following in the footsteps of his father, Wangcugbala (1795-1847), and elder brother, Güleransa (1820-1855?), both well-known literary figures, Injannasi produced many works of poetry and prose that resonated well with literate Mongols during his time and for many generations to come. His most famous work is his historical novel, *Köke sudur*, which continues to be hugely popular in southern Mongolia, as evidenced by a continuous stream of books about the book and its author, as well as at least one feature movie and a book of cartoons.

awareness of common roots with the majority of their fellow Mongols who lived under Chinese administration.⁷

This policy of grossly distorting the Mongols' cultural and historical heritage, relentlessly carried out over many decades, eventually resulted in a wide-spread belief among the citizens of the Mongolian People's Republic that they were the only "real" Mongols and the other two-thirds, living under Chinese administration, were *erliiž* or half-breeds.⁸ For the past decade or so, the government of the northern part of Mongolia, officially called Mongol Uls or simply Mongolia, has taken great strides to change its sovereignty from nominal to actual by establishing direct political and economic relations with scores of other countries and joining dozens of international organizations. It has been much less energetic in its efforts to undo the gross misperceptions that had been inculcated into generations of Mongols during the Soviet period.

With these few words about Mongolian culture and society, we now turn to the force at the center of our investigation, globalization. At the most general level, we can say that it has been a phenomenon since the dawn of human civilization and can be described in the simplest possible terms as a process which introduces changes on a scale encompassing many cultures and societies. It does not necessarily denote a truly planetary scale because concepts like "the world" mean not only physical entities but are also mental constructs. A case in point is what is frequently referred to as the Mongol world empire. It was, of course, the largest contiguous political entity in human history yet, equally obviously, it did not cover the entire planet. This fact mattered little to the people directly involved, conquerors and conquered alike, because in their minds the empire did indeed encompass their "world."⁹

⁷ One could also add the suppression of the Buddhist church. Although the main reason was internal politics, another motivation probably stemmed from the church's close connection with Inner Mongolia and, of course, Tibet.

⁸ Discovering this attitude toward them was perhaps the greatest shock for Mongols from Southern Mongolia when they were first allowed to visit the Mongolian People's Republic.

⁹ The term "world" is still being used in a less than planetary sense. One local example is the "world series" in North American baseball, a lingering testimony to the provincialism of an earlier age.

This difference between fact and imagination still exists but it has shrunk a great deal, and we must reckon with the possibility that for an ever increasing share of humanity this difference will eventually disappear altogether.

This leads us to define the term's relationship to the concepts of Westernization and modernization because many people treat these terms as being synonymous with globalization. They are based on the older terms of "Western" and "modern" which have been widely used for perhaps a century or more and would therefore appear to be both useful and accurate concepts. As we shall see in a moment, they are not very useful for our investigation of Mongolian culture and society in the age of globalization.

This may be surprising to some because both Western and modern are undeniably useful terms. The areas in which they are most useful are place for Western and time for modern. Western Mongolia, like the Western hemisphere, is an accurate place name. Modern Mongolian history, like modern times, if identified as a definite time period, can also be accepted as being accurate. Beyond place and time, however, both terms become much less useful.

The term Western, despite its relatively long use or perhaps because of it, has been widely misused. Today, one finds Mongols, especially younger ones, labeling certain cultural trends as "Western" because, as Peter Marsh suggests in his chapter, it presumably conveys a certain degree of prestige. It does not seem to matter to these young people that some trends had in fact originated in Korea or Japan. The term Western, when applied in a cultural or societal context, is also often less accurate than generally believed. It is most useful at the time an idea or object is created in, say, Pasadena or Paris, but the further one moves away from that time and place, the less precise or meaningful the term becomes.

The term modern is also less useful in any discussion of culture and society than many people assume. Like Western, the term modern is maximally useful only within an extremely short time frame. This is true even in fields where the term is said to have long-lasting significance.

Two such fields are medicine and history. We are all familiar with the juxtaposition of traditional versus modern medicine. One

finds this distinction as much in Mongolia as in North America and Europe.¹⁰ When we look a little closer at what is called traditional medicine in Mongolia we discover that it is not one solid piece of knowledge and practice but that it consists of several layers.¹¹ Much of it dates back to the time when Tibetan missionaries introduced to Mongolia large chunks of Tibetan culture, including a highly developed medical system,¹² but it has also an older layer containing in greatly modified form elements of earlier medical beliefs and practices, and it has added in recent decades a new layer of some foreign procedures, pharmaceuticals, and machinery. It would appear that as time went on the traditional/modern dichotomy gradually lost its initial acuity, and those who still insist on using it use it in less than objective ways. One can easily imagine that the early Tibetan missionaries and their Mongolian followers used this dichotomy in the same biased or prejudicial way that some of us use it today.

The case for using the term modern in Mongolian history turns out to be as weak as in medicine. Present historiographical convention decrees that modern Mongolian history began in 1921. If one wonders why, a comparison with its neighbor to the south will provide the answer because there the start of modern Chinese history is fixed at 1840. What these two dates have in common is that they mark the beginning of the intrusion of massive European political and military power that brought in its wake foreign beliefs and practices. But as in the case of medicine, in no time at all these foreign or "modern" elements began to be molded into forms by forces that were both native or "traditional" as well as even newer external ones. From that moment on, the dichotomy between traditional and modern weakened.

If the term modern, as I have tried to show, is not as useful for our understanding of culture and society, it follows that the pro-

¹⁰ Occasionally, there is also the explicit or implicit claim that modern medicine is Western medicine, but one should dismiss such claim as a product of provincialism or jingoism.

¹¹ One can discover the very same layered look in European medicine, but that subject is beyond the scope of this book.

¹² Tibetan medicine, in turn, owes much to ayurvedic and other medical systems in India and beyond.

cess of modernization loses much of its alleged utility. When viewed objectively, the term modernization is essentially nothing more than another name for the continuous process of change which is inherent in the temporal dimensions of all cultures and societies.

As for the term Westernization, it is often used for partisan, i.e. non-scientific, purposes, as when it is praised or condemned as a powerful force destined, or threatening, to engulf all of humanity. Yet any sober analysis shows that so far that predicted outcome is far from certain, and evidence is mounting that Westernization may well metamorphose into an entirely new hybrid process. We see numerous examples of this transformation in music and the visual arts. Moreover, there are cultural currents originating outside the “West” that may or may not hybridize with “Western” cultural forms. The growing popularity of manga and anim  in North America and the rise there in conversions to Buddhism, Islam and other “non-Western” religions and beliefs are but two examples.¹³ Other cultural currents, originating and spreading outside the “West”, may eventually also impact North America and Europe. One such recent example is *hallyu*, the Korean pop culture wave, which had a major impact on Southeast Asia in the 1990s and is now sweeping Japan. Each one of these non-Western cultural currents may become globalized, which is yet another way of proving that Westernization is not identical to globalization.

Finally, what are the forces that produce globalization? They can be both non-human¹⁴ as well as products of human volition. We are all too familiar with the former type as we become ever more inundated with all kinds of electronic communicators. An example of the latter would be what is sometimes called globalism. It can be found throughout human history whenever political and other influential leaders entertained expansionist ideas.¹⁵ Global-

¹³ There is at least one crosscurrent that has already led to new hybrid forms, to wit, in culinary matters.

¹⁴ Gadgets like cellular phones are made and used by humans, but the impetus they give toward globalization is autonomous.

¹⁵ One such expansionist idea was manifest destiny, first publicized in 1845, which declared that the United States was destined to expand to the Pacific Oc-

ism can be both the cause as well as the effect of globalization. Two recent examples will have to suffice. The messianic fervor of German political leaders in the 1930s, clearly aiming at becoming a world power, grew out of the notion of a mythical Aryan race. While this globalism was obviously the product of many complex historical trends, it was an *idée fixe* that failed to engender globalization, as hoped for by its creators. On the other hand, the christofascist¹⁶ variant of globalism currently held by some people in the United States who see themselves as entitled to ignore legal constraints such as international laws and agreements appears to be predominantly the product of one of the major driving forces of today's globalization, namely the temporary military and technological ascendancy of the United States.

The Mongolian world empire provides an excellent test case for an earlier kind of globalism which is sometimes called tenggerism¹⁷ and is perhaps best symbolized by the self-proclaimed role of the khan as the sole representative of heaven on earth. The crucial question is when tenggerism assumed its messianic role. Some will argue that it happened prior to 1206 or, put differently, that tenggerism, or Mongolian globalism if you wish, was the engine for the globalization that developed with the expansion of the Mongol world empire. I have argued obliquely elsewhere¹⁸ that this interpretation is not only factually flawed but also, unfortunately and unintendedly, lends credence to the view held by peoples like the Chinese and the Europeans who were conquered by the

ean. Like many other expansionist ideas, it failed to grow into a full-fledged form of globalism, but perhaps the final word on this has yet to be written.

¹⁶ A term coined by the American philosopher Eric Hoffer (1902-1983).

¹⁷ See Sh. Bira's important contributions in his article "Tenggerism and Modern Globalism : A Retrospective Outlook on Globalisation," *Inner Asia* 5:2 (2003), 107-118; "Mongolian Tenggerism and Modern Globalism : A Retrospective Outlook on Globalism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2004, 2-12; and his chapter in this book, "The Mongolian Ideology of Tenggerism and Khubilai Khan."

¹⁸ See my "Otrar," *Olon Ulsyn Mongolch Erdémtüü V Ikh Khural* (Ulaanbaatar, 1992), v. 3, 333-340; and "Otrar Revisited," in *Mongol Sudlалын Ögüüllүүд = Essays on Mongol Studies* [Commemorative volume on the occasion of Academician Bira's 70th birthday], edited by Ts. Batbayar et al. (Ulaanbaatar : Olon Ulsyn Mongol Sudlалын Kholboo, 1998), 195-208.

Mongols that the latter were nothing more than barbarians whose lust for conquest was unbridled and *a priori*.

As for globalization itself, I mentioned earlier the relatively free movement of goods and the extensive cultural interchange during the Mongol world empire period, considered key elements of today's globalization. However, there are some major differences, as one would expect across the span of some 800 years. There is, of course, the already mentioned greater spatial dimension today as well as a much more intense process, both in physical and psychological ways. Perhaps most importantly, what distinguishes today's globalization from its forerunner in the thirteenth century is connectivity¹⁹ by which I mean not only a physical two-way street, such as increasingly intensive electronic communications, but also a mindset that makes people feel much closer to those with whom they communicate or about whom they learn electronically. To paraphrase a well-known slogan in North America, a rapidly increasing number of people in all parts of the planet now "act globally and think locally."

I will conclude my remarks with a few suggested ways in which Mongolists may continue the lines of inquiry the contributors to this book started and fruitfully investigate the interactions among globalization, culture and society in ethnic Mongolia. I hope that if my preceding remarks have accomplished anything, they will convince our readers that our area of inquiry, largely ignored until now, offers a vast range of research options. It would indeed be foolish of me to try to list more than a handful here.

Keeping in mind the three areas mentioned at the start of my remarks -- the spatial comparison of Northern and Southern Mongolia, the temporal comparison between the present situation and that during the Mongol world empire, and the special China factor -- here are some possible targets for future investigations. What changes in which aspect of Mongolian culture and society have taken place during the last decade, and in what ways are those changes related to the process of globalization? Have these changes been the same or similar in both northern and southern

¹⁹ A term originating in technology where it means the ability to transfer data back and forth among various devices.

Mongolia? If they are different, to what factors may the differences be attributed? Turning the argument around, we should also ask whether Mongolian culture has in any way shaped the nature and/or intensity of globalization within ethnic Mongolia? When comparing different historical periods, we may ask how, if at all, globalization affected which aspects of Mongolian culture and society then, as compared with its effects on contemporary Mongolia? Conversely, what comparisons might we draw between the impact of Mongolian culture on globalization during these two periods in Mongolian history? And finally, when we look at the huge changes in China's relationship with Mongolia between then and now, should we simply explain them in terms of relative military and political strength, or have other forces been at work as well?