

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CHINGUNJAV'S REBELLION

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"History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" —
James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1986: 28)

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against
forgetting." — Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1982: 1)

Both of these authors offer insights into the perception of the past. Joyce reflects a traditional understanding of history — history exists, and although we may try to escape, the nightmare continues. History is something we are more or less helpless to change, although perhaps we can forget.

This can be seen as a blending of the coherence and correspondence theories of truth.¹ According to the correspondence theory, the truth is what most accurately reflects the "objective" world. Given the events and objects of history have disappeared, we are left with a coherence theory based perspective: the truth is what is most coherent, what most sources and documents agree on. The implicit assumption is that ideally this would give the same results as the correspondence model.

Kundera reflects a different thinking on history: it is a battlefield, a contestation of multiple interests and interpretations. This is a blending of the coherence and pragmatic theories of truth. History may have some sort of coherence, but the processes of recording and remembering it are based on "what works"; what is useful or necessary at the time.

Utilizing something akin to the "Kunderian paradigm", recent research has tended to focus on collective memory in the guise of commemoration. Schwartz's work (1982) on art in the US Capital building is a fairly typical example. I propose a similar, yet different task. Rather than concentrating on one presentation of an event, I

shall examine several different presentations of the same event. I look at the process of interpreting the past by focusing on the rebellion of the Mongol prince Chingunjav against the Manchus in 1756-1758.

By examining several accounts in parallel, the different accounts highlight and offset each other. We can then examine the influence of the authors' life world on the accounts produced. This in turn can lead to a greater sensitivity of the malleability of the past not only in representations by the anthropological other, but also in scholarly discourse.

Some Theoretical Considerations

In order to understand, to any significant degree, the influence of the present upon a scholar's accounting of the past, several factors must be taken into consideration. One must begin with the idea that we can only know the past in the epistemological present (Lowenthal 1985:187, Collingwood 1946:174). It is not possible to achieve an understanding of the past free of contemporary influences. The meaning or interpretation of any past event is not (can not be) inherent in the event itself. Meaning is "the result of an interpretation of a past experience looked at from the present Now with a reflective attitude" (Schutz 1967:210).

The past is continually "rewritten" or "re-remembered" in various ways to suit the present situation. Or, in slightly stronger terms: "History, then, is very much a mythical construction, in the sense that it is a representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the present" (Friedman 1992:195).

This process of construction or re-remembering is both intentional and unintentional. It is unintentional insofar as the past is not merely recalled. Memory does not operate like a filing cabinet or library, where events or facts are recalled in toto. Rather, memories are reconstructed each time they are needed (Thelen 1989:1120; Bolles 1988:xii). The memory process can be considered intentional (or at least conscious) to the extent that memory is used by people in the present to explain themselves, justify themselves, and to give legitimacy to the current order, or to contest it.

We are only able to access the remnants of the past in the forms of records and memories. Yet these "remnants" are not only all we have to work with, but they form the pool from which an understanding of the world is drawn, a framework on which interpretations are

hung. The boundaries between intentionality and non-intentionality become very blurred.

A scholar's account of a historical event is in part the result of his or her life experiences and socialization. Some of the differences in the accounts of Chingunjav's revolt can be seen as a result of such historical contingencies. One must be wary of either reading too much into these accounts, or attributing too much to the influence of a scholar's situatedness in the world. No one may ever be totally free of his or her past, but no one is completely shackled to it. A large amount of bounded freedom exists between the two extremes. In examining the accounts I shall outline, the task is to attempt to determine some of the boundaries of this freedom. In doing so, we shall note some interesting parallels between accounts. For example the different traditions of western democracy and Soviet-style socialism have both apparently lead to a nationalist reading of the rebellion.

To emphasize the point, I am not most interested in the truth-value of the accounts. Rather, although I shall make comparisons between the accounts and my understanding of the events, this is in order to highlight certain aspects of these accounts.

A Rough Outline

I begin with a rough sketch of the events of Chingunjav's rebellion as both Western and Mongolian sources agree upon them: a consensus approach to the event.

Chingunjav (1710-1757) was a leader of the Khotogoits, an Oirat tribe, located in north-western Mongolia. He was descended from the line of Chingghis Khan. Although a leader of the Khotogoits, he himself was ethnically a Khalkha Mongol - historically located in central and eastern present day Mongolia. Chinunjav apparently led a long and varied career in the service of the Ch'ien Lung emperor (the title of the Manchu emperor), being promoted and demoted at various times during his career.

In 1756 after a letter of complaint to the emperor was not answered to his satisfaction, he deserted the Manchu army. At the time, he held the rank of general. He took his Mongol troops with him and raised the banner of revolt. The reasons the various sources give for him rebelling are at least as numerous as the accounts themselves. Some say that he was rebelling against the financial stranglehold the Chinese merchants had over the Mongolian population, especially

the nobles and clergy (Sanjdorj 1980; Bawden 1989). Others offer an account of the revolt as a nationalist uprising (Bawden 1989; Mongolian Academy of Sciences 1990; Mongolian Academy of Sciences 1973). In addition, most accounts agree that the revolt was precipitated by the execution of Erinchindorji, who had been executed for his role in Amursana's revolt and flight. (Amursana's revolt was intertwined with Chingunjav's. It is discussed in slightly more detail later, although I will note here that Chingunjav was apparently one of the people ordered to pursue the fleeing Amursana.)

Chingunjav was to be ultimately unsuccessful. The degree to which he was so depends on the interpretation one gives to his revolt. It is agreed that rebellions all across Khalkha did take place at the time of Chingunjav's revolt. It is also generally agreed that he was responsible in some way for these uprisings. Although he was unable to coordinate his revolt with that of Amursana, or indeed, to organize any sort of concerted rebellion by nobles, army or commoners, (if that was his intention) massive unrest did occur at the time. Throughout much of Khalkha Mongolia there was a general rebellion, resulting in the smashing and looting of Chinese shops, desertion of army posts, and disruption of relay services (*örtöö*). The damage was widespread and extensive.

Other details of the revolt are generally agreed upon as well. Many of the nobles were, it seems, ready to rebel against the Manchus, turning to the Russians for protection and aid. They merely awaited the decision of their religious leader, the Jebtsundamba Khutagt, as did the Russians. He vacillated back and forth until it was too late, apparently in the end being swayed by the Ch'ien Lung. The revolt was crushed.

These are the barest outlines of the revolt as agreed upon by the various written sources. There are, of course, many more details of the revolt. These will become clear when we begin discussing the various presentations of the revolt by the different "schools" of thought.

The Western Accounts

I begin my examination of the various accounts by looking at what I call "the Western approach" to the Chingunjav rebellion.² The sources I draw upon here are the works of Charles Bawden, Alynn Nathanson, and Morris Rossabi. These accounts are, in many ways, the hardest to analyze from the viewpoint I am advocating. This is

not due to any inherently greater degree of difficulty in the texts themselves, or a closer approximation to the truth. Rather this is a result of my own background. Sharing many of the same taken-for-granted assumptions as the Western authors makes it more difficult to detect and comment upon their influences on the text. Some of the "background" that have affected their writing also colors my reading of their texts.

In order to utilize a coherence-theory based account of the events, several versions are required in each of the "schools". With one author, it is impossible to separate out personal biases and idiosyncrasies from the effects of the author's time and cultural background. Such a separation becomes easier (but by no means certain) as the sample set for each group is increased. However, there are trade-offs. As the number of individual accounts under each "school" increases, the amount of data to be dealt with becomes increasingly unwieldy for an exercise of this limited scope. In addition, as the number of accounts increase, one also risks a loss of subtlety. The finer details, in many ways more important than rough agreements may be lost as the sheer volume of data increases (or the amount of time and space required increases dramatically). As an initial compromise, I am dealing with two or three accounts in each of the written schools.

Bawden presents Chingunjav's rebellion as having two main causes: the nobles' discontent at the treatment they had received at the hands of the Manchus including the excessive tax burden, and the debt owed to the Chinese merchants. Such factors, nonetheless, do not explain the historical contingencies that led to the rebellion taking place when it did. This is linked to Amursana's escape from Erinchindorji, and Erinchindorji's subsequent execution at the hands of the Manchus in Peking.

(Amursana was a Jungar leader who went over to the service of the Manchus. After helping them to defeat and subjugate the other Jungars, he was not rewarded as well as he expected. Realizing the potential for further rebellion, the Ch'ien Lung had him arrested and brought to Peking. On his way, under the pretext of going to visit his family, he escaped. Erinchindorji, charged with bringing Amursana to Peking, did not pursue him immediately. For this, he was eventually executed. Rumor had it that the Jebtsundamba Khutagt, Erinchindorji's half-brother, was forced to watch the execution. Amursana eventually fled over the Russian border and died there.)

Chingunjav deserted in the summer of 1756. Before doing so he addressed a letter to the Ch'ien Lung emperor. In particular he

complained about the execution of Erinchindorji, and of another Mongol leader, Dambajav, who had been similarly punished for not pursuing a rebellious Jungar leader [Amursana] with sufficient dispatch. (Bawden 1989: 119). Bawden states that Chingunjav had been planning desertion all along, and only used the Emperor's reply to his letter as a pretext (*ibid*). Perhaps the most striking aspect of Bawden's account of the rebellion in *The Modern History of Mongolia* is the underlying nationalist sentiment that is evident. (Bawden's "The Mongol Rebellion of 1756-1757" (1968) is the same account as the one offered in his book, with critiques of other accounts added in.)

It should be noted before we proceed any further that the study is complicated when we realize that potentially several different levels of "nationalism" are functioning here. In some places, as in Bawden's writings, we find the Jungars and the Khalkhas lumped together as Mongols against the Manchus. However, the two were quite different in their own eyes, with wars between the two groups as late as the 1730s. In addition, the Manchus considered Khalkha Mongolia as a "shield" against the Jungars (Bawden 1989:113).

Throughout his account, Bawden explicitly denies that he is imputing any nationalist intent to Chingunjav; or even his contemporary Amursana. "In those days of non-existent nationalism," he writes, "such independence, even if achieved, would have meant only the exchange of one overlord for another" (Bawden 1989:128). The Mongols were not looking for the creation of a totally independent Mongol state. Rather, they were willing to trade subjection under the Manchus for subjection under the Russian tsar.

Bawden also realizes that other factors must be taken into account. Speaking of Chingunjav's highly colored career under the Manchu emperor, he writes "What lay behind these repeated lapses from loyalty is hard to tell, but they may well have been simply the expression of an irritable and ambitious character, excited by personal rancor against the overlord, and finally erupting, out of control, in open rebellion" (1989: 119). Bawden thus raises the possibility that the revolt, apparently precipitated by the execution of Erinchindorji, was only the result of the personal ambition of a local prince. Even given this explicit stance, however, we find several indications that Bawden supports a contrary interpretation. These are most apparent in the various summaries that he gives of the rebellion.

A brief litany of some of the phrases used to describe the rebellion, and especially the (non)cooperation with Amursana should help

bring this point to light. Bawden dwells at some length at the lack of coordination both among the (and thus, various rebellions in Khalkha Mongolia and between Chingunjav and Amursana (and thus, the rebellions in Jungaria and Khalkha Mongolia). He writes variously about "the sorry tale of disunity" (1989:118); the "complete lack of any clearly stated aim and of co-ordinated action" (120); "the sorry tale of vacillation" (121); and notes that at "every turn the rebellion betrays irresponsible haste, rash opportunism, lack of planning and coordination, and absence of common purpose" (128).

Such language appears to point to a certain prejudged notion of the revolt's aims and goals. By repeated use of terms like "sorry vacillation" and "disunity", Bawden seems to be revealing desires that the revolt should have been a single, unified war for liberation. Available evidence, however, suggests that the rebellion was a series of revolts and looting incidents triggered off by Chingunjav's uprising. Except for some communication between Amursana and Chingunjav (if this even took place), and a few isolated similar instances, there is no evidence of a long term plan. A rebellion can not be termed irresponsible in the haste with which it is executed if there is no larger, unified aim. The best one can do is to criticize the strategy and tactics of the leaders. One is in no sense justified in castigating Chingunjav and Amursana for failing to fulfill some imaginary plan.

While Bawden also notes that the vacillation of the Khutagt and the Russians' delay in offering aid (Bawden 1989:120 for details) helped to ensure Chingunjav's defeat, he does not always carry this argument to its logical conclusion. If one supposes that the Russians had lent their support to the revolt, and the Khutagt had taken a stand on the side of the rebels, an independent country would still not have resulted. (Bawden mentions this in passing elsewhere, but he does not take his own advice to heart.) If the rebellion had then proved successful, the Mongols would have been subservient to the Tsar, rather than the Ch'ien Lung emperor.

The insistence on the supposed co-operation between Amursana and Chingunjav is additionally surprising. The Jungars and Khalkhas have often been at each others throats (Bawden 1968:11,21). Most of the Mongols throughout history seem to have been unable to stay unified for long, and co-operation between the Khalkha and Jungars is not to be taken for granted. (One should note however that the Jungars had appealed to a Khalkha prince during the wars of the 1730s.)

Rossabi's (1975) account mirrors that of Bawden in many respects. He, like Bawden and Nathanson, talks of the execution of

Erinchindorji and the economic condition as the reasons for the revolt. His descriptions of the events reveal a nationalist bent similar to that of Bawden. He begins to tell of Chingunjav's involvement with the sentence: "A general named Chingunjav organized the resulting unrest into open rebellion" (1975:155). While Chingunjav did follow a route along the border posts, inciting them to rebel, to what extent this could be called "organization" is questionable, as is the implication that he was directly responsible for all the other riots and revolts across the country.

Rossabi continues by noting that the "disunity and absence of major objectives that so often afflicted the Mongols again disrupted their campaigns against the Ch'ing [the Manchu dynasty name]" (157). As was noted with Bawden, it is inappropriate to speak of such "campaigns" when there is no evidence of a concerted plan for a national uprising except for a superimposed twentieth-century nationalism. Bawden noted that there was no evidence of twentieth century nationalism among eighteenth century western Mongolians, and Rossabi seems aware of this. Yet he writes that Chingunjav "failed to arouse feelings of nationalism among the Mongols" (156), as if this was the goal of his rebellion.

Nathanson offers a much more complex picture of the revolt, as she is discussing it in the context of a dissertation, and not a section of a book. She presents a detailed analyses of contemporary Ch'ing political structure and policies. The main sources of information she draws upon are the various contemporary Chinese and Manchu accounts (or those rendered shortly after the reign of the Ch'ien Lung); the official histories of the period. Little is offered in the way of actually "interpreting" the rebellion. The various historical accounts are sifted for one "true" version.

We find that Nathanson offers the following as an account of the causes of the revolt:

The rebellion of Chingunjav was sparked by the prospect of another wave of requisitions from Khalkha to fight the Zuungars [Jungars]³ and the execution of a high-ranking Khalkha noble for dereliction of duty. (Nathanson 1983:137).

Nathanson adds that the order to pursue Amursana and the economic burdens this would entail helped to spark the revolt (92-93). This basically agrees with the accounts offered by the other sources. Yet, notably, Nathanson does not go beyond this. She does not explicitly link it to any larger issues.

Rather than nationalist sentiment, we find in Nathanson's work an interesting blend of what is apparently romanticization and tradi-

tional historical methodology. Thus, her handling of the data indicates that she believes that there is one true event that can be reached by a careful enough analysis. She is willing to accept that at least certain of her sources are necessarily biased by the context in which they have been written (ie, official record of an emperor may be expected to present him in as positive a light as possible); yet she is unwilling to extend this degree of doubt to all of her sources equally.

Nathanson's apparent romanticization of the people involved in the rebellion is a subtle process, but evident nonetheless. Discussing the reasons for the revolt failing, she writes

In the end very few nobles were willing actively to put at risk what they had gained under the Ch'ing and many of them even rejected the idea of the old nomad spirit of independence for a life of relative ease (1983).

She also refers to Chingunjav as conforming to "what Professor Owen Lattimore calls the 'true nomad,' one who was untouched by and not particularly attracted to the comforts and 'corruption' of settled life" (87). She talks about such a person's need for freedom, and the inevitability that they would chaff under Ching rule (89). All this indicates a romanticization of the situation of the nomad — free, living a hard life perhaps, but an honest one.

Having seen the various analyses offered of the rebellion by Western authors, we are left with the question of why the accounts are rendered as they are: why do Bawden and Rossabi explicitly disclaim any nationalist interpretation, while implicitly apparently supporting such a claim? Can any generalizations or conclusions be drawn about the influence of the life-world in which these scholars were situated? What can be said about the way in which the surroundings in which they lived and wrote affected their understanding and presentation of a historical event? We shall return to these questions shortly. Before doing so, however, let us briefly review the Mongolian accounts.

The Mongolian Approaches

I now turn to the Mongolian histories of Chingunjav's rebellion. For this, there are a number of sources, including translations of official histories. It is with one such official history, *The History of the Mongolian People's Republic* (published by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences in 1973) that I begin the analysis. A fascinating, at times contradictory picture of a proto-Marxist popular rebellion emerges.

But to label the accounts as only Marxist would be to simplify the issue excessively.

Gellner⁴ notes that certain theories of nationalism presume an "awakening" of a pre-existing nationalist consciousness. In such an approach, where nationalism is seen as natural or primordial, all that is required is a certain impetus to bring it to life. In certain ways, this mentality is what is found in the official histories of Mongolia. The Manchus are presented as usurpers and the rebellions are represented as being spear-headed by the herdsmen, seeking to reunite themselves as a nation.

As a prelude to the account of Chingunjav's rebellion in *The History of the Mongolian People's Republic*, we are told the "Mongol people ... continued to resist the oppressors even after the conquest of Mongolia by the Manchus" (190). It was the "systematic despoilation of the people by the Manchu usurpers" that lead to a "major popular uprising" (ibid). Interestingly enough, this work emphasizes the simultaneity of Amursana's and Chingunjav's rebellions, not the lack of coordination claimed by Bawden. The apparently non-coordinated revolts and desertions across Khalkha are glossed as a "major anti-Manchu movement."

Little is said of Chingunjav himself, except to note that his execution and the repression of the revolt "aroused a new wave of indignation" and that the "liberation movement ... began to assume mass proportions" (191). (This contradicts the earlier claim that it already was a mass movement.) The Lamaist church is also given contradictory coverage – it is stated that the Jebtsundamba Khutagt openly sided with Chingunjav (and was later killed by the Manchus because of this), yet the Lamaist church more generally was "subservient to [the] Manchu usurpers" (192).

One can also find passages in keeping with classical Marxism. We read of the "treachery perpetuated by the feudal classes and ... their betrayal of the interests of the Mongol people for the sake of their class advantages and privileges" (192). And again: "the spontaneous *arat* [herdsmen] uprisings weakened and undermined both the alien rule and the feudal structure in Mongolia itself and gave the *arats* a wealth of experience in class warfare" (15). (One is left to wonder how this wealth of presumably practical, first-hand experience would be handed down for the next 150 years until the 1921 revolution.)

In the *History of the Mongolian People's Republic*, there is no explicit mention of the economic situation in Khalkha Mongolia at the time. This, however, is precisely the area that receives the most attention in *Manchu Chinese Colonial Rule in Northern Mongolia* (Sanjdorj 1980

[1963]). Again we find the rebellion termed a struggle for national independence which "received support from the entire Khalkh people all over the country" (64). It is portrayed as an economically motivated revolt. To quote the brief account offered:

The accumulated hatred aroused by the exploitation of Chinese moneylending capital, especially the debts and repayments which escalated from year to year, was one of the important causes of the struggle of the Khalkh people in 1756-8 for national independence... It is clear from contemporary sources that the struggle was not only for national independence and against the Manchus but was also directed against Chinese money-lending capital. It is not surprising that Chingunjav of Khotgoid, who owed large debts to the Chinese traders, should have been its leader (64).

The rebellion is seen as being largely economically motivated, with a nationalist flavor. In contrast to the previous Mongolian accounts, the lack of coordination between Amursana and Chingunjav is pointed out (106).

Information Mongolia (1990), an encyclopedic compendium by the Mongolian Academy of Science, also offers a brief account of the revolt and its background.

Along with the Oirad [Amursana's] uprising, a large-scale anti Manchu movement headed by Hotgoit Prince Chingunjav (1710-1757) began in Halh.

The insurgents suspended the border, the frontier post on the border with Russia, and the *örtöö* service along the Kalgan-Uliatsai-Hovd route.

These actions frustrated the operations of the Qing [Ching] expeditionary army (113-114).

This is a particularly interesting account, as it makes no mention of the results of Chingunjav's rebellion. One is thus left with the impression that his goals were at least partially achieved.

One other Mongolian account deserves brief mention. A pamphlet, simply entitled *Mongolia* (1976) published in England, but with apparently Mongolian authored text offers an interesting interpretation of these events: "the *arats* (herdsmen) often rose to fight their oppressors, their greatest uprisings occurring between 1755 and 1758". No mention is made in this account — the type of pamphlet handed out by information or tourist agencies — of Chingunjav, or any of the nobles involved, yet the time period singled out is exactly that of Chingunjav's rebellion.

We are again left with the question that the Western accounts gave us: what are we to make of these accounts? It is possible to sort out

ideological and more general life-world influences from the authors' individual biases, and the "facts" of the events in questions? As in the Western accounts, the answer is a qualified "yes."

The Accounts Reconsidered

For a Western scholar, an analysis of Soviet and Mongolian sources presents a difficulty that may not be immediately apparent. The danger I think is to rest content with an overly simplified critique of the Marxist elements in such accounts. This critique may be valid to some degree, but it is not the only factor that needs to be taken into consideration. As in the Western accounts, there is a strong nationalist element. It is, in fact, more explicit in these accounts than the Western ones. The reasons for this, however are quite different.

We begin by noting that the presentation of nationalism in the revolts is very different from the accounts of Bawden and the others. In the Mongolian accounts, there is no question that the revolts were not nationalist in character. This is especially notable in the terminology used to describe the Manchus. We see them repeatedly being termed "usurpers" and "occupiers" (MAS 1973:192, MAS 1990:113). This immediately sets their claim of sovereignty over the region against the (by implication) "more valid" claim of the Mongols. Where this greater legitimacy of the Mongol claim derives from is an interesting question. One is tempted to attribute it to the fact that the authors themselves are Mongolian. But this, while perhaps offering a partial explanation, can not serve as the full explanation. Other long-term Mongolian institutions, such as the Lamaist church, are harshly condemned.

The solution, rather, should also be sought in the background of the authors. Not just their Mongolian nationality, but also their more general place in the political and cultural worlds of the times. Looking again at the histories, we can begin to understand the reading of a nationalist nature into the rebellion. Such a presentation of the past becomes a legitimator to the present. We can see in the claim for a long standing tradition of nationalism the desire (need) to assert a unique historical past, an identity separate from the various groups that have exerted influence on or over the Mongolian people.

Chingunjav provides an especially suitable departure point for this, for he is said to be of the line of Chinggis Khan. As such, he serves not only as a focal point in and of himself, but also as a direct

link to what is seen as a unified and glorious past. In this case, the past provides proof of the right of the current sovereign state to exist.

Such a projection backward of nationalism also serves as a contestation of the Soviet domination at the time the histories were written. In contrast to the contemporary situation, the accounts provide a sense of unity and destiny, implying, perhaps that the then current Soviet-Mongolian arrangement is subject to renegotiation. The revolt of Chingunjav can then be read as a model of resistance to Soviet hegemony. One can read such an implicit sub-text into the accounts; a warning, to push the analogy. (For a recognition of the politics of reevaluating other history in Mongolia, see Hyer 1966.)

One should also look to the Marxist-Leninist interpretations of history. One can interpret (and indeed, the accounts refer to it) a popular revolt against a ruling class not merely as a general rebellion, but one that is aimed at liberating the herdsman, the closest thing to an oppressed working class extant at the time. This also offers an explanation of why, itself a part of the Mongolian social and political landscape, the Lamaist church comes in for such a harsh assessment. The lamas highest in the hierarchy served to provide a part of the oppressor's class. When added to the orthodox Marxist-Leninist view of religion (the opiate of the people), such a condemnation appears almost inevitable.

The traditional critique, however, becomes questionable here. Some of the arguments actually portray the (second) Jebtsundamba Khutagt as openly siding with the anti-Manchu rebellion. If the orthodox view of religion is to be adopted, it seems highly unlikely that the highest religious figure in the country would be singled out for praise as a supporter of the rebellion.

The issue becomes more complicated by the realization that it was the eighth Jebtsundamba Khutagt who was the leader of the Mongolian nation after the 1911 revolution, and remained as nominal head even after the 1921 socialist revolution. Thus, as a secular leader as well as a religious one, the position of the Jebtsundamba Khutagts are more liminal.

It is possible to see in Chingunjav's revolt a foreshadowing of the 1911 revolution. By interpreting the 1756-58 revolt as nationalistic, if unsuccessful, it is possible to portray history as moving in an inevitable, evolutionary manner. (Again: "the spontaneous *arat* uprisings weakened and undermined both the alien rule and the feudal structure in Mongolia itself and gave the *arats* a wealth of experience in class warfare" (MAS 1973:15).) The development of history includes

not only the eventual rise of socialism, but along the way, the fall of feudalism, and the liberation of the oppressed. Occasionally, some (like Chingunjav) will be ahead of their time, and must suffer the consequences.

The Western Accounts

The aspects of Bawden's (and Rossabi's) accounts I focused most heavily on are the most problematic. His apparent desire to be able to read a nationalist intent into the rebellion can not be clearly attributed to his historical context. Yet, it is not unexpected given Bawden's general background.

Bawden, like Nathanson and Rossabi, is a Western author. As such he is heir to a professed belief in (if not always practice of) democratic principles. In addition, Europe has historically been swept by a unique, highly potent form of nationalism (see Hobsbawm 1990). Given such a background it is not altogether unreasonable to want to read into a slightly (if at all) connected series of revolts and lootings the potential for a nationalist movement.

The values Bawden is transmitting (whether intentionally or not) are clear. In a nationalistic presentation of the facts, there is clearly the desire to "side with" the Mongols at some level. Even if Chingunjav was a brash, irresponsible individual, he has the ideological advantage of being the underdog, one who can be seen as fighting for better conditions for his people. There is perhaps, in Bawden's (and Rossabi's) account, something of the David and Goliath story.

The romanticization noted in Nathanson's account is also part of a Western tradition. Western peoples have a long tradition of romanticizing the exotic — the construction of the Other. This has manifested itself in various ways at various times. Most famous of these, perhaps, is the concept of the Noble Savage. Parallel to, or part of, this is the idea of the "true nomad." Whatever the reasons, Western civilizations have a love/hate relationship with nomads. They are either feared and loathed ("the scourge of God") or portrayed in romantic overtones. There is not space here to consider the reasons for such images, but they have pervaded history and even contemporary scholarly works. Savage, but free and honest. Not only does this fit the Noble Savage, but, according to Nathanson, Chingunjav as well.

Even if this brief consideration has only offered some possible influences, it was not my intention to offer long, complex arguments,

and claim definitively to point out certain lines of influence. Rather, I am much more interested in raising consciousness to the matter more generally. Often, while taking into account the biases inherent in their sources, academics tend to ignore their own biases, or that of their colleagues. The post-modern movement in anthropology (see for example, Clifford and Marcus 1986) offers some counters to this, but some proponents take this to an extreme. Self-reflection and analysis is necessary, but scholarly work is something more than just poetry.

Oral and Written History — Some Methodological Considerations

The accounts examined so far have all been written histories, using largely written archives as their historical sources. Use of written records presents its own set of problems - the need to be aware of the biases of the sources, problems of dating sources, authentication; the list goes on. Yet written records do provide certain "advantages" over oral ones. Once created as texts, they are more or less permanent, and unless edited or otherwise changed, written records can remain in the same form over hundreds of years, making the same sources accessible to multiple scholars and interpretations. Comparison between editions becomes possible as well.

Some social memory scholars go so far as to argue that recorded history has eliminated the chance for (re)construction of the past. They argue that under such conditions, it may only be "selectively exploited" (Schwartz 1982:296). Others, myself included, disagree. Ample evidence exists, however, of the outright fabrication of pasts in literate periods in Europe (see for example, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Oral history in some ways provides a more challenging field for such studies. The range and extent of observable influences increases dramatically. No longer can a text, once codified, be expected to exist unchanged for generations. With oral history, each generation (and each individual) may be expected to have an impact upon the text (even such as are supposedly memorized and transmitted in toto). An oral tradition, until recorded by someone does not (can not) exist outside the tellers of such traditions. It cannot exist concretely as some autonomous text on a shelf. The shelf is in the individual's memory, and each retelling is a new edition issued (subjected to the approval and disapproval, even modifications, of the audience).

Other factors as well must be taken into account. For example, it is known that while oral traditions (those presented specifically as history) do refer to historical events, they are not necessarily always immediately distinguishable from stories without historical claims. Mixing of chronologies often occurs, as does a shortening of time scales. Whole generations may be skipped between the earliest times and those preserved in common memory. We can also find compression of space, as for example when Shidyrvan travels from close to the Russian border to Peking overnight. Many of the methodological issues involved in the use of oral traditions are comprehensively discussed Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition as History* (1985). Between the two fields lies a flexible boundary. If one were to be truly thorough, the impact of mass literacy and the new means of recording and transmitting knowledge should be examined as well.

The Shidyrvan cycle (Potanin 1883:298-309) provides a fascinating source of information on Chingunjav's rebellion and attitudes towards it. It should be noted here that although the cycle of stories found in Potanin refer to Shidyrvan, he is in fact one and the same with Chingunjav. This is evident to anyone familiar with the period from the facts presented in the tales. It does serve, however, to point out one of the caveats to be kept in mind when working with folk traditions, and written forms of oral history, namely, that one must not be ready to accept any and all aspects of the tales in the cycle as necessarily referring to the historical revolt, or even events or attitudes contemporary with it, without further examination.

Vansina writes that a tradition is still evidence unless it be shown that a message does not finally rest on a first statement made by an observer. It cannot then be evidence for the event or situation in question, even though it still will be evidence for later events, those that gave rise to the "false" message (1985:29) Bawden notes that it "is as a figure of a liberator that Chingunjav survived in Mongol folk memory." He adds that Shishmarev, "writing a century ago, had the acumen to observe the widespread discontent of the Mongols and to realize that in remembering Chingunjav in story and song, they were cherishing the memory of their lost independence" (Bawden 1989:130). While this may be the case, in light of an additional 100 years of folklore studies, one should be less willing to offer such an interpretation without further examination.

The Shidyrvan cycle provides a good example of several aspects of oral tradition. At the "core" is a historical event. Around it are grouped apparent importations from other historical occasions, super-natural events, millennial beliefs and other religious elements. Many of the thoughts offered here require further research to either

substantiate or reject them. At this time, they can only be offered as speculations.

I feel it necessary to begin by cautioning against a nationalist-liberationist interpretation of these tales. Shishmarev was writing in 19th century Russia, where European nationalist movements had already begun to penetrate among the intellectuals. Although it is possible that the Mongolian intelligentsia were also aware of, and caught up in, similar currents, it is not plausible to endow the entire populace with similar sentiments.

Rather, the tales seem to represent a historical occurrence that has been embellished over time, and that has "attracted" other stories to it. Thus, for example, the tale labelled "L" in the cycles makes no mention of the revolt at all, and in "M" it filters down to us only in the most oblique way – we are told that Shidyrvan was killed (three times), but never why. For that, one must already be familiar with the historical material.

In addition, many of the tales mention Shidyrvan's flight to Russia. While he did flee towards the Russian border and look to the Russians for aid, there is no mention that he ever managed to cross the border (as many of the tales recount). The accounts that he did then can be interpreted in one of two ways. It is possible to view them as a distortion of historical fact, or they can be seen as a blending of two separate events. While Chingunjav did not cross the border (as far as is known), Amursana did; in fact dying on Russian soil. It is possible that this aspect of Amursana's history has been imported into Chingunjav's story, and this is a blending of the two.

Other tales bring similar points to light. A Mongol tale (Sampildenev 1984:56-58) focuses on Amursana, but structurally, it is very reminiscent of the Shidyrvan cycle. Three people make a pact to revolt or stage a coup — Chingunjav, Amursana, and another noble. The last one betrays them, and they are forced to flee, with the Manchus catching up near the Russian border. This raises the possibility that many of the tales are based on Amursana, even if Shidyrvan is meant to be Chingunjav.

One wonders if, in part, the reported flight of Shidyrvan is not related to that of Amursana from Erinchindorji. I put forward this proposal mainly on the word used repeatedly by Potanin, *bezhal*. It has the connotation of flight, or running away. Such a reading is more in keeping with Amursana, than Chingunjav. Chingunjav's movements were more of a rebellion than a flight, which Amursana's clearly was. Unfortunately, we are not able to distinguish whether the tales told by the Mongolians used parallel terminology, or if this

is an effect of Potanin's recording. This is only one type of "distortion" one must be wary of. And it should be kept in mind that there is a chance, however slight, that the oral tales have got it right, and the written records are wrong.

To give an idea of some of the folklore elements present in the tales, I offer a brief cataloguing of some of them. All of these can be found in Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, (1958) a listing of motifs and themes from folk tales from a number of sources. A full discussion of this would take too long. This brief listing, however, gives some idea of the range, and indicates the degree to which folkloric elements can also find their way into "historical" tales.

The List

The Mingat have blue cloth strips around their doors, so Shidyrvan can identify them when he returns (account V — tale types H110ff: "identification by cloth"); only Shidyrvan can draw a certain bow, his father's is too weak for him (account L — tale type H31.2: "recognition by unique ability to bend bow"); Shidyrvan's ability to rise into the air (tale V — tale type D2135.0.3: "magic ability to fly"); recognition of reincarnations of Shidyrvan (tale O — tale types H50ff: "recognition by bodily marks). The list goes on.

This is not to suggest that all such ideas are necessarily folkloric importations. The blue cloth is also reminiscent of the Old Testament story of Passover, and given the activity of Christian missionaries in the area, a borrowing or imitation of this is possible. Nestorian Christianity also had a long tradition in parts of Inner Asia, dating back to at least the time of Chinggis Khan himself.

Religious elements also can be found in other parts of the tales. In one tale, the Bogd Gegeen travels to the land of the "Lyetin Khambu," (Latin Abbot) presumably the Pope (although it need not be as far — any Christian area could suffice). Christianity can also perhaps be read into other aspects of these tales. Shidyrvan is often killed three times, each time coming back to life. If one wishes, a distorted version of the death of Christ (rising from the dead after three days) can be seen here. This would also agree with the tortures Shidyrvan is often put to (redemption through suffering).

I would argue against such an interpretation as being the exclusive one. I would view this interpretation as being not much more than a Western template laid over the tales. The number three is too common in tales and religions throughout much of the world to read a

purely Christian element into it. The tortures were not an uncommon occurrence in Central Asia during this time period. If one can not thus say for certainty whether these aspects of the tales are Christian, Buddhist, or other (the flying ability is reminiscent of shamanic rites) one can at least still derive certain conclusions from them. We still see a noble transformed into a folk hero, with evil Chinese (only seldom are the Manchus singled out as Manchu, rather than Chinese) and often helpful (or at least, not actively dangerous) Russians. This not only mirrors the historical situation rather nicely, but given that Potanin had collected the stories in the northern parts of Mongolia (including Buriatia), one can reasonably assume that this mirrors local sentiment.

In many of the tales, much is made of the use of a yellow *khadak* to bind Shidyrvan's hands. In one tale, he does this himself, after being handed the scarf by the troops sent out to capture him (tale S). The yellow *khadakh* (scarf) is taken to have ritual or religious significance. While one can not rule out that the tales that mention this detail are all derived from one source, it is still significant that the color is important enough to be remembered, and in each account, it is yellow — the color of Lamaist Buddhism.

Having said this, however, there is still much valuable information to be gained from an examination of such tales. They do, to an extent, serve as an oral history; and more importantly, they provide a glimpse of the life-world of the people who told them. In this particular case, we have the additional advantage of having written records against which the tales may be compared. This means that we may use the two as a "filter" for each other and (hopefully) extract some additional information on the world-view they encode.

Although 20th century nationalism cannot be imputed to the tellers of these tales, we can receive some insight into their world. It must be made clear, however, that the life-world under examination is the one of the Mongolians and Buriats of the time period when the tales were collected, "contaminated" by remnants of earlier ones passed on through the tales. It is not possible infer much about the reaction to Chingunjav's rebellion by his contemporaries from these tales.

One of the most notable things about this collection is the geographical range over which it has been collected. Chingunjav was himself a Khalkha, ruler of the Khotgoid, and fled to the region of the Darkhats. Yet the stories are also being told by Mingat and Buriats. This latter group is perhaps the most surprising. They have been in the region surrounding Lake Baikal since the time of Chinggis Khan

(Bawden 1989:2), and have been heavily Russified since at least the early 1700s. While this helps to explain why Potanin was able to collect so many tales from them, it does not explain why the range of the cycle extends so far north and east of Chingunjav's original region. Undoubtedly much of this is due to trade and communication between the groups, but it is not possible to explain fully, by this alone, why the tales have been collected in this region.

The existence of the tales about Chingunjav/Shidyrvan among such a diverse group indicates that he was more than just a local hero. He had become something larger. This, unlike Shishmarev, I do not attribute to a yearning for liberation. Rather, I would suggest that Shidyrvan has somehow managed to strike a deeper cord. The varied accounts of the tale attributed to him, and the range of capabilities indicates that he has become a symbol that apparently resonates at several levels. And indeed, it is possible to question not only the range, but the man as well. Why Chingunjav? Was it just the rebellion, or is there something more?

Shidyrvan has clearly outgrown the roots of his historical origins as Chingunjav. We must examine the tales to see if we can explain this growth over the wide range of Mongol groups. I would begin by perhaps pointing to the millennial atmosphere of the tales. Caroline Humphrey has discussed a messianic movement in the Altai region some 20 or 30 years after these tales were collected (Humphrey n.d.). She also notes that the first waves of this movement occurred in the 1850s and 1880s, the time when these tales were being told and collected.

This collection of tales clearly has a millennial content, and perhaps this is why Shidyrvan became such a folk hero. By blending Amursana and Chingunjav, we can arrive at a figure capable of returning. Amursana was not seen to be killed, he merely disappeared into the Russian wilderness. Some clearly expected him to return, and when Dambijantsen first appeared (in western Mongolia, c. 1911), some took him for Amursana.

Before continuing with any further analysis, I include two of the shorter stories to give some idea of the tales themselves.⁵

B) Shidyrvan was the Oirad-Khan; he had two sons, Temirsana and Amursana. The Edzen-Khan took over the land belonging to the Oirad-Khan; Shidyrvan just disappeared [went to where he was not known]. Just before he left, he cut half of the tail of his horse and said "when this tail had regrown, my reign will return."

D) Shidyrvan and Amursana went away at the same time, one to the west and the other to the north. Shidyrvan arrived among the Darkhat and asked them to take him over the border; the Darkhat

said they would give him camels and several hundred horses, and they showed him the road across the Van-Tologoi mountains (at the river Khor) but they themselves told this to the Edzen-Khan. The army caught up with him at Van-Tologoi and captured him. This Tololgoi hill is near the Darkhat little temple at Shishkit.

In tale B, Shidyrvan is explicit: after cutting his horse's tail, he says that when it has regrown, his reign will return. And again, we often see Shidyrvan being reincarnated after he is killed, or stigma afflicting the children of the Edzen Khan. Thus, given a background of millennial belief, Shidyrvan becomes an ideal figure around which to base such stories. He (like Amursana) was not seen to be on killed, but led to Peking. Clearly the stories show doubt (hope) that he wasn't killed. Perhaps he too, like Amursana before him, managed to escape.

Some accounts deal with the rebellion or some version of it. Most of those that do, portray Shidyrvan as receiving the short end of it all. He is often betrayed, captured, and executed. One tale does not even portray the events leading to his flight, capture, etc., as betrayal. The supposed betrayal is in fact a concoction of jealous Mongol rulers, for we are told in tale N, that the "Shidyrvan and the Edzen Khan [the Manchu emperor] were great friends," and that further, "the Edzen Khan had a lot of trust in Shidyrvan." There is in fact no evidence that Chingunjav was ever betrayed (and with the letter he had written to the Manchu emperor, there was no need for betrayal.) The closest historical event to this that I am able to trace is a report that Chimgur, Amursana's brother, betrayed him by reporting to Erinchindorji Amursana's intention to flee (Nathanson 1983:70).

From this, we can conclude that popular sentiment was with Shidyrvan, and probably even Chingunjav. (The massive rebellions that did happen support this, although they do not necessarily reflect feelings towards Chingunjav. They could have been merely opportunistic.) Given the time the tales were collected, it is also possible that this sympathy can be extended to a resentment towards the Manchus (when the tales were collected in Manchu-controlled areas) and the Russians (when collected among the Buriats).

Many of the conditions that helped to precipitate the rebellions of 1755-1758 were still present over 100 years later when the tales were collected (and were to be found again in 1911). But this does not mean Shidyrvan/Chingunjav was seen as a great liberator. Rather, it is probably the rumblings of any over-taxed, destitute group against almost any ruler that are being heard.

It is also interesting to note that some of the tales that do mention the rebellion do not portray it merely as a rebellion. There is talk of

the fact that Shidyrvan wanted to place himself on the throne. In this case, then, we are not dealing with a rebellious noble, leading the way to a formation of an independent kingdom. What these tales reflect, rather, is an alternative view of the rebellion, one perhaps that was devised by the "commoners" to understand and explain why Chingunjav would revolt in the first place. Such a revolt would not necessarily lead to independence. It is, instead, the personal ambition of a single noble, who wants to place himself on the throne. This is dimly echoed in tale N, which begins "Shidyrvan and the Edzen Khan were great friends." In this tale, Shidyrvan is asked to sit on the throne, in Edzen Khan's absence. It is through the treachery of jealous Mongol princes that he is made to appear treacherous, planning to take the throne for himself. What is extant here, I suggest, is the dim echo of the other tales of this type. In this case however, Shidyrvan does not have such intentions. This serves to "redeem" him in the eyes of the tellers of such tales, for they do not have to come to terms with such a great folk hero (as Shidyrvan appears to be, at least in these tales) betraying anyone, no matter who he or she might be.

There is also talk of Chingunjav setting up his own capital, North Peking. This is in keeping with the theory that he wanted the throne already occupied by the Manchus. But having said all of this, we also see contradictory evidence. In one tale, "D", told by a Darkhat, the Darkhats betray Shidyrvan's flight to the Manchus. There is evidence that although the Mongols helped Shidyrvan, they did not actively oppose the Manchus, and the Russians would not do anything without the proper authorization. This usually came, but too late.

So, in sum, we can safely infer several things from these tales – discontent with the present conditions, hope for better times: in short, millennial sentiments. We see also a sympathy for, but not outright support with, a noble; evidence that the herdsmen were more interested in their own livelihood and survival than abstract principles of ethnicity or nationalism.

Conclusions

Returning to Kundera and Joyce, we see that the past lies somewhere between the two visions. It is not quite as immalleable as Joyce would have us believe, but it is more complex than Kundera's imagery suggests. The past is a battleground for memory and forgetting, but it is more.

As the example of Chingunjav's rebellion has shown, any event can be viewed in multiple ways. We have examined different written traditions, as well as oral accounts, and noted variations in all of them. The reasons for this have been already outlined. In viewing these variations, we are left to conclude that it is not possible to ever reconstruct a totally objective account of what happened. One is always left with a phenomenological equivalent of Mannheim's paradox: while one can critique the accounts of others as biased by their situatedness-in-the-world, this does not mean that one possesses a privileged position. The critiques apply equally to oneself.

But this does not then mean that all is hopeless. Histories are written, and they are something more than the ramblings of isolated individuals. History does refer to some event or thought, or other occurrence that has in fact occurred. What then, can such an approach as outlined here add to history? I would suggest it has several strengths.

First, it serves to help make us aware of the differences in accounts, and to realize that all accounts are thus biased. It is not just the Other who writes historical accounts that do not refer perfectly to the "objective event." We are all guilty of this: it is an unavoidable truth of historiography. Perhaps it is the only one.

Secondly, from a careful enough examination we can obtain some idea of the life-world in which the authors have lived. Such a point holds particularly true for recorded versions of oral accounts, which are much more explicitly influenced by the teller of tales. And, if we are fortunate enough to have information pertaining to the particular author's background, so much the better. We need not then look for the life-world in the text. Rather, we can look for the text in the life-world.

Third, such an approach teaches us that whatever Chingunjav, or similar historical figures may have actually done is in some aspects irrelevant. This point echoes, but is distinct from the first. For Kundera, history is a struggle and what we learn from such studies as the present one is that it does not always matter what is being fought over. I should also point out that in other cases it often does matter, and greatly so. What matters in many of these cases is who, in the end, triumphs. We are never be able to know the past as it was. What we can and should be concerned about is who's account of history we end up reading, and how to get past the explicit reading of the offered text. This, in the final analysis, is the crux of the exercise. In one way, Chingunjav has been dead for almost 150 years. In another, more important sense, he is still very much alive today.

Notes

- 1 I model the discussion of truth models after Borofsky 1987:16-17.
- 2 I consciously refer to "the Chingunjav rebellion", as opposed to "Chingunjav's rebellion". The latter I use to refer to the more limited case of Chingunjav's actual revolt. The former I prefer as a label for the reconstruction of the events, including the inclusion of the other revolts taking place at the time.
- 3 Many of the names encountered often take various forms. Although I have used common forms in the body of the text, I have kept the quoted text as they were. Thus, Zuungars = Jungars; Amursan = Amursana; Khalkh = Halh = Khalkha; Hotgoit = Khotogoit.
- 4 I am drawing upon a series of lectures on nationalism given in the Michaelmas Term, 1991, at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge.
- 5 I am indebted to Myriam Hivon and Caroline Humphrey for their aid in translating these tales from the Russian

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