

 **Article REVIEW**

Sergey Radchenko. “Mongolian Politics in the Shadow of the Cold War: The 1964 Coup Attempt and the Sino-Soviet Split”. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2006): 95-119.

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In the article “Mongolian Politics in the Shadow of the Cold War: The 1964 Coup Attempt and the Sino-Soviet Split” Sergey Radchenko describes the complex interplay within the high echelons of Mongolian nomenclature at the time of the “great friendship” and the later break up of the USSR and the PRC (People’s Republic of China). As access to the Soviet and Mongolian archival data on the 1950-1980s is still limited (the studies on the early socialist periods are more advantageous in this respect), the author’s efforts to collect scarce documentation from the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation and the Archive of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (nowadays the State Central Historical Archive of Mongolia) and dress it up with the information from his original interviews will be certainly appreciated by Mongolists.

Radchenko’s survey of the political struggle within the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (the MPRP) proves that Mongolian policy-makers were not obedient puppets in the hands of their big brothers in Moscow; despite their dependence on the USSR they had their own views on regional geopolitics, could follow their own decisions, and even had an impact on Soviet politics in East Asia. The article under review contributes to the deconstruction of the “Soviet satellite” myth created during the Cold War.

Since the beginning of the 1990s Mongolian authors have published extensively on the different personalities in Mongolian political officialdom during the 20th century. The utilization of this bunch of literature is an achievement by Radchenko that distinguishes him from other scholars who tend to overlook the present Mongolian historiography. Multiple references to the Mongolian literature in the article make the reader wonder about the general author’s approach to these secondary sources. What is the author’s view on the rewriting of the socialist history by contemporary Mongolian scholars? Do their studies reflect the nation-building processes in the present Mongolia? How do they conceptualize Cold War geopolitics in East Asia?

Although the article by Sergey Radchenko is a case study on the 1964 coup attempt in Ulaanbaatar and is deemed to bring new insights into the foreign policy discussions inside the MPRP, its broader scope of Sino-Mongolian-Soviet relations during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years calls for a wider contextual framework of Cold War international relations. Did the critique of Tsendenbals’ methods of rule by his opponents reflect in essence the anti-Soviet propaganda promoted on the other side of the iron curtain? How can we learn about U.S. policy on East Asia in this period? (The Ph.D. dissertation by Alicia Campi based on the US Department of State data has not been published so far.) Why didn’t the Mongolian intelligentsia during Khrushchev’s “thaw” and later, in the 1980s, recognize the informational and physiological “defeat” in the Cold War in the same way as their Soviet colleagues, instead preferring to portray themselves as victims of the “communist experiment in Asia”?

In the general approach towards the analysis of Mongolia's socialist history Radchenko seems to trap himself in the dichotomies of "Soviet dominance – independent politics", "authoritarianism – nationalism", "repression – party democracy" etc. It remains unclear, however, if the views by Tsedenbal's opponents, Lookhuuz, Nyambuuz and Surmaajav, really reflected the nationalist feelings of the Mongol people. On the contrary, the material presented in the work proves that the critique of Tsedenbal's overall reliance on Moscow's assistance was a political manoeuvre rather than an intention to "democratize the party" or launch a more pro-Chinese course.

I can hardly agree that the choice between China and the USSR was there on the table for Mongolian politicians in the 1950-1960s. The well-known fact that the MPR (Mongolian People's Republic) received de-jure independence from China in 1945 due to the USSR and Josef Stalin speaks for itself. Despite the constantly-present desire to diversify foreign policy and seek new alliances, the MPRP members could not hesitate about the predominant Soviet role in the development of their state. Although the two countries' (the MPR and the PRC) rapprochement in the 1960s and consequent economic gains for Mongolia were evident, Ulaanbaatar felt very secure within the Soviet sphere to make friends with China and, in addition, used the "Chinese factor" to trade for more aid from the Soviet Union. The data on the Chinese aid to the MPR mentioned by the author would be more representative if he had presented it in a comparative statistical perspective.

Sergey Radchenko's article is a valuable contribution to the rethinking of the socialist legacy in Mongolia, as it suggests a more balanced, nuanced view on the political struggle within the ruling party of that country. It also reveals the necessity of upgrading methodological and conceptual approaches to the history of socialist societies in Asia and to locate the "Mongolian episode" in the broader domain of discussions on Cold War (and post-Cold War) geopolitics.

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