



Power of the People's Parties and a post-Soviet Parliament: Regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks of power in contemporary Mongolia

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Abstract

In 1994, the new Orkhon Province was created, transforming the status of the Soviet-established federal municipality Erdenet, a major copper-mining center responsible for much of the country's export revenues and central to ongoing Mongolian–Russian relations. Rather than representing increased participation in national government for Erdenet residents, many of whom are members of transborder minority ethnicities with ties to remote parts of the country, the formation of the province has been controversial locally, as it has meant the introduction of provincial governors, de facto appointed by the Prime Minister. At the same time, the People's Parties descending from the single state party of the socialist era have in fact been successful at maintaining their networks across the country, and often fielded successful candidates for seats representing Orkhon. Representatives have included the director of a large local construction firm who also held the post of director of foreign trade within the mining enterprise (2008 to 2012, 2016 to present), the son of the mining enterprise's former General Director (2012 to present), and a politician long based in Ulaanbaatar but central to the MPRP (2016 to present). The situation demonstrates the tension in Mongolian governance between Ulaanbaatar-based centralization and vertical integration on the one hand (also pursued through attempts to privatize the mining enterprise) and the independence of constituencies integrated with regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks built up through long histories of international imperial entanglements on the other.

Keywords

Elections, ethnicity, infrastructure, political parties, regionalization

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Introduction

This article concerns the role of a representative Parliament¹ in integrating local and national levels of governance in contemporary Mongolia. Closely aligned with its neighbor, the Soviet Union, for almost the entirety of the 20th century, the governance of Mongolia has now long been structured into a four-level system of *bag* (neighborhood), *sum* (region, formerly coterminous with *negdel* collectives and state farms), and *aimag* (province).^{2,3} During the state socialist period, these levels of governance were integrated through single-party control; in the post-1990 period of multi-party elections, new centralizing processes were introduced. Rather than inscribing the form of constituencies and their representation in the

Constitution of 1992, these are defined by a frequently, even regularly, changing Election Law.⁴ Also established in the Constitution of 1992 (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khuul, n.d.), the institution of the provincial governor (*zasag darga*), effectively appointed by the Prime Minister, has not been an effective means of central control to reorganize relations between the center and regions of Mongolia. Contributing to this has been that Mongolia's regions have been long differentiated in terms of powerful cross-border networks constituting specific economic, infrastructural, and ethnic hubs, formed through a

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long history of what Sablin (2019) has called imperial entanglements. The reorganization of these relations to transform Mongolia's economy (and international relations) has been a major goal of Mongolia's Democratic Party and its associated movements since the 1980s. These parties and movements have been consistently contested, however, by the successors of the socialist era Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, the Mongolian People's Party and the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party,⁵ which, since the socialist period have maintained their political organizations throughout the country, including in regions defined by transborder power networks associated with Mongolia's "second cities." This situation is amply demonstrated by recent political figures' biographies and their elections, appointments, and political legitimacy in Erdenet, one of Mongolia's four cities outside of the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

Although Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were all governed directly under the centralized party-state in the socialist period as "federal municipalities" or "towns under national jurisdiction" (Sanders, 2017) in the 1990s, they were each reincorporated as part of new provinces, Orkhon, Darkhan-Uul, and Govisumber, respectively. This reincorporation instituted the office of provincial governor in these regions, though provinces are not guaranteed the status of constituency or electoral district in the Constitution (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khuul, n.d.). Each of these towns or cities is a hub of transborder infrastructure, economy, and distinctive ethnic networks established over the course of, at least, the Qing, Tsarist Russian, Mongolian Bogd Khaan, and Soviet imperial periods. Choir, formerly a Soviet Army cantonment of 259 buildings (Sanders, 2017, p. 181) was built at the site of a major monastery, along the major route between China, Urga (which became Ulaanbaatar), and the entrepôt of Maimaicheng/Khiakhtha, the route on which was built the Trans-Mongolian Railway. Choibalsan, the administrative center for Dornod province, was also the site prior to the socialist period of a prominent monastery and a center of one of the Qing period's Four Aimags of Khalkha Mongolia (covering, roughly, the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic and then today's Mongolia), and associated with transborder Buryat and Barga peoples. A railroad spur was constructed in the socialist period to connect the city, and local coal and uranium mines, to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Erdenet and Darkhan are both located on the Trans-Mongolian Railway in the Selenge region of northern Mongolia and the heart of Lake Baikal's watershed; this area has also been associated with transborder Buryat groups as well as Chinese working farming allotments (*tarialan*) granted from the Buddhist ecclesiastical estates as the area formed a key section of the border of the Qing and Russian Tsarist empires (Batsaikhan, 2012, p. 83).

Erdenet and Orkhon province are home to the Erdenet Mining Corporation, responsible for roughly a third of the Mongolian economy in the form of copper ores produced and exported via Soviet-established equipment,

infrastructure, and professionalization. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Erdenet was settled as a new city, predominantly by ethnic groups from Mongolia's border regions to the far east (Buryat), west (Kazakh, Dorvod, Uriankhai, Oold, Darkhad), and south (Khalkha from Govi-Altai) as well as more locally. Today, these groups continue to define themselves in terms of these distinct ethnicities and maintain strong relationships with coethnics across the country, and across the border. Along these relations flow access to necessary valuables associated with the city (*khot, gorod*)—education, professional jobs, medicine, apartments—as well as with the countryside (*khodoo*)—pasture, livestock, forest products, and herding as well as other "traditional" knowledges.

Constitutional and legal reforms after the 1990 "Democratic Revolution" sought, at least ostensibly, to move fracture and contestation into the arena of a popularly elected, multi-party Parliament, consolidating national interests. As richly documented by anthropologists working in Mongolia since the 1990s, fears about economic, ethnic, and territorial fragmentation of the nation state after the break with state socialism have defined the period of so-called "transition" (Billé, 2016; Bulag, 1998; Buyandelger, 2013; Pedersen, 2011). On one hand, commentators have long celebrated the participation of rural Mongolians in elections and establishment of myriad political parties. Yet at the same time, there has been a notable persistence of several contesting formations of centralized, vertically integrated governance, wielded by two dominant political parties (and their associated smaller parties and movements) consistently holding power in different regions and social sectors. Adding to the complexity of the situation, these frequently exchange control of the presidency and the Parliament.

The Democratic Party is strongly associated with the Democratic Revolution of 1990–1991, in which young and subaltern members of the party-state ruling elite called for the intensification of Mongolia's analogues of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (*il tod* and *shinechlel*), and then the resignation of the government and subsequent multi-party elections. Since the 1990s, many of those involved extended and intensified their networks beyond rather than within Mongolia. However, the Democratic Party has had difficulty challenging the networks of the single-party state inherited and maintained by the Mongolian People's Party and Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (Ginsburg, 1995), and accordingly the Democratic Party has often worked to sidestep the power of the People's Parties based in those parties' continued domination of political organizing in much of the countryside, provincial centers, and socialist-period established enterprises such as Erdenet.

The following sections of the article (1) summarize the existing literature on and trends in Mongolian political reform to illustrate the approach of the Democratic Party and its associated Western-based reformers; (2) contrast the presumption on the part of Western reformers that Mongolia

is unified and homogeneous with a description of Mongolia's nature as a set of regions with distinct networks of power defined by infrastructure, economy, and ethnicity; (3) argue that this is a condition which drives Mongolian politicians to attempt to unify the country through a flexible Parliamentary Elections Law and the institution of the provincial governor; and (4) provide an extended description of the 2012 Parliamentary election campaigns in Erdenet, which involved an unpopular Democratic Party provincial governor and largely ignored Democratic Party candidates unaligned with regional networks, and successful People's Party candidates, deeply part of those networks, especially but not limited to those of the mining enterprise.

Constitutional approaches to understanding and evaluating Mongolian politics and governance

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mongolians followed their Eastern European counterparts in embarking upon a "transition" from Soviet-led state socialism. Since then, Mongolia's political system has frequently been the object of praise, and reform, by American political scientists. According to these narratives, the young Mongolian elite (many of whom have studied in the United States and been members of the Democratic Party) turned against one-party rule and state planning of the economy, forced their elders to step down, and trained at Western universities and with international political organizations to refashion Mongolia's governing institutions (Addleton, 2013; Ginsburg & Ganzorig 1996; Jargalsaikhan, 2017; Kaplonski, 2004; Rossabi, 2005; Sindelar, 2009; Tseveddamba, 2016). As with the postcommunist governments of Eastern Europe, for almost three decades, the focus here has been on the Constitution and constitutional amendments as a means of regulating relations between governing powers (Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996, Munkh-Erdene, 2010) and guaranteeing human rights (Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996). In the 1990s and early 2000s, Western commentators pointed to Mongolia's "balance of powers" and "divided government" (Fish, 2001, p. 337) between parties in "the postcommunist region's best developed party system" (Fish, 1999, p. 801) as signs of a not just extant but even exemplary democracy.

In recent years, however, prominent Western-aligned politicians and political theorists have bemoaned frequent changes as features of instability. Prime ministers are frequently replaced, parliamentary majorities often shift, and presidential cabinets shuffle regularly, though cabinet appointments must be agreed upon by both the President and the Prime Minister. The figure "fifteen changes of cabinet, averaging 1.5 per year" is now a regular refrain in laments about democracy in Mongolia (Migeddorj, 2017, Tserendash Tsolmon cited in Bayartsogt, 2018). On the international scene, these conversations have presumed the central control of the Mongolian government operating at a

national scale and remained focused on issues like the relation between the President and Parliament in appointing and confirming the cabinet and the Prime Minister (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), whether or not prime ministers and cabinet members may also be members of Parliament (the so-called "double *deel*" issue) (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), and to what degree parliamentary representation should be majoritarian versus proportional (Migeddorj, 2012). Only very few analysts have focused on how government at the local and provincial levels functions in Mongolia, and the effects on this of constitutional and other legal changes at the beginning of the "transition" from socialism (see especially Badarchyn & Odgaard, 1996).

Although in Western-based discourses, the economic impact of these reforms is about fostering so-called free markets, this involves a centralization of the national economy. Mongolian reformers have concentrated on rearticulating the relationship of Soviet-established enterprises like Erdenet and the Mongolian center away from historically grounded transborder and transregional relationships and toward the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, a priority that often aligns with the privatization programs required by the Western organizations provisioning the Ulaanbaatar-centered political economy.⁶ However, in contrast to their Western counterparts, these Mongolian reformers are deeply anxious about the unity of the Mongolian nation, and are working in continuity with late Soviet period projects that understand the processing and export of Mongolian products to have been artificially restricted by the Soviet Union and now by Russia. Associated with this is a preoccupation with the consolidation of control over Mongolian resources. Paradoxically, both international and Mongolian actors ignore the physical and social networks creating these resources, and apparently have difficulty in understanding the existing networks and the inability to effectively dismantle or bypass these.

Regionalized Mongolia: powerful infrastructural, economic, and ethnic transborder networks

International advisors and reformers involved in the rewriting of Mongolia's Constitution and the establishment of its Constitutional Court, in alignment with the idealizations of the Ulaanbaatar-based policymakers they often work with, imagine the country as split between an urban, cosmopolitan, internationally connected capital city (*khot*), on one hand, and a rural, locally focused, countryside (*khodoo*) populated mainly by nomadic herders on the other hand. For example, Ginsburg (1995) writes that

situated in the grassland steppes between Russia and China, Mongolia has a little over two million people, several hundred thousand of whom are semi-nomadic herders living a largely

intact traditional lifestyle. Most of the remainder are concentrated in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. (p. 460)

and

despite collectivization of herding in the 1950s, the nomadic lifestyle of herdsman continued and families lived as individual units in their traditional pastures. There was little threat of grass-roots political organization against communist rule, and therefore little need for repression in the countryside . . . Massive inflows of aid and goods [during the socialist period] meant that the average herdsman enjoyed a far better standard of living than he would have had without them. (p. 462)

American and Western European analysts also tend to believe that Mongolia has a “common ethnicity” and “cohesive national identity” and that ethnic homogeneity is a factor contributing to Mongolia’s “relative success in regards to other nations that transitioned from communism to democracy” (Schmücking & Adiyasuren, 2017).

Among themselves, however, Mongolians gesture to and are often nervous about the range of regionally based international networks of wealth, power, and identity present among them. In a collection that also included a contribution by the then current American ambassador to Mongolia, emphasizing the need for “checks and balances” including Parliament as “a forum in which many Mongolian voices are heard” (Addleton, 2012, p. 38), national security advisor Batchimeg Migeedorj (2012) wrote,

Since our democratic revolution, almost all political elections in Mongolia followed the majoritarian electoral system (sometimes called “first past the post”). Some elected politicians have often chosen cash distribution and other populist actions in their constituency as a way to strengthen their popularity. Unfortunately, such actions, which are reinforced by our existing election system, have fueled “constituency-oriented politics”, diverting politicians away from large-scale national policies, wide-ranging poverty reduction goals, and national economic security and social development aims. For example, fuel crisis [sic] is just one of many significant issues for Mongolia’s economic security. It is alarming that despite obvious risks faced by current Mongolian society, the Parliamentary majority—which is well-aware of these risks—has chosen once again the majoritarian electoral system, which further complicates the situation. (p. 58–59)

Monitoring Twitter commentary as election results were coming in for the presidential election of 2017, I noted that accusations of vote-buying were especially levied against ethnic Kazakhs, who were also labeled as living in “*als khi-azgar*,” or particularly remote *sum* (analogous to “counties”) in the extreme far west of Mongolia. As to far eastern Mongolia, the Inner Mongolian, Cambridge-trained and affiliated anthropologist Uradyn Bulag (1998) wrote of his 1990–1992 fieldwork that “my decision to go there [Dashbalbar, a majority Buryat *sum* near the Russian and

Chinese borders] caused a sensation. [Ethnic majority] Halh [Khalkha] friends told me that the Buryats there were drunkards and rough; they fought, often using knives” (p. 23).

As details from Bulag’s field trip to Dashbalbar and Dadal indicate, the divide between urban and rural, city and countryside involves more than class-based snobbery on the part of the capital’s intellectual and political elite. He describes intense regional differentiation in Mongolia, characterized not only by the presence of particular ethnic groups, but also particular transborder international ties involving infrastructure and economy as well as ethnic identity. Dashbalbar neighbors the semi-secret uranium mining enterprise Mardai run by Soviet citizens; in 1991, when Bulag visited to attend the summer *naadam* festival, the mine director and engineers brought two TV sets and sports equipment⁷ and after the Soviet miners (also of a mix of ethnicities, including Buryats from the R.S.F.S.R., Delaplace, 2012) left, Dashbalbar residents complained to Bulag (1998) that the abandoned town had been “filled with Mongols from Choibalsan [fourth largest city in Mongolia, capital of Dornod province]” (p. 23):

The Buryats would like it to remain a Russian town, so they could benefit from exchange relations. Mongol control of the town would mean destruction, they said. In fact, many people from Choibalsan, Dashbalbar, and Bayandung [sic] came to dismantle the houses and take away the logs. (p. 23)⁸

International border crossing was frequent, and Bulag (1998) wrote that

although politically, Buryats in this region are subject to Choibalsang [sic] and Ulaanbaatar, in kinship and economic terms they are oriented towards Chita and other regions. . . they were keen to visit Chita and Inner Mongolia and asked me to write them letters of invitation. (p. 24)

Like the regions including Dashbalbar, Dadal, and Mardai, Erdenet and Orkhon constitute a region with distinctive transborder ties consisting of both industrial and transport infrastructure related to the mine and railway as well ethnically coded relations of kinship and identity, differentiating the region from the Khalkha-dominated and defined capital. In addition, Erdenet is a center of integration articulating other Mongolian regions. Since the 1970s many of its residents have migrated from (and regularly visit) regions across Mongolia. Kazakhs, Dorvod, Uriankhai, Oold, and Darkhad people came to Erdenet from and regularly return to western Mongolia. Buryats from eastern Mongolia (including Buryats from Dadal) as well as Buryats and Khamnigans from Selenge and Khuvsugul provinces within a day’s drive of Erdenet reside there. Khalkha Mongols from the southern Govi-Altai province also comprise a major group in Erdenet. As with Mardai, with which Erdenet was and is still specifically

compared by Ulaanbaatar-based reformers, Erdenet's trans-border industrial ties are productive for those in the region but often seem extractive vis-à-vis the nation.⁹ Erdenet is not only one of Mongolia's two second cities, the copper-molybdenum mine is one of the largest in the world and was the last Soviet copper mine established, and also lies between Ulaanbaatar and Irkutsk on the Trans-Mongolian Railway—thus the city continues to represent significant interests for Russia as well as for Mongolia.

Bulag (1998) writes of the phenomenon called *darga togtokhgui* ("leader doesn't fit"), referring to the political illegitimacy of centrally appointed leaders in these regions (p. 52). In the case of Dadal, this had happened already in the 1980s when a *sum* leader of the Darkhad ethnicity (based in Khuvsgul province of northern Mongolia, just east of Tuva) was "driven away." Bulag also writes that "the collapse of power in 1990 suddenly revealed the vulnerability of this central controlling system" whereby local leaders were appointed by the national center. Bulag further relates (citing Byambadorj, 1991) that after the 1990 election in the far-western majority-Kazakh Bayan-Ulgii province Mongol party, *sum*, and youth organization officials were removed and replaced by Kazakhs, and "cadres" from (central) Ovorkhangai province were removed from (northern) Selenge, (eastern) Dornogovi, and (eastern) Sukhbaatar province.

Representatives from these regions also of course actively pursue integration with the center, though on their own terms. The Constitution (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khuul, n.d.) delineates not just the roles and relationships between presidents, prime ministers, and the Constitutional Court (Sanders, 1992), but also, as emphasized by Bulag, was birthed in the context of lengthy debates over the new national emblem, and Bulag (1998) notes that many of the young reformers participating in the Small Khural established to draft the Constitution were Buryat and otherwise non-Khalkha,¹⁰ which effected their legitimacy. Kazakhs insisted on being granted the status of *undesten* ethnicity rather than *yastan* ethnicity, claiming a status of equality with rather than as a subgroup of Mongols (Bulag, 1998). The Constitution of 1992, importantly, does not define the form of representation comprising Parliament, leaving this to be defined by the Law on Elections, and also includes a complicated section on the new office of provincial governor. Both of these features may be read as measures torn between imperatives to centralize the country after the abandonment of single-party rule, on one hand, and preserve regionalism and the interests of their powerful transborder infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks on the other.

The 2012 parliamentary elections in Erdenet

In July 1994, the three "federally administered" cities of Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were reorganized into

the system of *aimag* (province), *sum* (regions), and *bag* (communities)¹¹ (Sanders, 2017, p. lx). Orkhon *aimag* was organized with two *sum*: Bayan-Undur, comprising the until-then federal municipality Erdenet, centered around a copper-molybdenum mining and mineral processing enterprise established with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, and Jargalant, the territory of the former Ulaan Tolgoi state farm established to supply Erdenet (Konagaya & Chuluun, 2013). Areas of apartment blocks and fenced-in yards with houses and mobile felt *ger* (*khorooolol*) were redesignated as *bag*.

At least since participant observation-based fieldwork I undertook in 2011 and 2012,¹² formation of the province has been controversial among employees of the joint Mongolian–Russian Erdenet Mining Enterprise. The engineers¹³ I worked closely with told me that their city had been transformed into a province so that the center would be able to unfairly extract more taxes. Assigning their city (*khot*) the status of province also activated defenses against being designated part of the rural, undeveloped "countryside" (*khodoo*) and subject to subordination by a single Mongolian city, Ulaanbaatar. In contrast, Erdenet residents regard their city's proper status to be that of "avant-garde project of the century."¹⁴

However, given how zealously Erdenet residents engaged with Parliamentary elections campaigns, and that incorporation as a province, at least in practice and popular understanding if not explicitly and consistently by the frequently changed Elections Law, guaranteed seats in Parliament, complaints about the reorganization of Erdenet and its immediate environs as a province remained somewhat puzzling to me. A key to this conundrum is that status as a province also places Erdenet under the power of a provincial governor effectively appointed by the Prime Minister.¹⁵ In 2011 and 2012, the provincial governor was particularly unpopular, and I also heard complaints about one of his predecessors. Being of the Democratic Party, he was further aligned with the interests of Ulaanbaatar and the national integration of Erdenet. In contrast to the Democratic Party, it is the People's Party which, generally speaking, maintains the status quo of Erdenet's integration with Soviet-cum-Russian infrastructural, industrial, economic, and political networks, and only some Mongolian networks based in Ulaanbaatar.

My coworkers, friends, and acquaintances in Erdenet often complained about the governor of the province. In late 2011, when national news broke that the provincial governor had been beaten up by a legal assistant to the mining enterprise's general director (Dolzodmaa, 2011), my coworkers recounted to me that the building next to our main workplace (in the city, not at the mine site) had been taken from the mining enterprise after it had been fitted out with a sauna. When I asked other friends and acquaintances in other workplaces of the mining corporation what they thought of the incident, they expressed dissatisfaction with

the state of garbage collection in the city. During the campaigning for Parliamentary elections in May, conversation about this governor continued, rather than turning to the candidates that the Democratic Party was fielding for seats in Parliament. A coworker told me that the governor was likely to lose his position, which was granted by the Prime Minister, whose party (the Democratic Party) was likely to lose their majority in Parliament, but this coworker was also following news about an anti-corruption agency investigation into the governor's involvement with funds that had perhaps not all gone into building a new stadium. Around the same time, construction problems at the building site of a colossal Buddha between the mining factory and the city were also being cited in corruption allegations against a former provincial governor (see Smith, 2019).

Mongolian legislators regularly change legislation to shift the balances of power in favor of their party's majority. Unlike the United States Constitution, the Mongolian Constitution of 1992 (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khuul, n.d.) does not make any definitions of how constituencies should be defined. The Constitution defines the Parliament as comprised of 76 members directly elected by their constituencies, but the definition of constituencies is covered by the Law on The Election of the State Great Khural of Mongolia (2012). The redesignation of Erdenet as a province has had no clear effect on how many representatives the citizens, and the enterprise, might have in the Parliament. The Law on Elections changes regularly preceding elections for Parliament every 4 years.¹⁶ In 2012, while I was conducting fieldwork in Erdenet, two members of Parliament were directly elected by citizens of Orkhon province. In 2016, Orkhon received three of the 26 constituencies. According to Sanders, in the 1992 election, Erdenet and Darkhan each constituted a single constituency (1992, p. 518) and elected two members each to the Parliament (1996, p. 263). Unlike the candidates in the Parliamentary election belonging to the Mongolian People's Party, those running as Democratic Party members were not part of the major regional network integrated with the Erdenet Mining Corporation. Mongolian People's Party members who have represented Orkhon province in the Parliament include O. Sodbileg, the son of the first Mongolian General Director of the mining corporation, who presided over the enterprise between 1988 and 1998 (Sanders, 2003, p. 259), and D. Damba-Ochir, a metallurgist who had worked in the mining corporation in a range of roles and whose construction firm regularly completes contracts for large infrastructure projects in Erdenet. Re-elected in 2016, D. Damba-Ochir was previously elected in 2008, and in 2012 was the director of a prominent construction firm in Erdenet, "Ochir Tuv" (Eng. "Ochir Center") which I was told enjoyed a close relationship with the mining enterprise for contracts, but executed these successfully enough in the form of sidewalks and other urban infrastructure (of the kind that locals complained provincial governors were failing to manage). According to Sanders (2017,

p. 210), Damba-Ochir had been the deputy director general of foreign trade for the Erdenet Mining Enterprise, and according to his profile on the official Parliament website (<http://parliament.mn/cv/113>), graduated from the Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloys, as another metallurgist I knew at Erdenet also had. One of the two members from Erdenet in the 1992–1996 Parliament was J. Delgertsetseg, (Sanders, 1996, p. 55), who had directed the Erdenet carpet factory from 1980 to 1992, and became a member of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party's Central Committee in 1992. Those running for Parliament to represent Orkhon from the Democratic and other parties (most of which have been born from factions in the Democratic Party) have included industrialists of note, like Kh. Zoljargal, but in industries such as meat-packing that are not necessarily well-integrated with the mining enterprise.

Thus, the integration of Orkhon province and the Erdenet region with the nation state is maintained not via the institution of provincial governor, but rather through structures of the Mongolian People's Party, successors to the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party of 1924 to 1990 of the single-party, state socialist Mongolian People's Republic. Political figures important to the region's own distinctive intranational and international institutions and networks, especially the Erdenet Mining Corporation and associated industrial enterprises as well as the ethnic groups whose members established and were recruited to work in these since the 1970s, are incorporated into these structures at the national level, that is, as members of the Parliament and its Standing Committees (*baingiin khoroo*). In 2012, the candidate who merited the most discussion (at least in my circles—primarily engineers and economists in their 20s and 30s working for the mining enterprise, some second-generation Erdenet employees and residents, and others originally from a range of province and *sum* centers) – was O. Sodbileg, the son of the former General Director of the Erdenet Mining Enterprise, Sh. Otgonbileg. Sodbileg's campaign was obviously lavishly funded, with a hard-cover illustrated pop-up book distributed door to door, a late-model minivan covered with his image and sporting a loud-speaker, and a central campaign office in an apartment rather than a mobile felt and wooden-lattice-work *ger*. A friend of mine (neither a regular supporter of the Democratic Party nor the People's Parties) commented that this was suspicious, a mark of funding from beyond Erdenet, though it seems likely it indicates support from the People's Party as integrated with networks local to Erdenet as well as Ulaanbaatar and beyond. Sodbileg was careful to establish himself as homegrown while also playing up his cosmopolitanism (studies in Switzerland and at Georgetown), and he portrayed himself in campaign materials as a child at the knee of Otgonbileg. Sodbileg was elected in 2012, and re-elected in 2016.

Although Sodbileg did not explicitly vow to defend the interests of the mining corporation and its employees, the

absence of language about “diversifying the economy” and Mongolia’s “national interests” was striking when compared with that found in the Democratic Party candidates’ campaign materials. In addition to being considerably less elaborate (brochures and a magazine rather than a hard-cover book), rather than establishing themselves as associated with the regional infrastructures, Democratic candidates even actively went against these. One Democratic candidate, Zoljargal (who ran again unsuccessfully, as a member of a third party, in 2016), presented himself as a graduate of a Czechoslovakian university and executive of a meat-processing factory, and in a joint campaign magazine asserted that the Erdenet mine was nearly extinct, and presented vague plans for the creation of a new cashmere industry (even though the Erdenet Carpet Factory, privatized and now under the control of major import/export and retailing conglomerate Nomin, already had one of the country’s largest and most successful cashmere processing and manufacturing operations).

Besides O. Sodbileg, L. Tsog ran successfully in 2012, though I heard almost nothing about this candidate. As I found out in the last 2 years, when a scandal over attempts to privatize the Erdenet enterprise erupted in national politics in 2016 on the eve of the parliamentary elections and has continued to boil, L. Tsog, who took a public role in debates over Erdenet privatization issues, has been a major political figure since the late socialist period. After 2010, he joined former President N. Enkhbayar’s new party split from the Mongolian People’s Party, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (Sanders, 2017, p. 828). I did hear, however, of support for N. Enkhbayar and his new party in Erdenet, particularly from a friend whose mother had worked at the Erdenet carpet factory rather than the mining enterprise since the late socialist period. In 2016, another Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party member won a seat from the Erdenet/Orkhon constituency, O. Baasankhuu, based in Ulaanbaatar and with no prior connections to Erdenet that I have been able to find, and whose seat in the 2012–2016 Parliament was granted through proportional representation.

Conclusion

Most recently, anthropologists following Mongolian politics have called the Parliament “consociational” (Sneath, 2012, p. 155) across party lines, agreeing to varying extents with the concept among Ulaanbaatar-based Mongolian intellectuals of “MANAN,” literally “fog,” a combination of the acronyms for the Mongolian People’s Party (MAN, *Mongol Ardiin Nam*) and the Democratic Party (AN, *Ardchilsan Nam*) (Dulam, 2017; Munkherdene, 2018). Although the concept makes sense in terms of negotiating the considerable powers of the President and the Parliament, who must agree to accomplish fundamental tasks including

forming the cabinet (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), it does not appear to operate in the “cooptation” of regions, in which the Mongolian People’s Party, and to some extent, its breakaway, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, have been much more successful than the Democratic Party and its associated smaller parties. This reminds one of how in the Russian Federation, a strong single party, United Russia, and regional governors must mutually coopt one another (Golosov & Tkacheva, 2018; Reuter, 2010). Although the Erdenet mine is aging and has long been ignored on international, regional, and national scenes, with infrastructural and economic development in Mongolia continuing to stagnate in the past several years, the city and its railhead have been recently been at the center of major national and continental development projects. These include speculative projects by Russians, Chinese, and Australians purporting to connect Tuva and Khuvsgul to a China–Mongolia–Russia Corridor of the One Belt One Road (OBOR)/Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Erdenet enterprise has also been at the center of several corruption scandals that have dominated Mongolian national politics since 2016 and contributed to major turnovers in the leadership of the long-ruling Democratic Party, whose support is concentrated in Ulaanbaatar and throughout the international Mongolian diaspora. Meanwhile, Erdenet has continued production, and the number of apartment buildings, and new garbage trucks, has increased, as I observed when I visited in summer 2016.

Although during the late socialist period, Erdenet was aligned with government executives including Yu. Tsendenbal himself, in the post-socialist period, the city has been aligned with the People’s Parties, the Mongolian People’s Party and its 2012 breakaway, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, rather than the Democratic Party and its associated parties and movements. Although a major transition in parliamentary politics, the transition to a multi-party system, took place in the early 1990s, this has not been accompanied by an upset of dynamics of transborder regional integration and independence from a national central government long evident in the region’s politics at national and local scales.

The People’s Parties have maintained relations of some degree of mutuality with regional powers that accommodate their interests, not only salvaging or scavenging late-socialist infrastructures but also expanding public infrastructures. The Democratic Party, confident in reforms crafted with American and Western European economists and political scientists, has focused on power in the capital and national abstractions, and pursued unsuccessfully and with limited legitimacy, across national and regional scales, take-overs of regional hubs like the Erdenet mining enterprise that would tear these hubs from the networks, regional, national, and international, that constitute them.

The Parliamentary structure established during the post-state socialist period, with the form of representation defined by an easily and frequently changed Law on Elections rather than a Constitution that must be amended with the cooperation of a Constitutional Court, has proven ineffectual at dismantling these networks. The office of provincial governor established by the Constitution has also been unable to establish itself as a mode of vertical regional administration capable of bypassing regional networks that have usually been able to elect one of their own to Parliament. The Mongolian People's Party and Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party have maintained their network, which is integrated with ethnic, infrastructural, and transborder networks elaborated as successive entanglements of the Qing, Russian Tsarist, Bogd Khaan, and Soviet empires.

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Notes

1. Also known as the State Great Khural or *Ulsiin Ikh Khural*. This article uses "the Parliament" to refer to this body, as is common practice when discussing it in English, except where other terms are part of official translations of the Constitution and other laws.
2. Analogously, the capital city Ulaanbaatar is further subdivided into *khoroos* (districts) and *duuregs* (neighborhoods).
3. These English translations of these administrative and territorial units follow that on the website of the Constitutional Court of Mongolia (http://www.conscourt.gov.mn/?page_id=842&lang=en). In the body of the article, these English terms are used, except in the case of *sum*, as here "region" is being used to describe transnational networks associated with larger territories. *Sum* is often translated as "county." *Bag* is sometimes translated into English as "brigade" or "team," indicating the overlapping of *sum* and collective and state farm organization and integration of party–state governance during much of the 20th century.
4. The Law on Elections, which defines parliamentary representation beyond the number of seats and constituencies mandated in the constitution, has changed several times; only in 2012 was representation wholly proportional. See Seeberg and Fish (2017, p. 130) for a summary of changes.
5. In 2011, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party split; former President N. Enkhbayar's new party kept this name, while the dominating remainder of the party had taken the new name Mongolian People's Party in November 2010 (Sanders, 2017, p. 285).
6. See Munkherdene (2018) for a description of the "distribution of procapitalist thought" as the translation, circulation, and discussion of texts in English and Russian among Ulaanbaatar-based intellectuals and the key role of members of the Democratic Party and associated movements involved in the 1990 revolution.
7. The original has "sports facilities" (Bulag, 1998, p. 23).
8. Such wooden houses have also been dismantled and moved from this area to the national capital Ulaanbaatar (and back?) in recent years (Elizabeth Fox, personal communication).
9. It is not only the international trade of mineral wealth that is anxiously regarded from the point of view of the national capital, however. Bulag (1998) also points out the continuing presence in the Constitution of language about livestock being "national wealth protected by the State" (p. 60) and how, at least in the early 1990s, the government was anxious to prevent carpets from leaving the country in the luggage of tourists (p. 53).
10. As part of the "transition" from state socialism in 1990, the 1960 Constitution was amended to create a Small Khural of 50 members (Sanders, 1992, p. 510), which did not represent administrative and territorial units; rather "each party received one seat for each 2% of the vote they received in the 1990 election" (Heaton, 1992, p. 50). The Small Khural drafted the 1992 Constitution and disbanded; "the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and the Asia Foundation all offered advice to the drafters" (Rossabi, 2005, p. 53, citing Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996).
11. In a 1992 article, Sanders (p. 507) reports that Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were placed under the administration of the provinces "in which they are situated" (p. 507) (meaning perhaps to which their territories belonged prior to the founding of the cities; in Erdenet's case, Bulgan); it seems that in fact the measure was never fully carried out.
12. Fieldwork during 2011 and 2012 was conducted under review and approval by the Princeton University IRB, and fieldwork in 2016 was conducted under review and approval by the Foothill-De Anza Community College District IRB.
13. The workgroup I conducted most of my participant observation with was responsible for teaching metallurgy students at the enterprise's university (incorporated in 1996 as a branch of the national University of Science and Technology) and conducting research with international partners into new metallurgical techniques.
14. In 2015, a draft was submitted in the Parliament calling for a referendum to make several amendments to the Constitution, including one that would redesignate Erdenet and Darkhan as

- cities (Byambasuren, 2015; Dierkes, 2015), prompting some on Erdenet-centered social media to voice approval, posting photos of a plaque at the mine site naming Erdenet as a city. #Erdenetbolokhot (“Erdenet is a city”) is also now a social media hashtag, and in 2012, the Erdenet Mining Corporation sponsored a hip-hop music video with this title (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qmd4ODt438&list=PLBQjd_zHp2LdMZMTNDbZJ-K1e1qFObRAZ&t=0s&index=2).
15. As during the socialist period, each level of administration (*aimag, sum, bag*) has an elected *khural*. During the socialist period, these elected a presidium tasked with “directing ‘economic and cultural-political construction’,” for supervising the economic and cooperative organizations, for confirming and implementing the economy plan and local budgets, for ensuring the observance of laws, and for making certain that all citizens were fully involved in the work of the state” (Worden & Savala, 1991, p. 184). The 1992 Constitution, however, created the position of province governor (*aimgiin zasgiin darga*), to be nominated by a directly elected “citizens’ representative’s *khural*” (*irdediin toloologchiin khural*) but confirmed by the Prime Minister (Badarchyn & Odgaard, 1996; Sanders, 2017, p. 463). Badarchyn and Odgaard (1996) give detailed description of how limited the powers of these local governance bodies are. The unpopularity of the provincial governor in this case does not seem connected to his not having been directly elected. His illegitimacy stemmed from his party affiliation associated with and indexing the lack of his and that party’s integration with regional networks and infrastructures.
 16. In the 1992 election, all 76 seats were directly elected in 26 multiseat constituencies; in 1996, 2000, and 2004, there were 76 single-seat constituencies; in 2008, there were again 76 seats in 26 multiseat constituencies (Sanders, 2017, pp. 464–465). See Seeberg and Fish (2017, p. 130) for a summary of changes, including determinations of constitutionality by the Constitutional Court.
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