PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE:

HOW MONGOLIANS BEGAN TO WRITE THEIR NAMES BACK TO FRONT

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During the communist period in Mongolia the word *ovog* (*овог* clan name) was used to mean patronymic (father's name). In 1991 President Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat called on citizens to restore the national tradition of "knowing their clan names and heredity, and keeping a family tree," which had been banned since the 1920s. His words were reinforced by the National Security Concept (June 1994), which said: "Mongolia shall revive on public initiative the tradition of keeping track of the family genealogy to 7-9 generations of ancestors." This was followed in January 1997 by a government decree on keeping a family tree (Угийн бичиг хөтлөх журам), saying that three names, the clan name (*ovog*), father's name or patronymic (эцгийн нэр) and personal name (өөрийн нэр), in that order, were to be used in identity papers (иргэний паспорт), foreign travel passports (гадаад паспорт), birth and marriage certificates, national census returns, and other official documents.

The natural order of things

Thus the *ovog* reverted to its original meaning of clan and clan name (бүлгийн нэр), although the terms өрхийн овог (family *ovog*) and гарал овог (clan of origin) were also used. A handbook of some 1,300 Mongolian clan names was published, perhaps based on Academician Byambyn Rinchen's famous 1979 atlas, showing places across the country where the clans had come from. Citizens who did not know their clan name were encouraged to choose a suitable one, reflecting their place of family origin or trade.

In the Mongolian natural order of names the clan name comes first, followed by the patronymic with a possessive case ending and the given name last, e.g. Yamaat Boldyn Bat. Most people do not use their *ovog* in everyday life, certainly none of the country's leaders do. In Mongolia given names are used in the same way as surnames in English-speaking societies: Mr Bat. In Mongolia people are listed in directories alphabetically by their given name (Bat) plus their patronymic, either in full or as an initial, to distinguish between those with the same given name: B. Bat. When international registers are compiled by Mongols, the foreigners may also be listed alphabetically by their given names. The *ovog* and *etsgiin ner* follow the male line and are not surnames or family names, which women in western societies may change by marriage. When the 1997 decree was updated in October 2007, it pointed out that husbands and wives have different *ovog*, since the wife has and retains her own.

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Muddle over "surnames"

Writing in the newspaper *Ардын Эрх* in June 1997, a government offical described a new identity card, literally a "citizen's certificate" (иргэний Үнэмлэх), which would gradually be introduced to replace the existing identity document (иргэний паспорт). The details to be recorded included the clan name, father's name and given name of the holder, place of birth, and also ethnic origin (яс Үндэс). However, at some point, perhaps in 2002, without public explanation, the State Registration Authority appears to have decided unilaterally to use the patronymic instead of the *ovog* as the "surname" in the new foreign passport. Sarlagatai O. Mashbat later suggested (Зууны Мэдээ January 2007) that this decision had broken the Mongolian Family Law of June 1999. The law's article 24 on naming children stated that "the father and mother on the basis of agreement give their child a name and *ovog*" (24.1) and "the child takes the father's name" (24.3).

Perhaps too many people had wanted to adopt Genghis Khan's *ovog* Borjgin. Or there may have been continuing confusion over use of *ovog*, which for many decades had meant "father's name". There also seems to have been no check on the meanings of the English words "surname" and "family name" which, despite being pretty well synonymous, continue to be used as the official translations for *etsgiin ner* and *ovog*, respectively, in Mongolian identity cards. Mashbat proposed the use of "middle name" for patronymics in passports, and suggested that for a transitional period Mongolian passports should carry an official notice on the inside front page saying that the Mongolian government was in the course of changing Mongolian names.

The State Registration Authority may have been misguided by the many then current western press reports about Mongols "being asked to choose surnames." They included frequent dispatches by Reuters news agency, e.g. Jeremy Page, in August 1998, and articles by Mark Magnier and Toby Moore in the *Los Angeles Times* in October 2004. This error goes back a long way: the 2/1987 edition of *Mongolia* magazine said (in English page 22), "The surname is formed from the father's name in the possessive case with the ending of 'iin'. Mongolians have no patronymic names." On the other hand, writing in *Монголия* 9/1990, D. Bayar said (in Russian, page 25), "The Mongols have no surnames (*фамилия*), just given names and patronymics... In the past the Mongols used to have surnames, so-called tribal names." Several dictionaries agree about *ovog*: Lessing (1960) and Hangin (1986): clan, surname, family name; Bawden and Altangerel (1997): clan, family name, patronymic. Naturally, they reflect the situation before the Mongolian authorities changed *ovog* back to its former meaning, but the Oxford-Monsudar English-Mongolian Dictionary (2006) still translates surname as *ovog*.

Reversal of names

In 2010 the State Registration Authority conducted "revised civil registration" nationwide, creating on the basis of over 15 million documents a data base of almost 2 million citizens for the introduction of "smart" or biometric identity cards. (It was planned that voters would use their "smart" cards with new electronic voting machines at the elections to the Mongolian Great Khural on 28 June 2012, but issue of the cards was delayed, and only a few thousand people received them.) Rather than rendering the patronymic (*etsgiin ner*) normally, with the possessive case suffix, before the given name, the cards show it printed separately in its own given name form. When the patronymic is used in documents without the possessive suffix (-yn, -iin), the distinction between patronymic and given

name is lost. When the "surname" moves to second place, Boldyn Bat becomes Bat Bold, and the names are no longer in the legal order.

This can lead to muddle, even in Mongolia itself. For example, in February 2011 the *UB Post* published articles with references to Khurts Bat (Batyn Khurts) as Bat, Enkhbat Damiran (Damirangiin Enkhbat) as Damiran, and Sanjaasuren Zorig (Sanjaasьrengiin Zorig) as Sanjaasuren. In April 2011 the *UB Post* called Gombyn Tsogtsaikhan, deputy chairman of MonAtom, Tsogtsaikhan Gombo and Gombo. The *Mongol Messenger* named the director of the fuel department of the Ministry of Mineral Resources as Erdenepurev Amarkhuu and subsequently as Amarkhuu, although his name in Mongolian is Amarkhььgiin Erdenepьrev. In the same issue the deputy director of Erdenes MGL, Ganzorigiin Temьblen, was referred to as Ganzorig. The Mongolian "News" agency this March, in a feature about the 25th anniversary of Mongolia-U.S. relations, named the Mongolian ambassador as Bekhbat Khasbazar, and subsequently as Khasbazar all through, although his name is Khasbazaryn Bekhbat!

There have also been references in English to the Mongolian president as Elbegdorj Tsakhia and the Prime Minister as Batbold Sukhbaatar. In March 2011 Montsame's English service published a feature about the "ardent struggler" of the 1921 revolution Sukhbaatar Damdin. A recent advertisement featured General Lkhagvasuren Jamyan, another famous historical figure. The reversal of the given name and patronymic in English, contrary to the normal Mongol practice, is thus also spreading to the names of historical figures. Mongolians' growing use of English business cards with their names the wrong way round just adds to the confusion.

Mongolian script complications

President Natsagiin Bagabandi and Prime Minister Nambaryn Enkhbayar decreed in June 2003 that the 800th anniversary of Genghis Khan's order on the adoption of the Mongol state script would be marked on 2 May 2004, and then at the beginning of May every year, as Mongolian National Script Day. President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj decreed in 2010 that, from July 2011, Mongolian ambassadors' letters of credence and other communications with foreign states would be issued in Mongolian script (with translation). Meanwhile, birth and marriage certificates, education certificates, diplomas, etc., would be printed in both Mongolian script and Mongolian Cyrillic. The text of the presidential decree (3/10 of 29 March) seems not to have been gazetted, but according to Өдрийн Сонин (August 2011), President Elbegdorj made a brief reference to it in his address at the opening of the 10th Congress of the International Association of Mongolian Studies. Professor Sh. Choimaa reported (Montsame, January 2012) that about 27,000 diplomas in the two scripts had been issued by the Mongolian State University so far, although there had been some problems with the correct forms of names. Everybody should learn to write their name in Mongolian script, he said.

Romanization standard revised

In January 2003 the Mongolian Centre for Standardization and Metrology, as it was then called, published State Standard MNS5217.2002, "for romanizing the script of the Mongolian Cyrillic alphabet". Developed after much public discussion of a number of proposed variants, this new Romanization standard was quite unlike the Soviet-approved romanization of Mongolian introduced experimentally in the 1930s. It had a number of unusual features, however, in particular the use of an

apostrophe to indicate vowel variation: in transliteration, back vowels

o = o, y = u, front vowels θ = o', Y = u'. In words with several vowels it was sufficient to use the apostrophe only once per word. Amongst consonants, x = x, ж = zh, ц = c, щ = sh' and so on.

In June 2003 the Mongolian Great Khural adopted a National Romanization Program (Латин Үсгийн Үндэсний хθтθлбθр) covering several years of preparation, development and training, including publication of dictionaries and handbooks. Some aberrant spellings in Mongolian Cyrillic were to be corrected. However, it became clear that the state standard was unsuitable and was being modified. For example, the tourist company Juulchin came to be spelt with a j and not zh (θдрийн Сонин, January 2004). A "transitional" romanization table published on the Ministry of Agriculture website in March 2005 indicated that ж = j, not zh, x = kh as an alternative, and ц = ts or c. However, the development programme was quietly abandoned.

Ten years later, at the end of February 2012, Зууны Мэдээ reported that the National Standardization Council had adopted MNS5217.2012, updating MNS5217.2002. The changes included the abandonment of apostrophes and introduction of diacriticals: θ = ц, Y = ь, also x = x, and ц = c. However, the solutions for щ and the hard sign ъ were still unsatisfactory. The Mongolian media in English currently do not use accented letters, the name Тцмцг, for example, is written Tumur. It is hard to believe, given the time scale, that the Mongolian names printed in English on the new electronic identity cards to accompany the Mongolian Cyrillic forms have been matched to the new romanization standard. Have the authorities put the cart before the horse again?

However, in April 2012 *Zuuny Medee* featured on its back page several sample entries from a new dictionary, Монгол кирил бичгийн зθв бичихзҮйн толь (Orthographic Dictionary of Mongolian Cyrillic Script) published by Monsudar. Of special note was the dictionary's instruction to use a soft sign (ь) to write words formerly spelt with a hard sign (ъ): томьёо, гавьяа and so on. This may explain why the 2012 revised standard has the hard sign ъ transliterated as i.

CONCLUSION

There is a wide range of international applications of script transliterations, ranging from identity documents to foreign language publications including maps and gazetteers. There is therefore a need to establish firm national standards and adhere to them. Who is in charge of the romanization standard? In Mongolia the National Standardization Council has the right to issue and cancel standards. The Mongolian Law on Standardization (15 May 2003) says (4.2.5) that national standards are developed on the basis of international standards. National standards (6.1) follow correct advanced standards of international and regional bodies and foreign countries. Businesses and organizations (8.1) may use standards developed by the organizations. A government decree in 2010 (No 44, dated 24 February) declared that state organizations were to make official use of standard MNS5552.2005 for the unified Cyrillic and Mongolian script computer code. While the romanization standard seems to be recommended, its adoption has not been enforced nationally.

The fundamentally different ways of writing Mongolian names described have raised important issues. Some aspects of Mongolian identity cards and passports are defective. If reversal of names, based on mistranslation, as promoted by Mongols in English, is generally accepted, records and indexes of Mongolian names, even historical ones, will quickly become corrupted. We should all surely follow the principle followed by the Mongolians in their own language, that the patronymic precedes the given name, and given names are used as we use surnames.