

## MONGOLIAN DEMOCRACY COMPARED TO CENTRAL ASIA POST-INDEPENDENCE

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**Abstract:** Mongolia stands out in Inner Asia as being the only country to be classified as a democracy, surrounded by the authoritarian regimes of China and Russia. It is also unique in being the sole Asian country to have emerged out of the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a democracy, despite being integrated into the Soviet economy as much as other former Soviet republics. The experiences of newly formed Central Asian and Caucasian states (with the exception of Georgia) have been that they have either failed to democratize such as with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, or backslid from democracy such is the case with Kyrgyzstan. This anomalous democratization is a culmination of Mongolia's unique historical experiences and economic conditions which influenced how it handled global processes affecting all former Soviet states at the same time, setting it apart from other Central Asian states, despite the surface-level similarities. Mongolia's pre-existing national identity, experience with statehood, and anti-Chinese sentiments interacted with the economic conditions at the time of the collapse, forcing Mongolia to adopt economic reforms and seek international aid. Democratic norms were then built and strengthened in the country through both the need to reform and nationalistic sentiments among the political elites.

This stands in contrast to Central Asian states, which historically did not have experience with statehood, and therefore, were suddenly tasked with state and nation-building when the Soviet Union collapsed. While they too took on nationalist rhetoric to gain legitimacy, this worked to sediment the pre-existing authoritarian rule rather than democratize institutions. Their economic conditions enabled this authoritarian rule, allowing for the elites to delay economic reform which could potentially work to undermine their rule. But as more time has passed since their independence, different states have undertaken different paths to reform and democratization, differentiating their experiences as will be noted later.

**Keywords:** Mongolia, democracy, Soviet Union, Central Asia, nationalism, democratization, transition, post-independence

### **Mongolia Compared to Central Asian States**

#### Common Structural Factors against Democracy

The main reason why Mongolia's democratization came as a shock to many Western observers was that its environment and structure were stacked against democratization. Such factors were often shared with other Central Asian states. These include the fact that they were highly integrated into the Soviet system by being the supplier of raw materials to the more industrialized parts of the Soviet Union, thus being economically dependent on their demand. (Pomfret 2006, p. 28-29; Rossabi

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2005, p. 35) Out of these states, Mongolia was the most dependent on the central government out of them all, with the USSR making up 95% of their trade, and net imports from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) making up 30% of their GDP. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 127; Pomfret 2000, p. 150) Being so dependent on the Soviet Union, Mongolia even acquired the moniker of the "16th republic." (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 205) This overdependence on the Soviet Union's internal economic network and CMEA aid put Mongolia and Central Asian countries in a vulnerable position when it came to independence, as the shift away from the Soviet economy came with a deep economic crisis resulting from the breakdown in supply lines, trade, and aid. (Heaton 1991, p. 54; Pomfret 2006, p. 21)

Secondly, neither Mongolia, nor any Central Asian states had any experience or tradition with democracy or a capitalist system, yet they found themselves facing a wave of people pushing for democracy and economic reform. (Al- Bassam 1997, p. 387; M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 127; Fritz 2008, p. 767;) Furthermore, they were isolated from all other consolidated democracies, and did not enjoy democratic diffusion through the neighbor effect like the Central European and Baltic states had. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 767-8) For most of these states' histories, one authoritarian leader after another had been the experience. For the intelligentsia, having mostly been educated in Russian universities in the Soviet system, it had been the only form of government they had experience with. (Al-Bassam 1997, p. 390)

Finally, with the eschewing of socialism, the populations of Central Asia turned to ethno-nationalism as their nation gained independence. (Bingol 2004, p. 56) While nationalism is not inherently an anti-democratic force, in fact some might argue a necessary force for democracy, nationalism as seen in the newly independent former-Soviet states was a recent development aimed at both restoring order to the state and give legitimacy to the government. (Bingol 2004, p. 44) For the ruling parties to survive politically, they were forced to adopt nationalism as part of their political program, yet at the same time be careful as to not cause a mass exodus of ethnic human capital from their country. (Carney and Moran 2000, p. 185; Pomfret 2006, p. 37; Al-Bassam 1997, p. 373) The failure to properly adopt nationalism into political rhetoric can be seen in the disastrous Tajik Civil War, resulting from the Tajik intelligentsia falling back on old Soviet phraseology against a growing nationalist opposition, even after the Soviet Union was dissolved. (Akbarzadeh 1996, p. 1105)

### **Proposed Differentiating Structural Factors for Democracy**

Judging from commonalities with other Central Asian states, Mongolia structurally seemed to be headed towards a path of authoritarianism. Some scholars both from the West and Mongolia itself have offered a variety of factors they see as explanations for why Mongolia ultimately emerged as a democracy. These explanations will be given an explanation and debunked before we proceed with the

core thesis for Mongolia's democratization.

First is that the Buddhist faith, the majority religion in Mongolia, is more conducive to democracy than Islam is. (Fritz 2008, p. 769; Sabloff 2002, p. 19) However, through decades of state-imposed atheism, the role of religion in daily life has diminished substantially in former Soviet states, making it hardly an explanation for their stance towards democracy. In fact, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism is often propped up as a threat for authoritarian parties and leaders to build legitimacy rather than as an anti-democratic force in and of itself. (Akbarzadeh 1996, p. 1121; Al-Bassam 1997, p. 394) Buddhism also does not necessarily pre-dispose a nation to democracy as can be seen in the multitude of Southeast Asian states which remain authoritarian to this day, even with equally high percentage of practicing Buddhists. (Hayward 2015, p. 31)

Another tempting explanation is the ethnic homogeneity of Mongolia that makes inter-ethnic conflict less likely to occur, helping its democratization. (M Steven Fish 1998a, p. 128) However, statistically, there is little strong correlation between ethnic homogeneity and democratic outcomes, or even human development for that matter. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 228) While it is true that ethnic conflict has been a common occurrence in Central Asian states, much of that can be attributed to the arbitrary borders inherited from the Soviet Union that has made nation-building so difficult in the region, not necessarily to ethnic heterogeneity itself. (Beacháin and Kevlihan 2015, p. 497-8) Turkmenistan serves as a counterexample as it is an ethnically homogeneous state (85% Turkmen), yet ironically is the most authoritarian and repressive in the region. (M Steven Fish 1998a, p. 128; Al-Bassam 1997, p. 403)

A popular theory in Mongolian literature is that Mongolian culture has developed to be highly individualistic from its past as a nomadic pastoralist culture in the sparsely populated steppe, therefore making Mongolians more receptive to an individualist ideology like democracy. (M Steven Fish 1998a, p. 128; Tangad 2016) Yet again, many Central Asian countries also have a similar nomadic pastoralist past, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, both of which are also sparsely populated. Even still among these three states one finds wildly different outcomes in democratization, ranging from personalist dictatorship, hybrid regime, to democracy.

## **Historical Background**

Democracy in Mongolia can be explained through other structural factors that have been in development since the establishment of the Mongol Empire. Just as with other Central Asian nations, nationalism became the primary basis for legitimacy for the new Mongolian state's governance. However, Mongolian nationalism is unique in that it has been in development for nearly a millennium, and especially its anti-Chinese sentiments have a deep history of nearly 2000 years. (Rossabi 2005, p. 225) With the

collapse of the Soviet Union and CMEA, Mongolia saw itself vulnerable to Chinese economic domination and sought to take every measure to protect itself from it. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 210) Both political and economic liberalization were seen as a way to avoid Chinese influence in Mongolian affairs. (M Steven Fish 1998a, p. 133; Fritz 2008, p. 768) These two forces of liberalization were self-reinforcing, even if it seemed chaotic at the moment, as a result of both the structure of the Mongolian economy and wise decision-making by the political elite in Mongolia, eventually leading to sustained democratization.

### **History of Mongolian Nationalism**

The origins of Mongolian nationalism can be traced back to the founding of the Mongol Empire in 1206 and the Genghisid lineage associated with the succeeding dynasties. (Lhamsuren 2006, p. 51) This legendary accomplishment forever united the Mongol nation, gave them a national myth, and national symbols distinguishing them from all others. (Bulag 1998, p. 44) The Mongolian nation would see itself divided up and ruled over by different regional powers afterwards, to the north by the Russian Empire, and to the south and central, by the Qing Dynasty. (Bulag 1998, p. 12) The territory of what is modern-day Mongolia was ruled as 'Outer Mongolia' for 267 years by the Qing dynasty. (Rossabi 2005, p. 30) Despite a law barring Han settlers from moving to Mongolia (Outer and Inner), the late-Qing period would result in extensive Han settlement of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia from deals struck with local lords willing to sell their lands, legal or not. (Reardon-Anderson 2000, p. 510) Tensions between the Mongols and Chinese increased further when the Qing dynasty fully lifted their ban on Han settlement, resulting in ethnic clashes, the most infamous of which was the Jindandao incident, where Han settlers massacred tens of thousands of Mongols in Inner Mongolia. (Lhamsuren 2006, p. 79-80) While anti-Chinese sentiments have always been present in Mongolian thought, the historic memory of Han economic dominance in Mongolia and colonization put Sinophobia, anti-assimilationism, and anti-colonialism at the center of Mongolian nationalism. (Lhamsuren 2006, p. 81)

When the Qing dynasty began to fall apart, the government of Outer Mongolia immediately took the chance to declare independence and establish itself as a modern sovereign state for the first time in 1911 with a Buddhist monarchy and all the institutions and sovereignty associated with statehood. (Pomfret 2000, p. 150-1) Consequently, when Mongolia regained its independence from the Soviet Union, it did not start from scratch in building a state or a place for itself in the world. However, the Mongol nation was still split between Russia and China, with Buryats and Kalmyks being part of Russia, and Inner Mongolia still under Chinese control. Pan-Mongolism, the idea that the Mongolic peoples of the surrounding countries should be united with Mongolia continues to endure and feed anti-Chinese sentiments.

(Milivojevic 2019, p. 131)

### ***Mongolia in the Soviet System***

In 1921, after a three-way war between the Russian White Army, Republic of China, and Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), supported by the Red Army, Mongolia would be re-established as the People's Republic of Mongolia. (Bulag 1998, p. 12) Mongolia served a strategic purpose for the Soviet Union, first as a way to check the Republic of China, then after the Sino-Soviet split, as a buffer state between itself and Communist China. (Rossabi 2005, p. 227) Before the split, Mao Zedong saw Mongolia as a part of China and expected that Mongolia would be annexed into the PRC, as Inner Mongolia had. (Milivojevic 2019, p. 145; Rossabi 2005, p. 225) During the split, Mao seems to have been surprised that Mongolia sided with the Soviet Union, as they had been providing significant economic aid, especially in cheap labor, to Mongolia until then to attempt to make the PRC seem favorable to the Soviet Union. (Milivojevic 2019, p. 145). As far as the Mongolians were concerned however, there was no real choice between the Soviets and the Chinese; they still had memories of Qing occupation and the aid that the Soviet Union offered was far greater than Chinese aid. (Rossabi 2005, p. 227) The Sino-Soviet split quickly accelerated the border tensions between the two communist powers, followed by China's withdrawal of their laborers, and the Soviets stationing of tens of thousands of troops in Mongolia. Although the Mongolian population hated Soviet troops in their land, as it evoked images of a foreign military occupation and colonialism, the politicians understood that the troops were a good way to further leverage for aid. (Milivojevic 2019, p. 143; Mendee and Tuvshintugs 2013, p. 242; Rossabi 2005, p. 33)

The Mongolian economy after the implementation of Soviet-style socialism consisted of agriculture collectives in the countryside into *negdels*, the Mongolian version of the Soviet *kolkhozy*. (Pomfret 2000, p. 150) While traditionally the Mongolian agricultural economy was already based on cooperation between different herders in the harsh Mongolian climate, the collectivization system intentionally created production teams out of unrelated kinship groups, so the collective interest would take precedence over kin. (Bulag 1998, p. 125-6; Rossabi 2005, p. 44) This system worked both to ideologically create a national identity over local kinship ties, sub-ethnic divisions, and regionalism, but also economically created a stagnant agricultural sector which made up the majority of Mongolia's economy. (Bulag 1998, p. 227) The Soviets also rapidly developed new mining centers in Mongolia for export with aid from both the Soviet Union and the CMEA. (Pomfret 2000, p. 150) These two processes would lay the groundwork for Mongolia's overwhelming dependence on the Soviet Union and CMEA for both trade and aid.

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Mongolia conducted 95% of its trade with the USSR, and net imports made up 30% of its GDP, making it one of

the most dependent countries on the USSR. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 127; Pomfret 2000, p. 150) Mongolia also received the most aid per-capita worldwide at around \$300 per capita annually, in a country where the annual per-capita income was \$500 to \$900. (Boone 1994, p. 338; Fritz 2008, p. 786; Heaton 1991, p. 54) Furthermore, Mongolia owed the Soviet Union more than \$15 billion to finance its trade. (Heaton 1991, p. 54) All of the listed factors, made Mongolia's economy extremely vulnerable to any trade shocks from the Soviet Union.

## **Democratization and Transition**

The collapse of the Soviet system came as a shock and immediately sent the Mongolian politicians to seek alternative sources of aid to avoid their economy from totally collapsing. The process started with Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy to allow for more political expression in the Soviet Union, and especially after Gorbachev's visit to China to begin rapprochement between the USSR and PRC. With tensions between the Soviet Union and China thawing, Mongolia lost much of its geostrategic value, and Gorbachev agreed to withdraw most of its troops from Mongolia. (Fritz 2008, p. 770; Milivojevic 2019, pp. 16–7) While the Mongolian population was glad to see the country free of the Soviet troops occupying their country, this also entailed the slowing down of Soviet aid. (Fritz 2008, p. 770) But a full breakdown of the economic system was not in motion yet.

In the late 1980s, *glasnost* ideas were already penetrating the Mongolian leadership and society. In 1988, the General Secretary of the MPRP, Jambyn Batmunkh<sup>1</sup> publicly denounced Choibalsan, the Stalinist ruler in the 1930s and 1940s, thus opening the party up to debates about its history. (Fritz 2008, p. 771) Inspired by events in Eastern Europe in 1989, Mongolian opposition, made up of those who were also educated in Eastern Europe, began to organize into parties pushing for democratization beginning in December 1989. (Heaton 1991, p. 50; Milivojevic 2019, p. 129) In January 1990, in capital of Ulaanbaatar, popular non-violent demonstrations were staged nearly daily with thousands of protesters, but this was initially reported on favorably by both the MPRP and Soviet media. (Milivojevic 2019, p. 129; Rossabi 2005, p. 24) This suggests that the reform elements in the MPRP looked on the opposition movement positively, and even promised political reforms gradually over the course of five years in an attempt to relieve pressure. (Heaton 1991, p. 52) However the more the party gave in, the more the protesters demanded and by March, the movement had grown to tens of thousands in Ulaanbaatar. The MPRP faced internal debates on whether to respond with force as China had done in Tiananmen Square less than a year ago. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 209; Milivojevic 2019, p. 129)

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<sup>1</sup> Mongolian naming system. Jamba is a patronym and Batmunkh is a given name.

The reform faction of the MPRP won out and decided against the use of force. The fact that most of the Mongolian leadership had personal connections with the protesters, and the influence of *glasnost* which also discouraged the use of violence against popular demonstration stopped the MPRP from violent retaliation. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 208; Fritz 2008, p. 771 Mendee and Tuvshintugs 2013, p. 244).

Under intense pressure, on 21 March 1990, General Secretary Batmunkh and Premier Sodnom, as well as the entire Politburo resigned, and agreed to amend the constitution to allow for free elections, a presidential system, and abolish the MPRP's leading role. (Heaton 1991, p. 52) The first elections were scheduled for July 1990, but in April, the protesters were already back in the tens of thousands calling for the MPRP to give up its advantage in funding, media, and government institutions, forcing the new General Secretary Punsalmaagin Ochirbat to return early from China to quell the protests. (Milivojevic 2019, p. 127; Rossabi 2005, p. 24) The MPRP did so through agreeing to meet with opposition leaders to discuss constitutional amendments, and deciding on May 14 to create a semi-presidential system with a parliament (called the Great Hural) as a legislative body. (Heaton 1991, p. 53) Both parties now focused on the upcoming elections.

The opposition parties which were formed less than a year ago were unable to organize quickly enough, nominate enough candidates, nor have the funds to sufficiently challenge the MPRP in the election. (Milivojevic 2019, p. 149; Rossabi 2005, p. 27) Furthermore, Mongolia's first-past-the-post election system favored the countryside where the opposition parties did not have a strong base of support in. (Fritz 2008, pp. 776, 779) Despite the opposition receiving around 40% of the total votes cast that election, they could only gain 20% of the seats in the *Great Hural*. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 128; Rossabi 2005, p. 27) While the election results proved to be disappointing for the opposition parties, this election was still widely seen as free, the first in Mongolian history, if not fair. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 129) The MPRP still chose to co-opt the opposition and did not exclude them from governance, choosing the reformist economist Ganbold as Deputy Prime Minister, and placed him in charge of the economy. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 130) The MPRP would go on to continue its dominance in 1992, but in the first presidential elections in 1993, P. Ochirbat now running as an opposition candidate would win, and the MPRP would accept its loss and focus on the second presidential election. (Fritz 2008, pp. 773, 777)

### **Anti-Chinese Elements**

Like any other anti-communist movements during the late 1980s, and early 1990s, the opposition movement in Mongolia explicitly took on a nationalist character. The MPRP embraced this movement such as when in September 1990 in his inauguration ceremony, P. Ochirbat appeared in the national dress, a *deel*, knelt before the Mongolian flag and touched it to his head, similar in fashion to a Mongol warrior

swearing fealty to a Khan. (Heaton 1991, p. 53) The MPRP would also legitimize itself as an anti-Chinese, nationalist party through the media in its control before the first parliamentary elections. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 209) Indeed the most persistent fear in everyone's mind with the collapse of the Soviet Union and CMEA, was the threat of Chinese economic domination. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 210 Rossabi 2005, p. 231)

Even if not economically, there was the threat of Chinese influence in the political sphere. One of the many factors for non-violence during the protests was the possibility of Chinese involvement if violence between the government and protesters were to break out. (Rossabi 2005, pp. 28–9) Later, the politicians part of drafting the new constitution in 1990 confirmed that the choice of a strong parliament with checks on the president was to make it difficult for China or Russia to influence the political system which would be easier in a strong presidential system with one person at the head. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 133) The historical experience in the Soviet past shows this to be the case. Before Batmunkh, Mongolia had been ruled for 50 years by only two men: Tsedenbal and Choibalsan. Tsedenbal especially was educated in the Soviet Union, had a Russian wife, and attempted to annex Mongolia to the Soviet Union multiple times. (Bulag 1998, pp. 91–2; Milivojevic 2019, p. 141) The anti-colonialist and anti-assimilationist character of Mongolian nationalism made sure that there would not be a Tsedenbal again. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 134) For the MPRP, making sure that the country remained stable to avoid the Chinese threat was also key which motivated the party to choose to share its power even when it had a majority as a way to make sure that there would not be further political chaos. Fundamentally, both parties agreed on the same principles of nationalism, reform, and parliamentarianism when drafting the new constitution which gave it strong legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the political elites of the opposition, in turn allowing for stable continuation of Mongolian politics. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 130; Rossabi 2005, p. 29) The real debate between the parties was on the speed and the manner of economic reform which they would be forced to undertake when the Soviet Union finally fell apart in 1991.

### **Economic Reforms**

The fall of the Soviet Union rang the death knell for the Mongolian economy. Now not only was aid completely gone, but the trade partner also it had come to rely on to sell its overpriced copper to and buy consumer products from disappeared, mired in its own crisis. (Heaton 1991, p. 54; Pomfret 2000, p. 150) Estimates put the combined shock to have caused more than half of Mongolian GDP. (Boone 1994, p. 337) Without other means of state revenue, Mongolia was forced to look for other partners internationally to supply the country aid, not only to save the quickly falling economy, but also to avoid becoming dominated by China. (Nixson et al. 2000, p. 26;

Rossabi 2005, p. 36) President Ochirbat pledged Mongolia to join IMF, World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank in 1990, but the steps to join them would be accelerated by the Soviet collapse. (Heaton 1991, p. 53) These institutions along with other international organizations would play a critical role in Mongolia's economic reform, a transition which would support and be supported by the country's democratization. The particulars of the Mongolian economy would also help smooth out the difficult and haphazardly done transition period.

Mongolia invited an IMF delegation to survey the economy and sent delegations out to Western countries and other Asian capitalist economies such as South Korea and Japan looking for investment and aid. (Heaton 1991, p. 54; Milivojevic 2019, p. 146; Rossabi 2005, p. 36) In 1991, parliament quickly passed a multitude of laws to liberalize the economy to appeal to both foreign investors and to gain admission into international donor agencies, eventually being admitted into IMF, World Bank, and ADB all in February. (Rossabi 2005, p. 37) These laws included rapid privatization, starting with the *negdels*, small enterprises, and a limited number of large enterprises. (Fritz 2008, pp. 775–6) Privatizing the *negdels* was popular and the burgeoning democratic system allowed the reformers to respond to demands. At first, the *negdel* privatization resulted in a chaotic transition as the social support collective agriculture provided was dismantled, but the now open market economy created incentives to organize herd more efficiently and raise more productive stock which caused the number of livestock in total to grow from 25.9 million to 31.3 million in the years 1990 to 1997. (Pomfret 2000, pp. 153–4) The fact that agriculture makes up such a big part of Mongolian economy helped it withstand the brunt of the economic shock since a traditional pastoral lifestyle is relatively resilient to such shocks. (Pomfret 2000, p. 152) The crisis of urban life and stability provided by the pastoral economy can be seen in estimates showing agriculture making up 14.1% of the GDP in 1991 to making up 30.2% the following year, combined with the decline in the urban share of the population shifting from 57% to 52%. (Nixson et al. 2000, p. 53; Pomfret 2000, p. 153).

The Mongolian government received significant aid and loans from international financial institutions to substitute for Soviet aid for a time, to survive the economic downfall which in turn gave the institutions leverage to guide Mongolian policy. The Deputy Prime Minister, Ganbold, was highly influenced by neoliberal thought and accepted nearly all recommendations from IMF and ADB during his time in office. (Rossabi 2005, p. 45) They recommended shock therapy, to transition the country from a centrally planned economy to a market economy in the quickest amount of time, faster the better. (Nixson et al. 2000, p. 16) These policies were wide-ranging, including price liberalization, massive downsizing of state budget, cutting of trade taxes and barriers, and mass privatizations of state enterprises. (Rossabi 2005, pp. 46–7) These policies were known to have a high human cost, and especially harmful

to the most vulnerable section of society as the social programs are cut to balance state budget and price liberalization entailed a massive inflation. (Rossabi 2005, p. 46) But these policies were hurriedly implemented with little infrastructure to stabilize the economy after the chaotic liberalization period. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 212) What resulted was a massive inflation of 323% and unemployment close to 15% in 1992. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, pp. 213–4).

However, the recently opened economic system and the rapid privatization of the small state-enterprises at the same time allowed an informal sector to flourish and lessen the economic difficulty for the average citizen around the mid-1990s. (Pomfret 2000, p. 154) During the times where the private sector was still developing, unable to pick up the slack of the former public sector, the informal sector grew due to lessened barriers to entry and relative freedom from external constraints on its behavior. (Nixson et al. 2000, p. 216; Anderson 1998, p. 19) Due to their informal nature, they are undercounted in official figures, but a study shows that more than one-third of the population of Ulaanbaatar were involved in some sort of informal economic activity in 1996-1997. (Anderson 1998, p. 14) These activities range from taxi driving, kiosk vending, or producing handicrafts. (Nixson et al. 2000, p. 241)

In 1992, when parliamentary elections were held, the voters did not know who to blame for the crisis since both the MPRP and the opposition were in government, which may well have been the MPRP's strategy, knowing how ugly economic reforms were. (Fritz 2008, p. 776) By pinning much of the blame for the economic crisis on Ganbold's economic policies, the MPRP was able to win in a landslide against the opposition yet again, this time putting the economy under the more conservative leadership of Jasray. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 130) However, under pressure from international donors that the government had borrowed so heavily from, he did not reverse any privatization, only slow down the pace of privatization and liberalization. (M Steven Fish 1998a, p. 130; Fritz 2008, p. 777; Rossabi 2005, p. 56) The opposition was invited yet again to participate in government, but they declined, focusing on the upcoming presidential election and drafting the new 1992 Constitution. (Fritz 2008, p. 777).

### **International Influences**

It was not only international financial institutions that were interested in Mongolia's transition, but many other organizations such as the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and the Asia Foundation. (Rossabi 2005, p. 53) These organizations offered help drafting the new 1992 Constitution, and inserted political freedoms, secularism, and other individual rights, as opposed to the collective rights language used in the previous constitution. (Rossabi 2005, p. 54) For the opposition parties, significant political aid came from Germany and the US, especially the International Republican Institute (IRI), which helped train the

inexperienced politicians and provided funding for their campaigns. (Rossabi 2005, p. 67)

The IRI would also help them come up with a new campaign strategy for the 1996 parliamentary elections which included uniting the two most popular opposition parties of the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP) and the Mongolian Social Democratic Party (MSPD) into the Democratic Coalition (DC). (Rossabi 2005, p. 67) The IRI would also model the DC's campaign strategy on their own 1994 Republican strategy. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 214; Rossabi 2005, p. 67) This would turn out to be a winning strategy as in 1996, the voters unhappy with the MPRP's handling of the still declining economic state, voted en masse for the DC. (M. Steven Fish 1998b, p. 136; Fritz 2008, p. 779) The DC began to speed up the pace of economic reforms once again, at a time when the economy was finally beginning to recover from shock therapy. (Bilskie and Arnold 2023, p. 214) The previous government had done much of the work of controlling inflation through extremely tight monetary policy (demanded by the IMF) which killed the small businesses supposed to provide formal employment; this was only eased by the informal sector. (Nixson et al. 2000, p. 68).

### **Analysis**

The political space afforded by glasnost allowed for Mongolian political elites to channel their nationalist desires to building a democratic system to avoid Chinese domination which they were so suspicious of. Later with the implementation of economic reforms and chaotic economic restructuring resulting from it coming at the same time as democratization, one might have expected that democracy would be seen with suspicion by the Mongolian population. However economic reform was the platform of both parties, and the population saw it as the right path to achieve the status of a developed country like its East Asian neighbors as can be seen with the election of the DC in 1996 who ran on an economic reformist platform. The democratic system institutionalized the demands of the population and opposition for economic liberalization. Economic reform was not a given to occur after democratization; it was forced to be implemented because of the particulars of Mongolia as a largely pastoral economy with minerals of little value (at the time). Later during the fallout of economic reforms, it was stable rural agriculture, and open dynamic informal economy which eased the pain of shock therapy. During all of this, democratic norms were slowly forming, initially to avoid Chinese domination, later to avoid rage of the electorate, at the same time being pushed along by international partners they were forced to seek due to their economic vulnerability.

### **Central Asian Experience**

#### **Nation-State**

This is all in contrast to Central Asian states which differed from Mongolia in several critical aspects. Firstly, Mongolia had a long history of existence as a nation, as well as a history as a nation-state with its current territories, even existing independently of the USSR at its dissolution. However, none of the Central Asian states emerging out of the Soviet Union had a history of nation-statehood which meant that they had to start nation-building from scratch and create a national myth themselves only after independence for their states. (Beacháin and Kevlihan 2015, p. 498) This difference would contribute to their divergence in democratization after independence from Mongolia's experience. Independent statehood was important when the Soviet Union fell, as it affected the MPRP less than it did the Central Asian communist parties which were so closely connected with the central Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). (Fritz 2008, p. 778) The communist parties of the Central Asian republics depended on the CPSU for political mobilization and support. (Beacháin and Kevlihan 2015, p. 499) Suddenly the ruling parties were faced with a power vacuum, for which they nearly all adopted nationalism, with the exception of the Communist Party of Tajikistan. (Akbarzadeh 1996, p. 1105; Omelicheva 2015, p. 93) However nationalism was a new concept in Central Asia, and each country would adopt different conceptions of nationalism in their states.

Before the Russian conquest, there were no nation-states in Central Asia, and they were late-comers to nation-building. (Bingol 2004, p. 45) In the Soviet Union, nationalization was started by Stalin with the *korenizatsiya* policy, however this was eventually dismantled for Russification and socialist internalism. (Bingol 2004, p. 46) All Central Asian countries gained a state before they had a nation, but nearly Central Asian states use nationalism as a force for legitimacy. (Carney and Moran 2000, p. 185) States which had a large minority ethnic population it could not risk emigrating such as Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan adopted what Carney and Moran defined as "Conceptual Nationalism" in which the government policy is to insist on a shared group identity but not defined by a particular language, religion, or common descent. (Al-Bassam 1997, p. 399; Carney and Moran 2000, p. 188) On the other hand, Uzbekistan has cultivated a more symbolic nationalism wherein the nation is defined by its revival of symbols from the past such as Tamerlane to define its nation, but not so far as to include language or religion. (Carney and Moran 2000, p. 191)

The failure to embrace nationalism for one's state and begin defining what constitutes one's national identity is seen in the example of Tajikistan. The Communist Party of Tajikistan failed to see the significance of the nationalist oppositions rising across Central Asia and committed itself to maintaining the status quo for as long as possible rather than to co-opt the ideology. (Akbarzadeh 1996, p. 1125) The tensions between the democratic opposition and status-quo eventually erupted into a civil war with factions across inter-Tajik regional clans, ethnic groups, and ideologies. (Akbarzadeh 1996, pp. 1125–6; Carney and Moran 2000, pp. 192–3)

Still, the national identity of what it means to be Tajik has never been answered and the country remains in a fragmented state. (Carney and Moran 2000, p. 194).

### **Economy**

Another significant piece of the puzzle is the economic model of Central Asian states. Similar to Mongolia, the Central Asian republics' role in the Soviet system was to supply raw materials to the more industrialized region of the Soviet Union. (Pomfret 2006, pp. 28–9) They too experienced a supply-line shock induced inflation after the USSR collapsed, however these Central Asian states had great material wealth within their borders to continue to maintain the economic system they had (Pomfret 2006, pp. 29–30) Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan both have enormous amounts of oil and gas reserves which have sustained their economy and avoid politically risky reforms. (Al-Bassam 1997, p. 400; Pomfret 2006, p. 37) It is telling that Kyrgyzstan, the country with the least amount of natural resources and therefore the fewest options, is considered the most reformist in Central Asia. (Connery 2000, p. 2; Pomfret 2006, p. 39) Similarly to Mongolia, its economic needs opened up the economy to international organizations who poured billions into the country. (Connery 2000, p. 4) To keep the aid and loans flowing, Kyrgyzstan has attempted to keep a democratic government, since Western countries, especially the US have an incentive to support democratic regimes. (Connery 2000, p. 5)

On the opposite end, Turkmenistan is an unapologetically dictatorial personalist authoritarian state. Despite possessing similar structural characteristics to Mongolia, the main difference which has led down different paths on democratization is that Turkmenistan possesses the 5th largest reserve of natural gas in the world as well as oil wealth. The government has completely mollified the opposition through generous price subsidies and free utilities. (Al-Bassam 1997, p. 400) The economy is considered basically unreformed from the Soviet period. (Al-Bassam 1997, p. 400; Pomfret 2006, p. 42)

### **Analysis**

Central Asian states differ from Mongolia in two essential aspects: timeline of nationalism and makeup of economy. Central Asian states did not have experience governing as a modern nation-state, and after the Soviet Union was dissolved, they became states before a nation. Nonetheless, nationalism became the most convenient ideology for the ruling parties to replace the power vacuum left behind by the communism of the CPSU. Nationalism had to be implemented carefully so as to not cause capital flight and was a way to check not against foreign powers for a well-defined nation as was the case with Mongolia, but rather to check internal forces of nationalist opposition and ethnic minorities. As a result, nationalism as it was deployed did not favor a democratic system over an authoritarian one.

Economically, Central Asian republics were valuable for their wealth in natural resources, and this continued to be the case which allowed for continued state revenue to sustain their regimes without undertaking politically suicidal economic reforms. On the other hand, Mongolia, and Kyrgyzstan to an extent, were forced by their limited natural resources to seek aid abroad and liberalize their economy. Economic reforms are handled well by an electoral regime wherein the unpopularity of a particular leader or party leads to only a temporary relinquishing of government control.

## Conclusion

Mongolia shares a common past with Central Asia, and it was forced to share the same fate of sudden independence from the Soviet system it had been coerced into being dependent on. Despite undergoing the same global phenomena, Mongolia came out as a liberal democracy due to its unique past and economic conditions in the present. Mongolia's cultural memory of once ruling the world forever unified the Mongols under a national identity that was fiercely protective of itself. Later occupation by the Qing dynasty would imbue this nationalism with strong Sinophobic, anti-colonialist, and anti-assimilationist tendencies. When the Qing dynasty finally fell Mongolia got its first experience being a sovereign nation-state and maintained that status to the modern day despite Soviet domination. After fighting for independence from the socialist system imposed on them, both the former ruling party and opposition agreed on political and economic liberalization to preserve their nation-state from Chinese domination with explicitly nationalist rhetoric. Economic liberalization brought out the inherent contradictions of the socialist system which survived through the democratic system it was cultivating as well as the traditional culture of a pastoral economy. Economic liberalization in turn reinforced the slowly building democratic norms by allowing voters to reward or punish specific political actors and set the pace of reform. The political elite too would ensure both the survival of their parties and the nation through engaging in power-sharing and tolerance.

In contrast, Central Asian states did not have experience in statehood nor nationalism. They suddenly found themselves presented with a state with the political support network from the central government gone. To stabilize their state and to start nation-building, they cautiously embraced nationalism to varying degrees. Central Asian nationalism was new and the purpose for its development was the maintenance of the existing system and internal stability. Maintaining the status quo existed as an option due to the natural wealth it was endowed with. As a result, many Central Asian states found themselves continuing the same pattern of authoritarian rule, often by the same leaders, as in the Soviet Union. The diversity in political outcomes can be attributed to the failure to embrace nationalism as in Tajikistan, or the lack of natural resources as in Kyrgyzstan.

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