

MONGOLIAN STUDY IN THE U.S.—ITS IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS: CHALLENGES/PERSPECTIVES

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Today the Mongolian Embassy has asked me to speak to this conference on the issue of the sad state of Mongolian language and area studies in the United States. It is highly likely that I, perhaps alone among you, have formal academic training about Mongolia. My Masters from Harvard University and Ph.D. from Indiana University are in Mongolian Studies. I have studied both the classical script in use from the time of Chinggis Khan through the 1930s (still retained in China by the Mongol peoples), as well as the modern Cyrillic-based alphabet. In 1990 while posted to Ulaanbaatar as a State Department officer, I was the first American student at Mongolian State University, where I studied modern Khalkha conversation. Of course, I am proud to say all of this, but at the same time, my uniqueness among you is also a matter of great concern and even anxiety, not only to other American scholars of Mongolia but now to the Government of Mongolia.

We have spent the past two days analyzing not only the specifics of U.S.-Mongolian bilateral relations, but also emphasizing Mongolia's special position in Northeast Asia, sandwiched between the two giants of Russia and China, with longtime ties to North Korea and close contacts now to South Korea and Japan. Certainly there are few countries friendly to the United States with such a crucial geopolitical status. So why more than 18 years into our formal diplomatic relationship and 15 years of democracy in Mongolia is our nation's academic interest in Mongolia dangerously close to disappearing?

During the Cold War era when the U.S. had no commercial or political ties with Mongolia, we had significant though modest government grants for Mongolian Studies programs and student financial support through the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the International Resources and Exchanges Board (IREX). There were several degree-granting programs at major universities including Harvard, Indiana, the University of Washington, and UCLA. Additionally, Mongolian language courses were offered at Johns Hopkins, Berkeley, Columbia, Brigham Young, and Western Washington University. The first Mongolian-English dictionaries were produced by eminent linguists such as Ferdinand Lessing (1) at the University of California at Berkeley, and later by Indiana University's John Gombojab Hangin, who also developed the first Mongolian language texts, funded and published under NEH and U.S. Office of Education (USOE) grants. (2)

The 1950s through 1980s was the era of world reknown American Mongolists including the Dean of Mongolian Studies in the U.S. Owen Lattimore and political scientist Gerald Friters at Johns Hopkins, linguist Francis Cleaves, linguist William Hung, and historian Joseph Fletcher at Harvard, linguist Nicholas Poppe at the University of Washington, Mongol refugee and historian Sechin Jagchid and historian Paul Hyer at Brigham Young,

historian George Vernadsky at Yale, historian Henry Schwarz at Western Washington, political scientist George Murphy, linguist Robert Binnick, and historian John Masson Smith at Berkeley, linguist Lopsang Lo and linguist John Street at the University of Wisconsin, linguist Kuo-yi Bao and historian David Farquhar at UCLA, historian Robert Rupen at the University of North Carolina, historian Morris Rossabi at Columbia, historian Frank Bessac at the University of Montana, and historian Frederick Mote at Princeton University.

During those decades, the largest concentration of academic scholars was built up at Indiana University by Hungarian immigrant and Central Asian historian Denis Sinor, who founded the Uralic and Altaic Studies Department in 1956 (now called Central Eurasian Studies Department). This dynamic man somehow convinced the university and state government authorities in corn-fed Indiana to hire simultaneously a bevy of notable Mongolists including John Krueger, Larry Moses, Steve Halkovic, Larry Clark, as well as John Hangin. Sinor and Hangin convinced the U.S. Government to sponsor a Center for Mongolian Studies as well as one in Central Asian Studies (established in 1967) at Indiana. (3) [Indiana's special relationship with the U.S. Government actually was established prior to this when in 19434 the program was founded as an Army Specialized Training Program for Central Eurasian languages.] All but two of these many above-named scholars now are either dead or retired. They were the ones who educated the early State Department experts on Mongolia in the 1960s such as Stapleton Roy and William Brown, both of whom became Ambassadors but never served in Mongolia, and me in the 1970s.

In 2005 Indiana University is the only degree-granting academic unit staffed with its own faculty of specialists where a student can concentrate in Mongolian Studies in the whole nation. (4—M.A. and Ph.D.s are awarded) The Central Asian and Tibetan focus has expanded within the Department with 27 professors, and in the Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies (RIFIAS) Center, which supports scholarly research and has an active publication program. Mongolian Studies, in the contracted form of only 3 professors, is now under the guidance of historian and some-time State Department Mongol interpreter Christopher Atwood and linguist Georg Kara, with a revolving Mongol linguist brought from Ulaanbaatar. RIFIAS, the John Hangin Memorial Library, and Indiana University have a very large collection of Mongolian-related books.

However, the largest collection of books (7,500 titles) on Mongolia in the Western Hemisphere is not at Indiana University, but in Bellingham, Washington at Western Washington University. In 1990 the U.S. Government recognized the importance of the library by awarding a major grant to assist in purchasing additional publications, and establishing a catalog. (5-electronic copies of the catalogue are available at Schwarz@cc.wvu.edu) Western Washington still publishes books related to Mongolian Studies, offers a small scholarship annually to students in the field, and regularly invites speakers on Mongolian topics to its East Asian Colloquium series.

Although this university's Mongolian program also has contracted severely with the retirement of Henry Schwarz, who singlehandedly is financing most of the library

acquisitions, a student can still concentrate in Mongolian Studies within the East Asian Studies degrees. The Mongol language program is available in tutorials, and recently it established a Mongol language course taught by a native speaker on the web. Western Washington in the 1980s used to organize intensive courses in Mongol language at Inner Mongolia University in Hohhot, China, in the days before diplomatic relations with independent Mongolia. (6-taught thorough Mandarin Chinese) This was the only overseas Mongol language study available at the time, and some of the younger American faculty now teaching were trained in this program. However, with the establishment of bilateral relations, the reason for and interest in this unique language program died.

There are several other colleges and universities that teach single courses on Mongolian history. They range from large universities such as Yale (7), University of California at Santa Barbara (8), University of Oregon (9), Harvard (10), Columbia (11), University of Chicago (12), historian and some-time State Department Mongol interpreter Christopher Atwood

(13), and Florida State University (14) to smaller institutions such as Dartmouth College (15), Macalester College (16), Kenyon College (17), Rutgers (18), Tufts (19), and Middlebury (20).