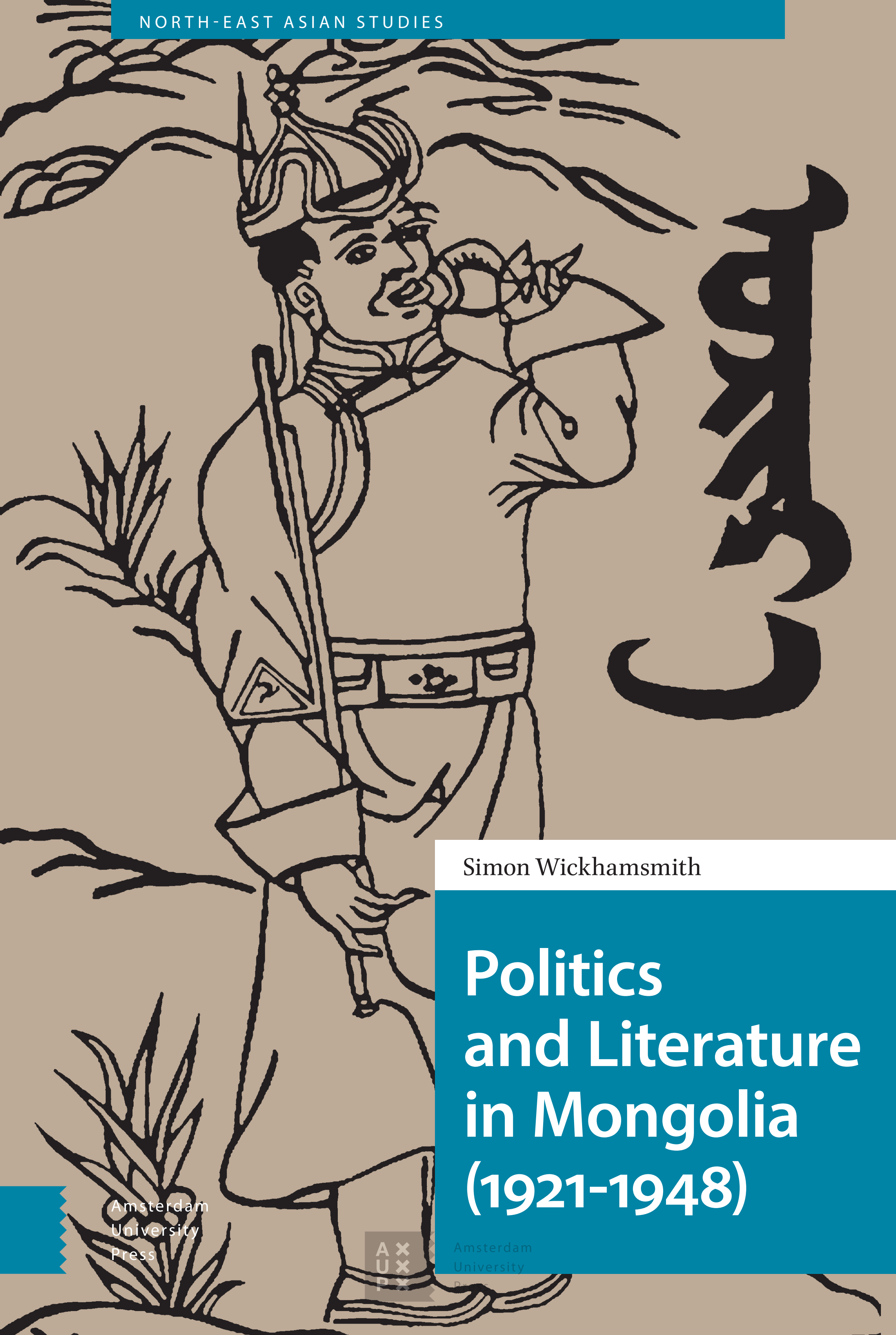
NORTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES
Simon Wickhamsmith
Politics and Literature in Mongolia (1921-1948)
Amsterdam University Press

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For Sunmin,
always with love

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Transliteration and Mongolian Names

The traditional vertical script (*Mongol bichig*) was gradually replaced by a modified version of Cyrillic between 1941 and 1950. This means that the majority of the texts mentioned in this book were originally printed in the vertical script. However, most of the texts available to readers and scholars inside and outside Mongolia – whether published before or after the Democratic Revolution of 1990 – have been reprinted in Cyrillic transliteration. For those who read Mongolian, transliterating the vertical script into Cyrillic affects the pronunciation and syllabification of the text, and therefore the rhythms, rhymes and essential sound that characterize the original are likewise compromised.

That said, my intention in translating texts for this book has been to convey the meaning rather than the music of the language, and those who read either or both the vertical script and Cyrillic will be able to read the texts for themselves.

To render the reading of Mongolian as easy as possible, I have chosen to use the Tibetan and Himalayan Library transliteration systems for both Cyrillic and the vertical script,[1] although I use 'v' to transcribe the Cyrillic 'в'. For Tibetan, I use the system laid out by Turrell Wylie.[2] For Russian, I use the ALA-LC romanization system, and I use the traditional characters for Chinese.

As far as the transliterations of titles and personal names are concerned, I have chosen always to use the Cyrillic versions of personal names (i.e. Buyannemeh rather than Buyannemekü) for the sake of consistency. For the names of works, however, I have used the transliteration appropriate for the cited text, so that if I cite a text printed in vertical script, it is cited and referenced using transliteration of the vertical script, while a Cyrillic text is transliterated according to the Cyrillic script.

Mongolian names are given using the patronymic (occasionally matronymic) initial, followed by the given name. Thus the writer and scholar Damdinsüren, whose father was called Tsend, is Ts. Damdinsüren. There is but one exception to this rule. Chimid Dungaryn (D. Chimid) appears to have made a decision to use the more "Westernized" version of his name in

1 https://www.thlib.org/tools/scripts/wiki/Mongolian%20Transliteration%20%7Camp%7C%20Transcription.html [accessed 12 December 2019].

2 'A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription'. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1959): 261-267.

his written work, with his given name placed first, and so I refer to him as Chimid Dungaryn or, where contextually clear, as Chimid.

This patronymic system was initially introduced around 1934, and the convention of using the initial letter of patronymics was only adopted in 1943. For this reason, many writers whose careers did not continue into the mid-1930s are identified only by their given name, and their identities are therefore very hard to establish.

All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

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Introduction

Abstract
Politics and Literature in Mongolia 1921-1948 is an account of the contribution made by Mongolian writers in building a new society following the 1921 Soviet-backed revolution. The literature of this time helped to frame the ideology of socialism and the practice of the revolution for those Mongolians who had little understanding of what it could offer them. Through a discussion of key topics in the socialist program – education, health care, religious belief, labor – it reveals in the work of writers such as D. Natsagdorj, S. Buyannemeh, Ts. Damdinsüren and D. Namdag the organic relationship that came to exist between literature and politics and how this relationship changed over the course of almost three decades, culminating in the First Congress of Mongolian Writers in 1948.

Keywords: revolutionary literature, Socialist Realism, cult of personality, Choibalsan, collectivization, industrialization, nomadic livestock herding

At the intersection of literature and politics, there is a feeling of potential, of what could be. Writers, whose craft with language can transport a reader's heart and mind to unimagined realms, work together with politicians, the most adept of whom enthuse their constituents through an admixture of idealism and pragmatism, and so it is that story and image transform – and are transformed by – society. It is such a transformation, earnestly desired and believed in, that lies at the heart of this book.

Mongolia was certainly transformed following its socialist revolution in 1921. Over time, people came to benefit from an education system that focused on basic literacy, a health care system based upon Western science, a political model in which local elected representatives came together to make decisions, and an infrastructure that made these developments more feasible. The revolution also brought political infighting, censorship, arbitrary power exchanges, draconian executions, the near-destruction of religion and the substantial weakening of certain aspects of cultural tradition.

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Yet the period with which this book is concerned – from the revolution in the summer of 1921 until the First Writers' Congress held during the first week of April in 1948 – was for Mongolia a period of sustained literary development, assisted in part through the financial and moral sponsorship of the Soviet Union, which allowed writers for the first time directly to apply themselves for the benefit of their fellow Mongolians. By 1948, Mongolian poets were experimenting with free verse, dramatists were exploring human psychology, and writers of fiction were developing ways to discuss, credibly and intelligently, those aspects of life that socialism had as yet been unable to transform. And while these benchmarks might not sound especially radical for 1948 – given the extent of the far greater and more radical experimentation of Russian writers well before the October 1917 revolution – for Mongolia, such advances were indicative both of the determination of the writers themselves and of the breadth of the political context in which they worked.

One of my principle aims in writing this book has been to show how writers chose to represent the new, revolutionary Mongolia and how they also expressed, alongside the advances and benefits that accrued, the difficulties that necessarily accompanied them. Rather than seeing Mongolia, under Moscow's increasingly stern grip, as a society of individuals controlled and manipulated by a Party driven solely by ideology and operating solely through threats and fear, the stylistic and thematic range of the literature at this time bears witness to the way in which the Party in fact worked together with the writers, and with both sensitivity and rigor, to fashion a new revolutionary literature. That said, there is no doubt that censorship, imposed through emotional, intellectual and physical coercion, was used right from the beginning to stifle many critical voices. Yet what has remained constitutes a remarkable body of work, and the senseless torture and deaths of individual writers should not detract from their legacies nor from those of their friends and colleagues who, whether through collusion or through happenstance, managed to survive.

The process of researching a book such as this in Mongolia is complicated by a number of issues. Literary scholarship, based largely upon the Russian model, is descriptive and lacks the analytical and theoretical aspect of much Western scholarship. Moreover, while scholars before 1990 published work through the State Publishing House (*Ulsyn Hevleliin Gazar*) about politically acceptable writers and themes in a politically acceptable way, contemporary scholarship is frequently self-published and so lacks the means by which it can reach a critical audience. Studies of the literature during this first quarter-century are especially scarce, and one is left with the impression

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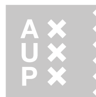
that, for whatever reason, there has been very little interest – whether in Mongolia, the Soviet Union or the West – in closely examining this work or what it represented.

Original texts fare little better. Before the establishment of the Party's publishing section in 1936, books and journals had been published in a haphazard fashion, and although the process was made more streamlined by the Party's support, the production of texts was not greatly increased until the early 1950s. From that time, limited runs were produced of individual titles, ranging from five to ten thousand copies. These were not systematically distributed, however, and did not necessarily find their way into libraries, nor were they generally reprinted when the supply was exhausted, and today the majority can only be found through Ulaanbaatar's network of second-hand booksellers. My quest for materials dating back to the early 1940s and before has produced even more limited results: although extensive searching has generally turned up the sought-for poem or story, or at least one similar to it, in the pages of anthologies published in later decades, there remains the possibility that some texts are now all but lost.

Research into the work of some writers necessarily revolves around their political status, especially in the years immediately following their deaths, and the way in which their legacy has since been handled. Those whose adherence to the Party fluctuated minimally or not at all tended to be rewarded with more publication opportunities, while those who were more critical were for the most part silenced, in death as in life. To some extent, it is this dynamic of censorship that produced the slow shifts in the corpus of Mongolian literature during the Soviet era. For instance, the works of S. Buyannemeh and Sh. Ayuush, executed respectively in 1937 and 1938, remained unavailable for more than 30 years. This meant that a full understanding of the first 15 years of revolutionary literature likewise remained largely unknown until a slim volume of Buyannemeh's work was published in 1967, followed six years later by a similar one devoted to Ayuush. On the other hand, the work of D. Sengee, who died at the age of 40 in 1956, has never been out of print, most likely thanks to the constant support given to him by the Party and his loyal and determined service in return.

In Ulaanbaatar's second-hand bookstores, books are frequently sold 'as is', with missing pages, torn pages, annotations and random drawings (such as the full-length image, in leeching blue ink, of a woman in a rather revealing dress decorating a page of my copy of Buyannemeh's complete works). Like these books, the social history of Mongolia during the first two or three decades after the revolution also has missing sections and personalized interventions, and it is almost impossible to know quite how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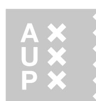
works of literature would have been understood, as much stylistically and thematically as ideologically, by readers at the time. The fact that they were published means they were in line with Party ideology, but beyond that, we can read what was written about the texts and their writers only in journals such as the Party newspaper *Ünen* or in publications focused on literature and culture such as *Ardin Soyolin Zam* (The People's Road of Culture) or *Zaluuchuudin Evlel* (Union of Youth). The analysis I offer in this book, then, is simply one person's viewpoint, seen through the prism of Party propaganda, and the occasional first-hand account of foreign writers.

These issues of sourcing and analyzing both primary and secondary materials necessarily define the limitations of scholarship. However, they also allow for a scholarship in which the exploration and analysis of both what is probable and what is possible is raised to the status of a methodological framework. Much of this book, then, is based upon readings both of the texts themselves and of the supposed, or assumed, histories that accompany them, a method that brings into sharp focus the imagery and style of the work, albeit in translated form, alongside the conceptual, narrative and sociopolitical concerns of the texts' original readers, performers and writers.[1]

Given the nature of research in Mongolia, then, and the importance among Mongolians of telling stories in order to establish a history that is workable if not provable, I have approached the narrative of this book in part as an exercise in literary ethnography. Throughout my research and writing, I have discussed with contemporary Mongolian writers and scholars the ways in which these texts, and others like them, might have been understood at the time they were composed, and in experiencing both Ulaanbaatar and the vast landscape that lies beyond it, I have tried to frame my analysis through a physical and spiritual apprehension of Mongolia's natural world, amid whose cycles and variations the writers of these texts lived. In this way, I have sought to construct narratives, to read a text as an individual's creative response to their own particular situation. So it is that microportraits of writers emerge, hazy because of the passage of time and relative paucity of material evidence, but illuminations nevertheless of their work, allowing

1 There are not many anthologies of Mongolian literature in English, but the reader could consult the following, either for further materials or for alternative versions of texts mentioned in this book: Charles R. Bawden (ed.) *Mongolian Traditional Literature: An Anthology* (London: Routledge, 2002), S. Narantuya and S. Dugarmaa *Some Modern Mongolian Stories in Mongolian and English* (Ulaanbaatar: n.p., 2005), Henry Schwartz (ed.) *Mongolian Short Stories* (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1974), and D. Tsedev (ed.) *Modern Mongolian Poetry (1921-1986)* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongol Ulsyn Hevleliin Gazar, 1989).



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us to see them seeking, amid the complexity of their own lives, to reveal the complexity of the lives of their fellow Mongolians.

The story that such lives and works recount is represented here in a kind of thematic history, revealing the development of key policies – regarding, for example, education, collectivization and religion – through texts written in response to them. This approach allows us to read the texts as historical documents rather than simply as art, and this in turn means that their particular value is frequently in propagandizing Party policies. In some ways this is a shame, because one must presume that the majority of these writers wrote the majority of their works as much as creative expressions as instruments to promote ideas or to elicit behaviors. Yet in the language of most of the works covered here, the social or political message is clear, pointing to a Mongolia modeled on the Soviet Union, yet defined by a history and culture rooted in nomadic movement and, perhaps less obviously, in the legacy of Chinggis Haan.

The literary scene during this period encouraged educated young people to experiment as much with the act of writing itself as with form and theme. The idea did not exist of a professional writer whose life was devoted exclusively to writing, and the majority of those whose works were published by the Party were deeply involved also as political organizers and activists or as administrators. It was only after the First Writers' Congress in 1948 that the Party began to professionalize literature, although of course these professional writers were funded to write specifically in response to the Party's social, political and ideological directives.

With this in mind, we can see the trajectory of the present book as mirroring the gradual focusing of the Party's ideological trajectory, starting with social equality in the new society which was a concern immediately following the revolution, followed in the late 1920s by education and health care, then religion and industrialization during the 1930s, through to the personality cults of Stalin and Choibalsan and the corresponding deepening of the Soviet-Mongolian alliance during the late 1930s and 1940s. The status of both the Soviet Union and its leader became coded into literature, whether explicitly or implicitly, such that, by the time of the Allied victory in 1945, the new wave of writers such as D. Sengee, who would a decade later be the first Mongolian to be educated at the Gorky Institute in Moscow, was engaged in the writing of encomia, dedicated less to Mongolians involved in the war effort than to the soldiers of the Soviet Union.

The consolidation of Stalin's power in 1929 impacted also the brief but disastrous 'leftward deviation' in Mongolia and precipitated the demise of many of the leading writers over the following few years, culminating in the

Great Repression of 1937-1939. Even those who died of natural causes, such as D. Natsagdorj, had fallen under such constant and severe pressure that their silencing became a fait accompli; the likes of Rinchen and Damdinsüren only managed to survive because they were deemed of greater assistance to the Party alive than dead.

Yet, rather than being a tale merely of cynicism and manipulation, the story of Mongolia's early revolutionary literature is a multi-layered search for a way to express what was good in the new society. For those who survived, there were accolades and recognition both at home and abroad: among them were Rinchen and Damdinsüren, who both became outstanding scholars, Ya. Tsevel, a lexicographer who compiled what is still regarded as the standard dictionary of Mongolian, D. Namdag, a popular and influential dramatist, and B. Baast who, born in the year of the revolution, remained until his death in 2019 at the age of 98 spry and chatty, a voracious reader and the last remaining link with much of the work covered in this book.

Mongolia's accession into the Soviet sphere of influence was significant in terms of its culture in two key aspects. First, it was a predominantly nomadic society, and second, despite the surface vestiges of autonomy, it had been a colony of the Manchu until 1911 and then since 1919 of the Republic of China, under the warlord Xu Shuzheng. The combination of a constantly mobile population and control by an external power rendered Mongolia a somewhat singular case and offers a potentially interesting study of how revolutionary literature might grow from such an apparently complex brew.

The transformation of a nation's literature under a new revolutionary system – and although I will be talking here about Socialist or Communist revolutions, discourses of transformation hold good for other revolutions, such as the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran or even the National Socialist revolution in Germany between 1933 and 1945 – involves the activity of writers in defining and developing government policy and the activity of government in defining the latitude to be permitted regarding theme and style. With its largely illiterate nomadic population, Mongolia in 1921 was perhaps a special case, but in other revolutionary contexts we can see how the influence of the literature of the incoming revolutionaries defined both a ready-made adherence to the overlords of the new system and an explicit break with that of the defeated, colonizing power.

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, for instance, as Tatiana Gabroussenko explains, early Soviet literature – and particularly the work of the architect of Social Realism, Maxim Gorky – was popular and influential for several decades, 'and especially for the very traits [...] that contemporary

Russian critics ridiculed, such as its sentimentality and over-romanticizing'.[2] These traits, of course, became a trope in the characteristics of an idealized loving and protecting father (not unlike those of Stalin and Choibalsan in Mongolian literature during the 1940s) attributed to Kim Il Sung right up until his death in 1994.

Furthermore, much in the same way that many educated Mongolians during the period of Qing rule could read Chinese well enough to enjoy its literature, so could educated Koreans during the Japanese colonization of Korea read Russian writers in Japanese translation as well as Japanese literature in the original. When a revolutionary system replaces a system of colonization, the newly liberated readers have at their disposal the literature of the colonizing power as well as that of the liberators. And yet, the troubled relationship between the liberated and the liberators – such as the Soviet Union in both Mongolia and the DPRK – raises the question as to how much revolutionary power post-colonial indigenous writers can exercise over their work. As we will see in the case of Mongolia, the impact of Soviet ideology during the 1930s and 1940s had the effect of erasing religious culture and, somewhat precipitately, focusing on industrialization and collectivization.

The effect of this 'out of the frying pan, into the fire' scenario on the writers in a liberated community becomes especially forced when applied to the imposition of key revolutionary discourses and themes. Gabroussenko describes how 'the distribution of obligatory topics to North Korean writers [...] in the late 1940s [rendered] many North Korea writers [...] frustrated by the explicit demand to extol land reform and industrialization'.[3] While Mongolian writers were generally given a little more freedom, they too were encouraged to focus on, for instance, the urban development of Ulaanbaatar or the importance of education and health care, with their efforts being rewarded with publication and with greater political approbation and power.

The effect of these imposed narratives varied from the unrealistically upbeat quality of what Sheila Fitzpatrick describes as 'the "boy meets girl meets tractor" genre'[4] in Soviet Socialist Realism via North Korean novels such as Yi Ki-yŏng's 1947-1948 work *Land*, composed 'as a direct response to the Party's request that North Korean writers reflect in their work the

2 Gabroussenko, 2010, p. 14. Gabroussenko's entire first chapter addresses the reception of Russian and Soviet literature during the Japanese occupation and its influence in the early years of the DPRK.

3 Gabroussenko, 2010, p. 27. Shatro (2016, pp. 35-60) offers a similarly tense portrait of how Albanian writers dealt with the ideological expectations during the first fifteen years (1945-1960) of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship.

4 Fitzpatrick,1992, p. 209.

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"tremendous transformation" in the villages in the course of the recent land reform'[5] to the transformative character of Mongolian Socialist Realism, found among the works described in Chapter 9. These texts were composed either at the behest of, or in a response to, the needs of the Party and represent a pragmatic approach to literary art that at once devalues (or at least bypasses) the creative genius of the writer while also emphasizing the writer's proactivity in the revolutionary project itself and its presentation to the people.[6]

The colonization of Mongolia by the Manchu and by the Republic of China, and of Korea by the Japanese, suggests that the revolutionary literature of Mongolia and the DPRK should be considered postcolonial, notwithstanding their immediate and ostensibly ameliorating colonization by the Soviet Union. The way they combined liberation from their colonizers with a sense of new-found national identity mediated by Soviet Marxism-Leninism[7] can be seen as complex yet fascinating iterations of what Dariusz Skórczewski describes, in his discussion of Polish post-colonial literary history, as 'unique experiences of a double colonization'.[8] Whether North Korea's de facto break with the Soviet Union during the early 1960s renders it as doubly postcolonial – in the way that Mongolia after 1990 most certainly is – is clearly debatable. But the development of the initial postcolonial literary traditions – defined by *juche* in North Korea and by the characteristics of nomadic culture in revolutionary Mongolia – presented homogenized 'imagined communities' of the kind envisaged by Benedict Anderson,[9] somehow inviolable and fixed, notwithstanding their previous colonization.

5 Gabroussenko, 2010, p. 93. An enlightening analysis of this work is found on pp. 93-101 of the book. Whether this or any other work of North Korean literature falls into the category of 'Socialist Realism' is open to debate. Myers (1994) contends that Socialist Realism failed in the DPRK, but he remains alone in this opinion among those scholars who have considered the question in any depth.

6 A similar case is that of Albania. According to Robert Elsie, the works written during the initial period of Hoxha's dictatorship, prior to his break with the Soviet Union in 1961, were, 'for the most part, not literary publications at all. They were politically motivated and educative in nature, often to the point of being cumbersomely didactic' (Elsie, 1991, p. 258). Most politically driven literatures, Mongolia's included, do at times fall foul of such problems, but I hope that the reader will see that the best of what was written in Mongolia during the period covered by the present study at least retained a sense of artistry and beauty, albeit frequently skewed in the direction of Moscow.

7 Indeed, it is arguable that the DPRK's *juche* ideology was developed by Kim Il Sung from his understanding of Marxism-Leninism (although Kim Jong Il claimed that it represents 'a new era in the development of human history' [Kwak, 2009, p. 19]).

8 Skórczewski, 2014, p. 95.

9 Anderson, [1983] 2016.

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The impulse of authorities in sedentary societies to encourage nomadic groups to settle is one that has touched the literature of many indigenous peoples, and one notable problem that the Soviets encountered in Mongolia was the resistance – indeed, the disinterest – of nomadic society to accept this option. Despite a broad-brush approach to showing the benefits brought by the revolution, the Party's original attempt at collectivization during the period 1929-1932, precipitated by a similar drive in the Soviet Union as part of the first Five-Year Plan, failed dramatically, although by the end of the 1950s, 97.7% of Mongolia's rural population were now members of a *negdel*, or 'association'.[10]

But when a nomadic group does settle in one locale, the dynamic of the new sedentary life can affect the culture on many conflicting levels, including the cultural and creative levels. The resulting settlement of what had been oral literature on the pages of a book is likewise an act that at once preserves and devitalizes the spoken word, trapping its imaginative and multi-dimensional wisdom, solidifying it into *text*, august and inviolable.

The changes brought during the Soviet era to the literature of the peoples of Central Asia offer a similar account of how stories that had once flowed between and among their tellers now settled and became a 'definitive' version conceived and written by an individual 'author'. Particularly during the years immediately after the revolution, Mongolian writers, as this book will show, were keen to extract revolutionary sentiment from the tropes and genres of folk literature. Indeed, throughout Soviet Central Asia, literature became a way by which nomadic readers whose traditions were being impacted by modernity could remain aware of what they were in the process of giving up, even as they were benefiting from education and improved health care.

In her analysis of the Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov's 1942 novel *Abai Zholy* (Abai's Way), Diana Kudaibergenova describes how Auezov 'conceptualizes and captures space as it was remembered by [...] generations of the local nomads'[11] and goes on to outline the organic and harmonious attitude with which nomads interact with their environment. In comparison to Kazakhstan, it is worth noting that literature in Mongolia in 1942 was in thrall to industrialization and labor and that the nomadic experience was visible only barely in the descriptions of landscape. That Kazakhstan's nomadic herders – and those in other Soviet Central Asian republics – had only a decade earlier resisted collectivization by voluntarily slaughtering

10 Atwood, 2004, p. 115.

11 Kudaibergenova, 2017, p. 66.

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up to half their livestock rather than collectivizing them[12] suggests that they had more to mourn and to remember when reading books such as Auezov's than Mongolia's herders might have, the majority of whom were still at that time independent.

In its history and geography, the nomadic culture of Central Asia stretches northeastward through Siberia and beyond, over the Bering Strait and down towards the plains of North America. Through the writings of ethnographers and the work of indigenous writers, we can see that there exists a similar apprehension of, and relationship with, the natural world among the once nomadic tribes of North America as among the nomads of Central Asia.[13] The conceptual and social shift from stories told about the ancestors or about a recent hunting trip to stories written especially for magazines and books is also a shift towards the technologies of print and broadcast media through which a writer's texts may be enjoyed beyond their immediate friends and family. In Kazakhstan and Mongolia and the Canadian Arctic, this shift has brought a dynamic relationship with settlement and with stability. The point on the continuum of nomadism where a writer in one of these communities perceives themselves to be as they plan, write, distribute and read aloud their work will likewise exist in a state of flux: my own experience with Mongolians, for instance, is that, with a few exceptions, they are often itching to return to the countryside, to their homeland (*nutag*), and to the place where their ancestors have herded for generations. This is perhaps not so much nostalgia, though, as a sense of spiritual displacement. Yet the literature at the center of this book was part of a project, imposed largely from without by a sedentary and colonizing culture, which was intended to bring Mongolia's nomads into the modern industrial world of the twentieth century and away from the 'backwardness' and 'feudalism' of traditional nomadic culture. It is this culture that many Mongolian writers today, like others in Central Asia, wish to revive but which their forebears, in a heady combination of revolutionary zeal and desire for the new, chose to ignore and deny.

My original intention for this book was to follow Walther Heissig's magisterial *Geschichte der mongolischen Literatur*, dealing simply with the literature as literature. It soon became clear, however, that the literature of the period immediately following the revolution was so closely connected with – and

12 See Conquest, 1986, pp. 194.

13 See, for instance, the understanding of the landscape among First Nations peoples in the Yukon in Cruikshank, 2005.

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indeed dependent upon – politics that it was necessary to present the two together. Thus it was that the text morphed into a kind of political history, observed through the lens of literature.

The first chapter, then, is intended as an overview of where Mongolian literature found itself at the time of the revolution. My particular concern has been to present some important aspects of the literature that appear over the course of the book's narrative and to show how elements of the modern and the traditional came together during the first two decades of the century. The end of the Manchu Empire and the brief period of autonomous rule in Mongolia provided a social and political context for the development of revolutionary ideas among the country's intelligentsia, and the literature that would be used to support and promote the revolution grew out of the literature that came before it.

Chapter Two addresses the development of revolutionary drama, which brought both the ideology and experience of the revolution to the large majority of Mongolia's population, who were illiterate. Drama, moreover, offered a context in which a group of individuals could come together and, by working together towards a common end, reflect the focus of the revolutionary project. As they spread out from Ulaanbaatar across the country, local dramatic groups were able to show people, faster than any printed texts, the benefits already granted by the new society and hint at those to come.

Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six and Seven deal respectively with the natural world, the battle between the left and the right at the end of the 1920s, education and social change, religion, and health, and so encompass the primary social and political developments of the period before the Great Repression. These chapters, each focused on a specific topic, represent reflected aspects of the whole, with education, for instance, supporting the introduction of scientific medical praxis, and the political negotiation of religion informing more general social shifts. These developments led to Mongolian writers' initial interest in Socialist Realism at the end of the 1930s and to its introduction and imposition during the 1940s.

Chapter Eight gives an account of the arrest, torture and execution during the Great Repression of September 1937 to April 1939 of several of the writers whose works are discussed in the previous chapters. The chapter also shows how those writers who managed to survive worked on their own literary development and how the Party began to impose more explicit control over their work.

The ninth and final chapter concentrates on the ways in which writers adopted Socialist Realism and explored what might be possible from within

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its boundaries. The increased association with and reliance upon the Soviet Union, the reflection of Stalin's personality cult in that of Choibalsan, and the complex sociopolitical dynamic of the Great Patriotic War all led towards the First Writer's Congress held in the spring of 1948, which established the nature of Mongolia's literary community for the next four decades.

This book has developed parallel with my experience in, and understanding of, Mongolia and its literature. When I first went to Mongolia at the invitation of one of the country's leading poets and cultural critics G. Mend-Ooyo, he and his assistant O. Munkhnaran started to introduce me to modern 'classics' – works by D. Natsagdorj, S. Buyannemeh, B. Rinchen and Ts. Damdinsüren – which have formed the backbone of my education. Over time, through their help, and through the help of many others, my knowledge of early revolutionary literature has broadened and deepened. So I must first thank Mend-Ooyo and Munkhnaran but also other friends, acquaintances, and colleagues in Mongolia for their assistance in clarifying issues and finding texts, especially G. Ayuurzana, B. Baast, J. Bat-Ireedui, U. Erdenetuya, L. Hushaan, L. Ölziitögs, Ts. Munkhchimeg, J. Saruulbuyan, Anna Tsendina and D. Urianhai. In particular, Sh. Tsogt, whom I met on my first visit to Mongolia in 2006 and who died early the following year, was a man of rare kindness and understanding, and I feel keenly how his advice to me about the translation of Mongolian literature still pervades my work.

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