The study relies on statistical data from the 1990 Chinese national census, sample surveys of minority migrants conduct- ed by the authors in 1997-98 in Beijing, Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, and interviews with more than 1,600 repre- sentatives of minority migrant com- munities.

Environment and identity

The first two case studies focus on Inner Mongolia. Jergal Burjigin and Naran Bilik argue that increased culti- vation of pastureland by Han immi- grants in Inner Mongolia has forced an outflow of Mongol herdsmen into the desert and into urban areas. This has a shattering effect not only on the region’s environment, but on the iden- tity of the Mongol people who have to shift from nomadic life to settled ani- mal husbandry or urban livelihoods. Wang Jiumin’s essay examines pat- terns of migration, settlement, and social interaction among four domi- nant groups (Mongolian, Hui, Manchu, and Han) in ethnically mixed neigh- bourhoods of Hohhot, Inner Mongo- lia’s capital.

The next three chapters analyse migration in Xinjiang, the Chinese region with the largest concentration of ethnic minorities. The essay by Ren Qiang and Yuan Xin shows that most of the new migrants in Xinjiang are Han from the more prosperous provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Other ethnic groups have also moved to Xinjiang. The chapter on ethnic minorities has replaced middle-aged peasants as the leading migrant group. This reflects the growing gap in wealth between urban and rural areas and the higher demand for female workers in the service sector, for example in restaur- ants and in child-minding. Tsui Yen Han also demonstrates the decisive role played by ethnic identity, kinship links and education in migrants’ job seeking and employment.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first two provide the reader with theoretical background, description of fieldwork methods, the main concepts on social memory and nationalism, and terminology. In chapter three, ‘Democ- racy comes to Mongolia’, Kaplonski addresses the political history of Mong-olia in its transition from socialism to what is often believed to be a demo- cratic society. The main hypotheses on the historical symbols of Mongolian democracy appear in chapter four. Chapter five, ‘The icebergs of history’, overviews the role of historiography in shaping Mongol identity over the last one hundred years. Chapters six and seven are crucial as they discuss mod- ern interpretations of three historical figures: Chinggis Khaan, Zanabazar and Sükhbaatar. The final chapter sum- marizes the hypotheses of the book.

Nutag and uls in Mongol identity

Kaplonski rightfully points out the importance of nutag (birthplace) for Mongol identity. He argues that nutag has become inseparable from the als (the state and its people) and demon- strates the importance Mongol attacks on historiographical aspects that have con- tributed to the als. The author becomes so concerned with proving the nutag-uls linkage between Chinggis, Zanabazar and Sükhbaatar that he overlooks other features of identity.

Emphasizing Buddhism (suppressed during socialism) was part of the search for a new national identity in the early 1990s. As Kaplonski points out, the image of Zanabazar – the first Mongo- lian ‘Living Buddha’ – is associated with the establishment of Buddhism in Mongolia. In socialist times, Zanabazar was exhibited to the outside world as a cultural figure, a gifted Mongolian artist and intellectual figure, an intellectual figure and artist. The author highlights the dilemma posed by the great Zanabazar’s sur- render to the Manchus. However, post-socialist Mongols tend to justify this with the long-term perspective.

Kaplonski explains, Sükhbaatar gained popularity among Mongols as a fighter against the Chinese and as the commander-in-chief of the Red Mon- golian Army. Contemporary Mongolian historians have re-evaluated Sükhbaatar and, based on recently available archival data, concluded that his role in the 1921 revolution was no greater than that of other leaders such as Solny Danzan and Dogomsyn Bodo. At the same time, contemporary Mongolian histo- rians attribute, erroneously, ‘democrat- ic’ credentials to these early revolu- tionaries. Kaplonski exposes their political motivation. The next question the author could have asked is whether contemporary Mongolian historians’ perceptions of democracy are compa- rable to Western ones.

The book’s weaknesses derive, first, from the narrowness of the geographi- cal scope of Kaplonski’s nevertheless impressive field data. The author is aware that Han nationalism is not rep- resentative of Mongolia, let alone Mongol-olian peoples living in China and Rus- sia. Second, while the author addresses the creativity of the Mongolian intelli- gentia, other, especially rural, social groups are absent. And finally, as Kaplonski’s achievement is his compre- hensive knowledge of works by Mongolian historians, it is especially regretful that he seems to be unfa- miliar with a number of important works on and around his topic by Russian, German and French scholars.

Despite these drawbacks, the book contributes to our understanding of the recent history of Mongolia and brings innovative research methods to Mon- gol studies. The book should be espe- cially thought provoking to a Mongo- lian audience.

References


By Elena Barabantseva

Kaplonski’s book belongs to the cur- rent wave of anthropological stud- ies on historical imagery and the popu- lar interpretation of historical symbols. Based on data collected dur- ing several years of field research in Ulaanbaatar, the author provides insight into the ideological mixture that inhabited the minds of urban intellec- tuals at the dawn of democratic reforms in the early 1990s.

China’s Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies is a pioneering study on ethnic minority migration in China. The collection of articles rejects earlier assumptions that downplay the role of ethnicity in explaining migration dynamics.

By Irina Morozova

Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia examines the political manipulation of history in post-socialist Mongolia. Shifting memories of the historical figures Chinggis Khaan, Zanabazar and Sükhbaatar illustrate the role academic and popular historiography play within contemporary Mongolian nationalism.