

Inner ASIA

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Inner Asia is published by The White Horse Press for the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at the University of Cambridge. The Unit, founded in 1986, is currently one of the very few research-oriented forums in the world in which scholars can address contemporary and historical problems of the region. **Inner Asia** focuses on fundamental issues, contemporary social transformations and theoretically-informed attempts to understand them.

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Themes in this Issue of INNER ASIA

Westerners who do not know Mongolia and Mongols well may imagine them through a series of stereotypes. One of these is that Mongolian culture is simply the 'folk culture' of nomads and warriors and that their literature therefore consists of age-old genres, such as ballads or archaic oral epics. This is doubly mistaken. As a matter of fact, Mongolian literature is (and has been) both varied and sophisticated, and as a matter of perspective, to see Mongolian literature as 'timeless' or 'traditional' is to ignore its historicity and more generally to deny coevalness to the Mongolians. It is therefore appropriate that the new journal *Inner Asia* should start with the splendid piece by Christopher Atwood on the early 20th century poet Saichungga. Atwood shows how modern Inner Mongolian poetry arises from and contributes to the historical consciousness of its time. Saichungga, he argues, had both 'an intense commitment to modernity as a project of economic and mental transformation and a deep reverence for the primordial images he constructed as symbols of Mongol nomadic existence'. Atwood thus demonstrates how Saichungga could take hold of the 'traditional' images and re-invigorate them in such a way as to make them politically resonant against the background of the imminent fall of the Autonomous Mongolian State and relevant to his particular vision of a resurgent Mongolian nation.

N. Hurcha's paper is an interesting description of how Buddhist dignitaries attempted through the centuries to turn the cult of Chinggis Khan towards Buddhism. It is more than a plain historical analysis, however, since Hurcha writes from a Mongolian point of view, from which stance he is able to state unequivocally that the attempt was not altogether a success. The unspoken background to this is Hurcha's understanding of ordinary Mongols, who 'were firm on certain issues essential for Mongol values' and who today have reaffirmed a different, largely non-Buddhist, image of Chinggis Khan.

Humphrey's paper moves to Halh Mongolia and a study of how Mongolian society took shape within the structures of the Soviet-dominated version of socialism. As yet, there has been little work on the question of whether the Mongols merely followed or mimicked Soviet patterns or whether in fact the character of Mongolian society, economy and politics was sufficiently different from the Russian to create its own kind of social formation. An aspect of this question is understandings of property, or more generally the relations between people and material objects. Humphrey argues that even in the 1980s Buddhist morality as regards possessions was not entirely eradicated; nor was the Mongolian practice of using objects to denote symbolically aspects of the person and his or her fate. In the socialist context, the wider ideological emphasis on communal property was counterbalanced by a number of types of intimately 'personal' property which were foregrounded in the Mongolian burial ritual. By contrast, the European concept of 'private property' was virtually absent in Mongolia.

One urgent task for a journal such as *Inner Asia* is to document and analyse the social processes underway in the current period of economic and political turmoil. It is notoriously difficult to understand the implications of contemporaneous happenings, the more so when events are drastic and rethinking abounds. Accordingly, we are delighted to be able to publish here four different studies of a single Buryat village, Tory in the Tunka District in the mid-1990s. The four essays are written from a variety of viewpoints: Manzanova, a Buryat sociologist, describes attitudes to the agrarian reforms; Meshcheryakov, a historian of the Far East, casts an ironic eye on the information environment in the village; the anthropologist Stroganova reveals the existence of millenarian ideas among contemporary Buryats; and Panarin, an economic historian, analyses the imminent collapse of the 'community'. There are common themes which emerge in all four articles, notably the shock of abandonment by the paternalistic state. Nevertheless, the papers strike out in different directions, and we see that even for a single village it would be difficult to provide a synthetic analysis. Perhaps the essay is the most appropriate form for capturing the shifting and kaleidoscopic ground of present-day life in Inner Asian Russia.

In future issues of INNER ASIA

- A. Hurelbaatar (Cambridge University) 'An Introduction to the History and Religion of the Buryat Mongols of Shinehen in China'
- Xiaoyuan Liu (Harvard University) 'From "Restoration" to Relinquishment: The Chinese National Government and Inner Mongolia in the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949'
- Magnus Fiskesjo (University of Chicago) 'The "Raw" and "Cooked" Barbarians: Chinese Constructions of the Frontiers of Civilisation'
- V.A. Shnirelman (Moscow) 'Passions about Arkaim: Aryans and Nationalism'