Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
China, Japan, and the Soviet Union are primarily interested in the Mongolia-Sinkiang region of Inner Asia. The collapse of the Japanese Empire will still leave many problems for China and the Soviet Union to consider in Mongolia and Sinkiang. In these vast areas of Inner Asia many events of the past have led to great repercussions in the world. Migrations have begun in the arid interior of Asia, moving west to Europe and south to China. The fluctuating rainfall of Outer China is responsible for many of the great events of history.

The Great Wall of China was an effort to establish a dividing line between the farmer and the shepherd. When the rainfall outside the Great Wall increased to the extent that crops could be grown, colonists from China pressed into Mongolia for more than a hundred miles and the nomads retreated to the interior. On the other hand, when the rains failed, the farmers retreated to the south and the nomads invaded the area inside the Great Wall.

Mongolia, covering an area of almost a million square miles, has been divided into Inner and Outer Mongolia by the Gobi desert. Inner Mongolia since 1911 has been organized into Ningxia, Suiyuan, Chahar, and Jehol. Japan has created an "autonomous" Mongol state southwest of Manchoukuo in a large part of Inner Mongolia. Outer Mongolia has been practically independent of China since 1913. This area is divided into the Mongolian People's Republic and the Tuvinian People's Republic both under the control of the Soviet Union. However, China still possesses sovereignty in name over all of Mongolia. Sinkiang or Chinese Turkestan has been one of the Chinese provinces since 1878. The New Dominion has been greatly influenced by the Soviet Union.
All life in Mongolia depends upon grass. In the central part of the Gobi desert the surface is almost barren. In the steppes around the margins of the real desert is the home of the nomad. More rainfall occurs in the northwest due to the higher elevation. Camels and horses, sheep and cattle live on the grassland. The sheep provide food and clothing while the horses and camels afford transport.

The Mongolian people live chiefly in three places: western Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, and Outer Mongolia. The population of Inner Mongolia is over seven million, the majority of whom are Chinese colonists. The Chinese are a negligible factor in the population of Outer Mongolia which is below one million. The capital city of Outer Mongolia is Urga, or Ulan Bator as it is now called. It has a population of 70,000. The Mongols generally believe in the Lama form of Buddhism. The monasteries are leading centers of permanent settlement.

Mongolia occupies a strategic position in the arena between Japan and the Soviet Union. The Japanese have constructed railroads in northern Manchuria to cut the Trans-Siberian Railway in the event of war. The Soviet representatives in Mongolia have been interested in a possible push across central Manchuria to Korea in the event of hostilities. A Japanese drive across all of Inner Mongolia into Kansu and Sinkiang might have brought about the fall of Free China.

Before the Chinese Revolution of 1911 the Mongols were divided into "banners" and confederacies. There were four confederacies in Outer Mongolia and twenty-four in Inner Mongolia. Although the Mongols were vassals of the Manchu dynasty of China, they were actually ruled by a priesthood under a "Living Buddha" in Urga. With the fall of the Manchus in 1911, the Mongols
claimed their independence. The revolt in Outer Mongolia was aided by the czarist Russians. In 1915 at Kialkha on the border of Siberia and Mongolia representatives of Russia, China, and Mongolia made a tripartite agreement in which the Mongolians received autonomy under Chinese sovereignty. After the Russian Revolution in 1917 a Chinese expedition was sent to Urga to re-assert sovereignty over the area. Later the Chinese were driven out by the Mongol princes aided by a White Russian unit under Baron Ungern von Sternberg. The Japanese supported the Russian General Semenov who tried to organize a regime under Nipponese influence.

The Mongolian Peoples Revolutionary Party was organized in March, 1921. In July the Red Army and Mongolian partisans captured Urga and order was eventually restored to Outer Mongolia. Toward the end of the year a Mongolian Peoples Government was functioning at Urga. In a treaty of friendship between the Mongols and the Russians in November, 1921 former Russian privileges in Outer Mongolia were ended, the Mongolian Peoples Government was recognized, and diplomatic relations were established. When the living Buddha died in 1924, the Mongol People’s Republic was organized.

Soviet troops were withdrawn from Outer Mongolia in 1925. Yet military experts were sent to train the local troops. Military equipment was supplied without cost to the Mongols and loans were advanced without security or interest for commercial purposes. Efforts were made to introduce handicraft industries and to improve sheep raising. Young Mongols were trained for political positions and schools were established for the public. A road was constructed from Urga north to the Trans-Siberian Railway and another south to Kalgan and North China.
The Russians were careful to maintain the formal fiction of Chinese sovereignty. In the Russo-Chinese Treaty of 1924 the Soviets continued to recognize the sovereignty of China over the area. The agreement states: "The government of the USSR recognizes Outer Mongolia as an integral part of the Chinese Republic and respects the sovereignty of China over it." The Soviet government in Moscow has never deviated from this policy. On the other hand, the Mongol People's Republic is for all practical purposes both independent of China and subject to the Soviet Union.

In 1931 Japan entrenched herself in Manchuria, creating the puppet state of Manchoukuo. The long border between Outer Mongolia and Manchoukuo led to many disputes over a number of years. The outbreak of friction in 1935 in the area of Lake Buir Nor led the Japanese to urge the abandonment of the isolation policy of Outer Mongolia toward Japan. On July 24 the Japanese spokesman for the foreign office said: "Manchoukuo is knocking at the door as Commander Perry eighty years ago knocked at the doors of Japan."

In an interview on March 1, 1936 Stalin is reported to have said: "If Japan should venture to attack the Mongolian People's Republic and encroach upon its independence, we will have to help the Mongolian People's Republic." On March 12, 1936 a Mutual Assistance Pact was signed between the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic. If any country attacked either one, the other would go to the aid of its ally. Under the present treaty relations, Russian instructors may train the Mongolian army, Russian propagandists may work in the country, Russian concessionaires may monopolize the industrial, railroad, and commercial development of Mongolia, and Russian troops may enter the country as long as danger exists.
Friction continued after the pact along the Manchoukuo-Mongolian border. From May to mid-September, 1939 the fighting between the Soviet-Mongolians and the Japanese-Manchouko troops in the Nomonhan area near Buir Nur and the Khalka River was very severe. At the beginning of September the Soviet-Mongolians defeated the Japanese-Manchoukno forces due to the better mechanical equipment of the former. In the fighting, tanks, planes, artillery, and armored cars were used. After the outbreak of the European war in September, 1939, an armistice was concluded in the Nomonhan area on September 15. An agreement was reached on June 10, 1940 on the demarcation of the frontier between Outer Mongolia and Manchoukno. On April 13, 1941 the Pact of Neutrality was signed between the Soviet Union and Japan. In a joint declaration Japan recognized the "territorial integrity and inviolability" of Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union recognized the "territorial integrity and inviolability" of Manchoukno. In April, 1945 the Soviet Union denounced the Pact of Neutrality with Japan.

Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union are also united by bonds of trade. Almost all of the trade of Outer Mongolia is with the Soviet Union. The trade is conducted on a basis similar to that with Tannu Tuva and Sinkiang. Russian imports from Mongolia have been wool, hides, and livestock while Russian exports to Mongolia have been textiles, flour, sugar, tobacco, and metal products.

The domestic policy of the Mongolian People's Republic has changed since 1930. From 1930-1932 the government favored complete collectivization, pursued an administrative campaign against the Lama church, and tried to effect a state monopoly of internal trade. Following uprisings against the policies of the government, a change was made in 1932. Individual enterprise would remain but the trend would be toward eventual socialism.
In the northwestern part of Mongolia is Tannu Tuva or the Tuvinian People's Republic under Soviet influence. The area occupies an enclosed basin of the Yenisei valley. The population is about 60,000. The people are not pure Mongols but represent a Finno-Turkic stock. Some of the inhabitants are nomads and others are forest dwellers. The capital of Tannu Tuva is Kyzyl.

The New Dominion of China is Sinkiang. This vast province commands the low-level routes in Inner Asia between the East and the West. Sinkiang has been called the geographic center of gravity between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the Arctic and the Indian Oceans. Trucks, carrying supplies from the Soviet Union to China, followed the three thousand mile route from the Turk-Sib Railway in Soviet Central Asia to Chungking in Free China. The route passes the capital city of Urumchi, or Tihwa as it is now called, Hami, and Lanchow in Kansu. The leading trade routes into Sinkiang itself from the Soviet Union are fourfold: first, from South Kirgizia to Kashgar; second, from Alma Ata to Kuldja; third by the Ili River to Kuldja; and fourth, south from Sergiopol on the Turk-Sib Railway to Chuguchak. The development of river transportation on the Ili River is growing.

Political Sinkiang has an area of 600,000 square miles and a population of 4,360,000 people. Most of the people are Turki while no more than 10% are Chinese. Mohammedanism is the prevailing religion in the area. As far back as the 1300's Mohammedanism replaced Buddhism. Sinkiang is a land of oases and most of the plains are too arid for grazing. Irrigation is practiced wherever possible. Leading populated areas are oases like Yarkand with a population of 60,000, Khotan with 26,000, and Kashgar with 35,000. Some wheat, millet, kaoliang, beans, rice, fruit, tobacco, and cotton are produced.
China's historic relations with Sinkiang have been political—not linguistic or racial. Sinkiang has been under general Chinese rule off and on since 200 B.C. The Chinese are traders at the bases—not settlers. Sinkiang is now held by a Chinese army which is anti-Japanese since many of the men are exiles from Manchuria. For a while a Turki rebellion supported by an army of Tungans from Kansu tried to organize an independent state. The Moslem revolt collapsed in 1934 for a number of reasons. The Turki and Tungan units began to fight each other and the Manchurian exiles restored Chinese authority. The Russians helped the Manchurian exiles to reach Sinkiang and to put down the revolt. Soviet bombing planes and Soviet tanks aided the provincial government. The "Altai Volunteers", apparently consisting of Soviet troops and White Russians living in Sinkiang, also helped to restore order.

A contrast in Soviet policy is now apparent. The Russians in Sinkiang aided the Chinese in crushing the separatist insurrection. On the other hand, the Soviets have supported the separatist movement in Outer Mongolia. However, Russian influence in Sinkiang is still very strong. The Russian Turk-Sib railroad, exchanging the wheat of Siberia for the cotton of Central Asia, is a magnet for Sinkiang. In the New Dominion the prices of Russian goods are lower than those of Japanese or Indian goods. Several commercial agreements have presumably been made between Soviet trading units and local administrative authorities. Considerable progress has occurred in Sinkiang. In 1939, 330,000 students were in school, stations to supervise agriculture and animal husbandry had been established, communications had been improved, and mining and industry had been better developed. Although the Russians have aided in the reconstruction of the area, no attempt has been made to communize the province.

In 1943 the Russians withdrew their military forces from Sinkiang. For a number of years they had kept an armored motorized unit in Sinkiang at or
near Hami near the eastern border that guards the approach from Kansu. The
Russians may have been afraid of a successful Japanese motorized dash through
Ningsia and Kansu into Sinkiang, cutting the supply routes from the Soviet
Union to China and threatening Chiang Kai-shek from the rear. When the
Russians no longer considered the Japanese capable of taking such a bold
step, Moscow may have decided to withdraw the Russian forces from Sinkiang.
In the same year Governor Sheng Shih-tsai of Sinkiang in a visit to Chung-
king promised complete participation in the war against Japan.

The events of the Second World War have had repercussions in Inner
Asia. Soviet interest in Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang in recent years has
been greatly influenced by Japanese aggression on the Asiatic mainland.
The removal of Japan from the councils of the world powers will leave the
future of Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang squarely up to China and the Soviet
Union. There is no real reason—strategic, economic, or political—why
China and the Soviet Union should clash in Inner Asia.

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