POL 4 Option E: Mongolia and China

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Paper Description

The first half of the Paper Option is organized around the messy, contested, and contingent historical trajectories in the first half of the twentieth century that led from empire to the nation-states that we now know as China and Mongolia, and eventually to modernist socialist states with ambitions to overhaul their societies. The second half of the Paper Option examines the historical trajectories taken, and transformations underwent, by both countries over the last two decades of the twentieth century in response to political protest, social upheaval, and economic pressure. Mongolia embarked on a path of democratization, whereas China remained a Leninist one-party state. Their divergent political trajectories were accompanied by starkly dissimilar political economic transitions to, and roles within, global capitalism. By focusing on these two epochal moments at the beginning and end of the twentieth-century, this Paper Option covers key concepts of comparative political studies, including nationalism, state formation, and political regime type.

On the surface, China and Mongolia are not easily comparable. China has the world’s second largest population (1.412 billion people), and Mongolia is the world’s most sparsely populated country with 3.343 million people who live on a landmass that is six times larger than the United Kingdom. China’s GDP is the second largest in the world, whereas Mongolia’s economy is dependent on the extraction and export of mineral resources to China. For these reasons, and to
eschew the perils of methodological nationalism, rather than compare each country side-by-side, we will take a historical approach.

The first lecture is an account of how the nation-state of Mongolia was carved out from the disintegration of the Qing Empire, and managed to maintain independent status in relation to the geopolitical aspirations of its neighbours: Republic of China (and its successor, the People’s Republic of China) and Tsarist Russia (followed by the Soviet Union). This is not only a story of the Mongolian nation, but also of China’s tumultuous histories, contested borders, and forms of political order.

In the second lecture, we will study the contested status of the symbol of Chinggis Khan (colloquially known in English as Genghis Khan) from the perspectives of Soviet internationalism, Japanese imperialism, Mongolian nationalism, pan-Mongolian nationalism, Chinese imperialism, and Maoism. The multiple representations of Chinggis Khan—whether they celebrated or vilified him—offer insight into how political orders find legitimation in history. Despite being in the past, history is never stable or settled.

The third lecture is devoted to the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR) of China. It examines the IMAR’s complicated history of quasi-independence, alliance, fealty, incorporation, autonomy, conspiracy, mass murder, and model minority status. Starting from the separation of ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ Mongolia during the Qing Dynasty to ethnic Mongolians’ role in the founding of the People’s Republic and their persecution during the Cultural Revolution, the lecture concludes with a reflection on what recent policies in the IMAR suggest about the direction and identity of the nation-state under Xi Jinping.
The second half of the Paper Option focuses on events in the late 20th century and how they have shaped the present. The fourth lecture addresses the precipitous years of 1989 in China and 1990 in Mongolia. In China, authorities brutally suppressed the students and workers who camped out in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square to call for political change. In Mongolia, the ruling party eventually conceded to the demands of protestors who occupied the main square in front of the government palace in Ulaanbaatar (it is important to note that in both cases, protests, including hunger strikes, also happened throughout the country). This lecture examines the political logic of protest, repression, and democratisation.

The fifth lecture traces China and Mongolia’s different economic trajectories in the aftermath of political upheaval, revolution, and reform. Although both countries transformed their political economies to integrate with global capitalism, they did so following different processes, and ended up in vastly different positions. China has risen to the status of a global power; by contrast, Mongolia survives at the periphery in a chronic state of sovereign debt. While these outcomes might not seem surprising in retrospect, there is nothing inevitable about them.

For the last lecture, we turn to contemporary Sino-Mongolian relations. We will examine not only the geopolitics and diplomatic relations between both countries, but will address also how each country appears in the mirror of the other.
Further Details

For students who are interested, this option serves as an introduction into the themes that will be developed more comprehensively in the third-year paper *POL 16: Politics of Global China*. This Paper Option provides a complementary introduction to that paper next year.

Note: since this is an entirely new Paper Option for Pol 4, previous years’ exam questions are not available.

You will have two supervisions for this module. Supervisions will be scheduled early in Michaelmas Term.

In preparing your supervision essays, you are expected to draw on the core readings. You are also encouraged to engage with examples from the supplementary readings to gain a more focused and guided understanding of the central themes and issues.
Lecture Topics, Supervision Questions, and Readings

Lecture 1: *Out of the Ruins of the Qing Empire*

Lecture 2: *The Ghost of Chinggis Khan and National Imaginaries*

Lecture 3: *The Myth of China’s Quiescent Autonomous Region: Inner Mongolia*

Supervision question for Lectures 1, 2, & 3:

What can the struggles over the significance of *Chinggis Khan* tell us about the nation-building projects of China and Mongolia at different junctures of history?

**Core Reading:**


Introduction,

Chapters 1 and 2; xvii-xxvii; 3-77.


Uradyn E. Bulag, “Hunting Chinggis Khan’s Skull and Soul,” in *Collaborative Nationalism: The*


Further Reading:

For reference:


Nations and Nationalism


Christopher Kaplonski, “The Case of the Disappearing Chinggis Khaan: Dismembering the


**Inner Mongolia**


**Lecture 4**: *Political Turmoil and Transition*

**Lecture 5**: *Post-Socialist Economic Trajectories*

**Lecture 6**: *Sino-Mongolian Relations*

**Supervision question for Lectures 4, 5, & 6:**

How did the *political responses* to protests in 1989 and 1990 shape the different *economic trajectories* of both China and Mongolia?

**Core Reading:**


**Further Reading:**

*Tiananmen Square*


Deng Xiaoping, “June 9 Speech to Martial Law Units”
Suggested Film:

The Gate of Heavenly Peace Part 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Gtt2JxmQtg&t=6005s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Gtt2JxmQtg&t=6005s)

The Gate of Heavenly Peace Part 2:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0lgc4fWkWI&t=37s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0lgc4fWkWI&t=37s)

China’s Economy Post-1989


Chapters 3 and 6; 63-91; 131-165.


Democracy in Mongolia


127-141.

Mongolia’s Capitalist Transition


Sino-Mongolian Relations


