Contents

**Special Issue:** Parliamentary Formations and Diversities in (Post-)Imperial Eurasia

**Guest Editor:** Ivan Sablin

**Introduction**

Introduction to the Special Issue “Parliamentary formations and diversities in (post-)imperial Eurasia” 3

Ivan Sablin

**Special issue articles**

Mykhailo Drahomanov’s ideas of parliament 6

Anton Katenko

Late Qing parliamentarism and the borderlands of the Qing Empire—Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang (1906–1911) 15

Egas Moniz Bandeira

Imperial parliament for a hybrid empire: Representative experiments in the early 20th-century Russian Empire 30

Alexander M. Semyonov

Soviet federalism from below: The Soviet Republics of Odessa and the Russian Far East, 1917–1918 40

Tanja Penter and Ivan Sablin

An old Soviet response and a revolutionary context: Dealing with the national question in the committees of the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies (1989–1991) 53

Carolina de Stefano

The All-Buryat Congress for the Spiritual Rebirth and Consolidation of the Nation: Siberian politics in the final year of the USSR 62

Melissa Chakars

**Articles**

The Baloch nationalism in Pakistan: Articulation of the ethnic separatism after the end of the Cold War 72

Hashang Noraiee

China’s engagement with Kazakhstan and Russia’s Zugzwang: Why is Nur-Sultan incurring regional power hedging? 86

Maximilian Ohle, Richard J. Cook and Zhaoying Han
Contents

Articles

Power of the People’s Parties and a post-Soviet Parliament: Regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks of power in contemporary Mongolia
Marissa J Smith 107

The rise of a new tourism destination: How did Vladivostok become the closest Europe for Korean tourists?
Beomsoo Kim and Jurak Kim 117

Reassessing classification of Kazakhstan’s ethnic management model: A comparative approach
Ildar Daminov 133

Competition, stakes, and falling electoral participation in Central Asia and the Caucasus: A comparative analysis
Alberto Lioy and Stephen Dawson 144

On becoming a development cooperation partner: Kazakhstan’s foreign policy, identity, and international norms
Insebayeva Nafissa 158

De-securitizing the “Silk Road”: Uzbekistan’s cooperation agenda with Russia, China, Japan, and South Korea in the post-Karimov era
Timur Dadabaev 174

Guest warriors: The phenomenon of post-soviet fighters in the Syrian conflict
Azamat Sakiev 188

Insufficiently diverse: The problem of nonviolent leverage and radicalization of Ukraine’s Maidan uprising, 2013–2014
Volodymyr Ishchenko 201

Corrigendum 216
Introduction to the Special Issue “Parliamentary formations and diversities in (post-)imperial Eurasia”

Ivan Sablin

Abstract

Addressing the entangled histories of deliberative decision making, political representation, and constitutionalism in several geographic and temporal contexts, this Special Issue offers nuanced political and intellectual histories and anthropologies of parliamentarism in Eurasia. It explores parliaments and quasi-parliamentary formations and the designs of such in the Qing and Russian Empires, the late Soviet Union, Ukraine, the Russian Far East, and the Russian-Mongolian borderlands (from Buryat and Mongolian perspectives) in seven contributions. Apart from the regional interconnections, the Special Issue foregrounds the concepts of diversity and empire to enable an interdisciplinary discussion. Understanding empires as composite spaces, where the ambivalent and situational difference is central for the governing repertoires, the articles discuss social (ethnic, religious, regional, etc.) diversity in particular contexts and the ways it affected the parliamentary designs. The multitude of the latter is understood as institutional diversity and is discussed in relation to different levels of administration, as well as the positions of respective parliamentary formations within political systems and their performance within regimes. The contributions also investigate different forms of deliberative decision-making, including the soviet, the Congress of People’s Deputies, and the national congress, which allows to include conceptual diversity of Eurasian parliamentarisms into the discussions in area and global studies. The Special Issue highlights the role of (quasi-)parliaments in dissembling and reassembling imperial formations and the ways in which parliaments were eclipsed by other institutions of power, both political and economic.

Keywords

Empire, Mongolia, parliament, Qing, Russia, Siberia, Soviet

The articles were ordered chronologically, and the Special Issue starts with Anton Kotenko’s contribution. Focusing on the works of Mykhailo Drahomanov, Kotenko examines the views of Ukrainian intellectuals on parliament in the second half of the 19th century. He argues that Drahomanov’s main innovation in the debates was his federalist approach to the imperial transformation, in which local self-government was to play the central role. The ideas of Drahomanov and other proponents of decentralization became part of the political mainstream during the Russian Revolutions of 1905–1907 and of 1917 and represented a peculiar take on dealing with the imperial crisis, manifested globally (Sablin & Semyonov, 2018).

The discussion of the imperial crisis and transformations continues with Egas Moniz Bandeira’s contribution focusing on the constitualization of the Qing Empire’s peripheries—Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Bandeira analyzes the integration of these regions in the newly established parliamentary institutions at the provincial and central levels. He argues that the main goal of the reform was the stabilization and strengthening of the imperial state and notes how the late imperial approaches to diversity management in a constitutional regime informed the University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

Corresponding author:

Ivan Sablin, University of Heidelberg, Grabengasse 3-5, Heidelberg 69117, Germany.
Email: ivan.sablin@gmail.com

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).
post-revolutionary dynamics, contributing thereby to the rather scarce literature on the matter (Brophy, 2012).

Parliaments in imperial transformations are also at the center of Alexander Semyonov’s article, which interprets the first Russian parliament as a parliament of a hybrid empire. Semyonov foregrounds the imperial context, that is, the layered sovereignty and heterogeneous society which produced diverse political subjectivities, in the history of early Russian parliamentarism. He concludes that the first Russian parliament proved more inclusive than the parliaments of renown liberal democracies, such as France and Great Britain. Semyonov’s work continues the exploration of the Eurasian imperial parliaments not from the perspective of their ultimate failure, but from that of concrete political developments and their importance in the global context (Kayali, 1995).

Addressing the next period of the Russian imperial transformation, Tanja Penter and Ivan Sablin analyze the soviets, a key conceptual and institutional innovation of the Russian Revolutions, and their performance as bodies, alternative to Western parliaments, in the city of Odessa at the Black Sea and the Russian Far East adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. They demonstrate that regionalisms and localisms were used as organizing principles on par with nationalism across the former empire. At the same time, the comparison of the two peripheries shows that the two early Soviet governments functioned as ad hoc committees and hence did not offer a viable extra-parliamentary alternative in governance (Resnick, 1973).

Carolina de Stefano’s article focuses on the late Soviet transformation and the role of the parliament, the Congress of People’s Deputies, in the management of diversity. Focusing on the proliferation of parliamentary commissions and committees aimed at dealing with specific national problems, de Stefano discusses the parliamentary representation of ethnonational groups and minorities and, more specifically, the continuities and novelties in the functioning of the committees vis-à-vis their previous Soviet counterparts. The article contributes to the discussions of Soviet disintegration (Suny, 1993) by analyzing how the Soviet central leadership tried to control and handle the national question through the parliament.

The late Soviet transformation is also at the center of Melissa Chakars’ article, but she analyzes it from the perspective of a concrete national group as organized at an ad hoc assembly—the All-Buryat Congress for the Spiritual Rebirth and Consolidation of the Nation. Chakars discusses the elections, carried out in the disjointed Buryat ethnonational units, the diverse representation at the congress itself, and the debates on the concrete approaches to national self-organization of the Mongolic-speaking indigenous people in the Russian-Mongolian borderland. The article demonstrates the heterogeneity of the national groups and complicates the history of the late Soviet transformation.

Marissa Smith takes up the discussion of the Russian-Mongolian borderland from the Mongolian perspective and during the post-socialist period. Although Mongolia is usually celebrated as a notable and regionally exceptional success in the transition to democracy (Fish, 2001), Smith successfully demonstrates that the politics on the local and provincial levels is influenced by the post-imperial entanglements, such as the presence of the Soviet-cum-Russian and other internationalized infrastructures at the borderland, with the locality–center relations complicating the understandings of the current constitutional regime.

This Special Issue on Eurasian parliamentarism, informed of current developments in history, anthropology, and political science and attentive to the peculiarities of global, regional, and local contexts, seeks to fill some of the gaps in the discussions of democracy in Eurasia and beyond by exploring several key conjunctures and trends of democratic developments. Attempting to overcome narrow state-centered approaches, the articles in this Special Issue discuss the transboundary interactions between politicians and intellectuals, the circulation of ideas and concepts, and the entangled imperial and post-imperial political practices.

**Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This Special Issue was prepared as part of the project “ENTPAR: Entangled Parliamentarisms: Constitutional Practices in Russia, Ukraine, China and Mongolia, 1905–2005,” which received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement no. 755504). Most articles were developed from the presentations at the Workshop “Parliaments and Political Transformations in Europe and Asia: Diversity and Representation in the 20th and 21st Century,” hosted by the University of Heidelberg (Germany) on February 12–13, 2019.

**ORCID iD**

Ivan Sablin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6706-4223

**References**


**Author biography**

Mykhailo Drahomanov’s ideas of parliament

Anton Kotenko

Abstract
Ukrainian parliamentarism and constitutionalism have a long history. Its brightest episode occurred 100 years ago, in 1917–1921, when the Ukrainian activists tried to cope with the breakup of the Romanov Empire by suggesting various projects of its reconstruction. In this article, I argue that the history of these projects began at least half a century earlier, when a young professor of history at Kiev University, Mykhailo Drahomanov, started to reflect upon future reorganization of the Russian Empire into a parliamentary state. Being an ardent advocate of turning the empire into a representative democracy, Drahomanov still felt uneasy about unapologetic support of parliamentarism. Having embraced Proudhonian idea of anarchy or self-government, he realized that the existence of parliament was not a universal cure for all political ills of the Russian Empire, especially for the main one—extreme state centralization. Hence, his views of political reconstruction of the empire did not necessarily mean transforming it into the Russian Republic. It seems that a reasonable and reasoned monarch, who could turn the empire into a federal state with a wide local self-government, would totally fulfill Drahomanov’s ideas of future Russia. His enormous influence upon the pre-war Ukrainian intellectuals explains why only few of them seriously discussed an idea of Ukrainian state independence in 1917.

Keywords
Drahomanov, federalism, parliamentarism, Romanov Empire, Ukraine

Introduction
In 1920, Otto Eikhel’man, formerly a professor of foreign and international law at Kiev University, submitted his project of the Ukrainian constitution to the Constitutional commission of the Ukrainian National Republic. The project envisioned Ukraine as a federal parliamentary republic, which consisted of 13 lands. Based on a principle of decentralized representative democracy, Eikhel’man suggested Ukraine to be governed by a bicameral parliament, which consisted of two chambers: Land-State Chamber and Federal-State Council. The first chamber was to include from three to five representatives of each land depending on a number of its population. The second chamber was to be created as a result of the secret, direct, and proportional elections by all citizens of Ukraine, who, to prevent “oligocratic unreasonableness” and “arbitrariness of a crowd,” had to enjoy a plural vote depending on their age, family status, education, and experience of administering a state (Eikhel’man, 1921).

Eikhel’man’s was just one of a number of proposals of a future constitution, put forward by the Ukrainian intellectuals in 1917–1921. What were their intellectual antecedents and predecessors? This question might be answered in different ways. From a long durée perspective one can argue that the activity of “forefathers”—participants of Polish-Lithuanian early-modern noble parliaments from Ukrainian provinces—has been important for the development of Ukrainian parliamentarism since the early-modern period up to the twenty-first century (for an example of this approach, see Mykhailovs’kyi, Mykhailo Drahomanov’s ideas of parliament...
2018). From a short-term perspective, undoubtedly, Ukrainian revolutionaries of 1917–1921 benefited a lot from their experiences of being members of imperial parliaments of the long nineteenth century—Russian Duma, Austrian Reichsrat, and Galician Landtag (see some of their stories in Chornovol, 2002; Gerus, 1984). Most recently, a history of Ukrainian parliamentarism combined both of these approaches (Lytvyn, 2010).

Indeed, in 1917–1921 federal parliamentary republicanism was not a novel idea for the Ukrainian intellectuals. One could trace its emergence back at least to the first Ukrainian political organization of the Russian Empire, The Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius. In 1846–1847, its members put forward a plan of turning East-Central Europe into a federal union of Slavonic countries. This union was “to be ruled by a common sein [parliament] or a Slavonic assembly, which would gather the deputies of all Slavonic republics to decide those matters, common to all the Slavonic union” (Hlyz’ et al., 1990, p. 170). In the second half of the long nineteenth century, this project was taken as a model by other Ukrainian intellectuals, who proposed to turn the Romanov Empire either into a constitutional monarchy, where an emperor necessarily would be checked by a parliament (Grushevskiy, 1907), or into a federal parliamentary republic (Hrushev’s’kyi, 1917). As a result of these discussions, after the reappearance of Ukrainian public sphere in the Russian Empire in 1906, the concept of parliament (with its accompanying words of parliamentarism, parliamentarist, parliamentary) actively entered Ukrainian political language. Thus, already, in 1906 the author of popular books in Ukrainian, Mariia Hrinchenko, unambiguously argued that Ukraine should have been ruled by a regional parliament, which would have issued regional laws (Zagirnia, 1906, p. 71). Unsurprisingly, in 1906 and 1910 the concept of parliament was included in the only two pre-war dictionaries of foreign words in Ukrainian language by Vasyl Domanytskyi and Zenon Kuzelia.

Trying to answer the question of when does a story of Ukrainian parliamentarism of 1917–1921 begin, in this article I suggest to leave both long and short durée approaches to the story of the Ukrainian revolution mentioned above. On one hand, in 1917 memories of the early-modern Polish-Lithuanian noble parliaments did not have an important intellectual influence on the Ukrainian visions of their future state. On the other hand, activity of Ukrainian politicians in modern imperial parliaments, especially in the Russian Duma, and its relation to the events of 1917–1921 still require meticulous archival research.

Instead, I propose to look closely at the ideas of a key Ukrainian intellectual of the second half of the century, Mykhailo Drahomanov. I argue that they immensely inspired the Ukrainian revolutionaries of 1917–1921. At the turn of the centuries Drahomanov was actively read, praised, and criticized, but definitely taken into account by all generations of the Ukrainian activists (see, for instance, a summary of Drahomanov’s ideas by Ahatahnel Krymsky in his student notebook from the beginning of the twentieth century in Krymsky, n.d., pp. 20–221). Thus, one should not be surprised to find out that these were excerpts from one of the most important Drahomanov’s texts, which opened Otto Eikhel’man’s 1920 project of the Ukrainian constitution mentioned above (Eikhel’man, 1921, pp. 1–11reverse). If previous scholars of Drahomanov’s intellectual oeuvre concentrated mainly on his ideas of federalism (see, for instance, Lysiak-Rudnytsky, 1994, pp. 289–374; Von Mohrenschildt, 1981, pp. 131–165), or on his political thought in general (Kruhlashov, 2000), in this article I am interested in Drahomanov’s views of representative government. Even though he did not write any special treatise about parliament, one can still find numerous references to it in a number of his writings. What exactly were Drahomanov’s ideas of the future reconstruction of the Romanov Empire? Was he an advocate of turning it into a parliamentary republic, or did he suggest to turn Russian absolute monarchy into something else? In this article, after providing a short biographical background, I will discuss Drahomanov’s ideas of parliament, arguing that representative government was for him neither a solution to the most pressing political problems of the Romanov Empire, nor did he necessarily presuppose a replacement of monarchy with a republican form of government. Russian political reconstruction, Drahomanov argued, would succeed only when accompanied by its decentralization.

Biographical background

Mykhailo Drahomanov has been deservedly considered one of the most notable modern Ukrainian political thinkers. He was born in 1841 in a small town of Poltava province in the south-west of the Russian Empire into a petty noble family. In 1863, he graduated from Kiev University as a specialist on Roman history. It was there that Drahomanov for the first time got involved into Kievian Ukrainian circles. In 1864, he submitted a pro venia legendi thesis on the emperor Tiberius, where still a young student argued that the empire had not brought a decline of the Roman world after the republic; on the contrary, in social and cultural terms it seemed to the author to be quite a progressive state. Five years later Drahomanov defended his MA thesis on Tacitus and historical meaning of the Roman empire and was sent abroad to finish his preparation for a teaching position. Some of these months of 1870–1871, during the Franco-Prussian war, he spent in Berlin and Heidelberg, which turned out to be of an utmost importance for him: it was in Germany, where Drahomanov wrote his first important texts on politics, federalism, and autonomism in the Eastern Europe. After his return to Kiev, Drahomanov taught at the university until 1875, when he was fired by ministry of education. Even though the reason
of his dismissal had to do with his “political unreliability,” Drahomanov was still issued a passport and was allowed to leave the country. The rest of his life he spent as an emigre, first in Geneva, where he published his own journal and political brochures, and since 1889 as a professor at a University in Sofia. He died in Bulgaria in 1895.

Drahomanov on parliament

Parliament was one of Drahomanov’s keywords. To understand his ideas of it one has to stress that even though some contemporaries pigeonholed him as a Ukrainian nationalist, Drahomanov never dreamed of an independent Ukrainian national state. As he repeated it many times in many of his texts, political separatism was not only almost impossible, but also did not make any sense for Ukrainians (as well as, for instance, for the Russian Poles). In 1888, Drahomanov wrote that

even in my thoughts I could not concede that all our country up to Stavropol could tear away from Russia; I had an indifferent attitude towards wars on the territorial side. War interested me solely from the point of view whether it would cause [...] a movement for reforms in Russia. (Drahomanov, 1901, p. 6)

Defining himself “not as any -phile, neither Ukrainophile, nor Slavophile, but simply as a Ukrainian with all-human tendencies, a man of the Ukrainian nation (homo nationis ukrainicae)” (Drahomanov, 1894a, p. 6) and as a “Ukrainian, with claims to be a European liberal and socialist on Ukrainian ground, similar to, for instance, English radicals and socialists” (Vakarchuk, Isaievych, 2006, p. 513), Drahomanov firmly disproved of any nationalism. At the same time, he did not reject the existence of nationalities, and turned a formula “cosmopolitanism in ideas and goals, nationality in the ground and forms of cultural work” (Drahomanov, 1893c, p. 223) into the most concise expression of his political theory. Identifying himself as a Ukrainian, he considered it natural to work primarily for other Ukrainians in his plans for the federal reconstruction of Russia. As he put it in 1894, “I do not separate myself from the Great Russians, but only find Ukrainians to be different from the former, which is why they require special attention” (Drahomanov, 1901, p. 34). A decade later Bohdan Kistyakivsky would call this idea a “nationalization of socialism” (Dragomanov, 1908, p. xxxi). Unsurprisingly, all political ideas of Drahomanov were concerned with the future of the Russian Empire, not of an independent Ukrainian state. This is why it was a Russian parliament, which he discussed in his texts on prospective reconstruction of the Romanov Empire, not a Ukrainian one.

For Drahomanov, this was the first step for the future political reform of Russia—to abolish the “obsolete beast” of the Russian autocracy and replace or amend it with a parliament, or zemsky sobor (Dragomanov, 1877, p. 28). He was convinced in an inevitability of arrival of representative government to Russia, and his argument was that of a historian. Human past provided him with an idea that absolute monarchies were simply historical phenomena, they had not existed from the times immemorial, and would not last forever. Drahomanov underlined that various popular councils and self-governments checked the power of kings and queens already in the most ancient societies, which made freedom an ancient phenomenon and despotism a novel one. A specialist in the ancient history, he emphasized that one could have found seeds of representative government already in the Roman Empire. What concerns Eastern Europe, here local absolute monarchies were checked by the early-modern parliaments like veche or zemsky sobor, both of which were summoned in Muscovy in the 16th to 17th centuries (Drahomanov, 1894c, pp. 104–105, 255–256).

It seems that Drahomanov mentioned Muscovite zemsky sobor in his texts for two reasons. First, it enabled him to argue that monarchism and despotism were not Russian national peculiarities. In Drahomanov’s opinion, Muscovite veche and zemsky sobor perfectly corresponded to the contemporary Western European parliaments, while “the ideas of local theorists of government of the people [...] were fully compatible with the ideas of English Fortescue and French Comines.” The French history of representative government especially reminded him of the Russian one:

France separated from the Carolingian conglomerate in 843, the Principality of Vladimir [separated] from the old principalities in 1243; [the first] French états généraux [were convened] in 1302, the first zemsky sobor in Moscow—in 1550; the last états généraux were convened in 1614, the last zemsky sobor—in 1698, the attempt to restore états généraux was undertaken in 1649–1651, the project of a constitutional charter of Anna Ioannovna [was proposed] in 1730. (Drahomanov, 1893a, p. 143)

Second, Drahomanov noted that republican democracy was not an inherent trait of the Ukrainian national character. While he recognized that the Ukrainian past provided one with numerous examples of struggle for political freedom, self-governance, and political equality, while he called upon the Ukrainian historians to bring their history back to life (Drahomanov, 1893b, p. 169) and spread the ideas of constitutionalism in Russia in print at least in historical texts (Drahomanov, 1894a, p. 5), Drahomanov still considered them to be historical phenomena as well, thus subject to change. For instance, he explicitly mentioned that in the seventeenth century, while the Muscovites were still summoning zemsky sobor, the Ukrainian Cossacks and churchmen put forward not a republican, but a monarchical ideal (Drahomanov, 1893a, p. 143).

In the nineteenth century, however, according to Drahomanov’s evolutionary vision of the past, both Russian and Ukrainian political lives were still passing through a
stage of Western Europe’s development, which the latter had left behind in the 17th and 18th centuries. Thus, he was not surprised to find out that in Russia monarchical principle was popular even “among the honest people” (Drahomanov, 1893a, p. 143). However, he underlined that as far as everywhere in contemporary Europe, except for the Romanov and Ottoman Empire, it was agreed that states had to be ruled not just by the czars and their officials, but by the constitutional governments and according to the laws, passed by the elected parliaments, those institutions would inevitably return to Russia (Drahomanov, 1894b, pp. 173–175).

For Drahomanov, two examples of parliamentary democracy for future Russia were Great Britain and Switzerland. The former especially fascinated him. For instance, his daughter remembered that Drahomanov used to admire Britain underlining that its evolution was far more expedient than the French revolutions (Drahomaniv-Shyshmanova, 1991, p. 141). Maybe this was a reason why after his move to Sofia Drahomanov even gave a special class on English parliamentarism to his students, predicting that future would belong to Englishmen (Pavlyk, 1896, p. 425). On the other hand, a longtime resident in Switzerland, Drahomanov got closely acquainted with this country, which became another example of an ideal state formation for him. Thus, for instance, in his review of recent books on contemporary Switzerland (the French translation of The Swiss Confederation by Francis Adams and C.D. Cunningham and Les Alpes Suisses by Eugène Rambert), Drahomanov praised this country for being an example of a successful direct democracy. Moreover, he argued that “every educated person of our times has to get acquainted meticulously with Switzerland, which is a laboratory, where many things were created, which later appear in larger states” (Drahomanov, 1891a, p. 176). His support for a system of a proportional representation during a general voting also came from his Swiss experience (Drahomanov, 1892, p. 202). In both cases, those were parliaments, which allowed Drahomanov to use groupist categories of “Englishmen” and “Swiss”: he underlined that only parliaments revealed a true nature of representation during a general voting also came from his Swiss experience (Drahomanov, 1892, p. 202). In both cases, those were parliaments, which allowed Drahomanov to use groupist categories of “Englishmen” and “Swiss”: he underlined that only parliaments revealed a true nature of nations. This is why, for instance, Drahomanov (1915) argued that at least at the moment it was premature to blame the Russian society for the ongoing Russification or any other governmental policies toward Ukrainians as one could blame the French or German governments for their Gallicization or Germanization of population of France and Germany: the existing Russian laws were not passed by a parliament, appointed during general elections, as they were passed in other European countries (p. 52).

Drahomanov’s dilemma of parliament

Despite praising parliamentary democracy, Drahomanov constantly underlined that in his dreamt of state autocracy would not just be replaced with a parliamentary rule (see, for instance, Dragomanov, 1877, p. 28). His main fear was that a centralized autocracy would be substituted with a centralized parliamentarism, which Drahomanov was as much opposed to as to the former (Kruhlashov, 2000, p. 381). In his words, in a heavily centralized state there was no real political freedom. Drahomanov’s condemnation of any tendency toward centralization stemmed from his admiration of an anarchist socialism à la Proudhon, which he got acquainted with during his tour around Europe in 1870–1873, and whose advocate he remained till the end of his life (Fedenko, 1930). As Drahomanov explained it himself in 1881,

the teaching of anarchy, i.e., of statelessness, is an exact opposite of the more or less centralist monarchist, constitutionalist, and republican theories of France in the 1840s and 1850s. Proudhon defined his doctrine as that of complete independence of the individual and of the inviolability of his rights from all authority, even from that of elected representatives. […] Accordingly, Proudhon considered “an-archy” as synonymous with the English term “self-government.” In its practical application the theory of anarchy leads to federalism. (Dragomanov, 1905, p. 124)

Anarchy/self-government seemed to Drahomanov the main tool for the improvement of life of the common people, their “political, social and cultural advancement, where a nationality is only a ground, form and experience” (Dragomanov, 1915, p. 115). He clearly juxtaposed this idea to any Jacobin-inspired vision of a centralized state, not only to the Romanov Empire (which belonged not to Russian people, but to people of Russia) or Habsburg Empire. As Bohdan Kistiaikovsky put it,

[Drahomanov] did not stop to prove the disastrous influence of centralism for the sole existence of political freedom, whomever this centralism came from: be it from the autocratic bureaucracy, or centralizing revolutionary parties, and whichever ideals this centralism supported, be it a falsely understood idea of unity and inseparability of Russia, or historical rights of Poland for Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine and for a restoration of Polish statehood in old borders. (Dragomanov, 1908, p. xvi)

Thus, even being an apologist of a constitution, he definitively opposed any centralized government. On the contrary, Drahomanov always stressed the idea of federalism, of local self-government, or the recognition of the widest autonomous rights for political, social, and national groups, rights for a wide local self-government. After him, popular representation had necessarily to be linked as closely as possible with a local and regional representation. At the same time, he argued that political freedom was different from a constitutional form of government: autocratic parliament could not grant personal freedom, freedom of faith, as well as of unbelief, of national life, of speech as those could not be granted by an autocrat sovereign. In particular, Drahomanov pointed out that probable Russian zemsky sobor would preserve the predominance of a “Great Russian nation” and would protect the interests of the central Russian provinces over the rest,
especially what concerned schooling and economy—this is what Drahomanov saw happening in Germany, where Berlin dominated Poznan and Alsace, and in the Habsburg empire, where Vienna and Budapest dominated Slavs. This meant that there was no reason for the “sons of nations and regions of Russia” to shed its blood during any revolution if its only result was an establishment of an autocratic zemsky sobor. After Drahomanov, such bloodshed would have some meaning only if imperial borderlands were governed by their own parliaments, which in this way would check the central parliament (Dragomanov, 1906, p. 410).

In addition to his categorical disapproval and condemnation of terror as a method of achieving political aims, the last argument was one of the reasons of Dragomanov’s criticism of Russian populists: he found them to be too centralist. After Drahomanov, already a couple of days after they killed Aleksandr II, members of the People’s Will suggested Aleksandr III to convene a Constituent Assembly on behalf of all Russian people [russkogo naroda] to solve its most pressing problems. For Drahomanov, this project was problematic as

Since the times of a famous Déclaration des droits de l’homme, if not earlier, science and practice of civilized countries realized the existence of whole concentric circles of the rights of individual, public, communal, regional, and national. People, who are interested in them, do not have to ask any kind of national assembly, [. . .] a more or less random gathering, led by the dominant nationality, for them. Non-recognition of these rights by this assembly is neither morally binding, nor legal. (Dragomanov, 1906, p. 730)

Hence, even if political liberation of Russia would begin from summoning a zemsky sobor, Drahomanov wished that elimination of a czarist-bureaucratic autocracy would not be limited just by a reestablishment of parliament, which would subsequently act in an autocratic fashion (Ukraїnets’, 1891, p. 320). This is why, even though for Drahomanov a parliamentary state was by definition the most superior form of political organization, even being an ardent republican, his vision of a future parliamentary Russian state was not necessarily that of a Russian republic. Drahomanov explicitly mentioned that the head of the future Russia might even be a (reasonable) hereditary emperor.

If one were to choose [. . .]—wrote he in 1884,—on one hand, between local self-government with personal rights even under an autocratic-monarchic form of state government, and, on the other hand, between the representative government without personal freedom and local self-government, then, of course, a choice should have been made in favor of the first. (Dragomanov, 1884, p. 59)

The second option was realized in France, whose parliament created a republic according to a principle (probably, most detested by Drahomanov) of one and indivisible state, thus substituting a “despotism of tsars” by a “despotism of freedom.” After the idea of a centralized parliamentary rule à la France spread around Europe, it became especially harmful in multinational states like Austro-Hungary: according to Drahomanov, local parliamentarism simply turned into a tool for a German and Hungarian rule over Slavs and Romanians, and of Poles over Ukrainians (Dragomanov, 1884, p. 65). As far as Drahomanov was very much afraid that Russia would follow the model of French centralized parliamentarism, he was convinced that it was enough to reason the Romanov dynasty not necessarily removing it (vrazumit’; and not ustranit’) (Dragomanov, 1884, p. 69). Instead of copying the examples of France and other parliamentary countries without any guarantees of personal or public rights and freedoms, he would have liked Russia to follow the paths of Britain, Belgium, or Netherlands (Ukraїnets’, 1891, p. 320). In 1884, Drahomanov published his own project of a future reconstruction of Russia, Free Union, which tried to take all the thoughts above into consideration.

**Drahomanov’s project of a Free Union**

In 1884, Drahomanov summed up his ideas on how to reform the Russian Empire in a brochure Free Union (Dragomanov, 1884). It became immensely popular among the contemporaries, some of whom (for instance, Pyotr Struve) even called it the first detailed project of Russian constitution. Free Union was a name of an organization, which Drahomanov suggested to create on the territory of the Russian Empire to popularize there the ideas of political freedom, which not only meant the rights of man and the citizen, but most importantly the idea of self-government.

According to Drahomanov, self-government was to become a key principle for a future reconstruction of Russia: the country was to be divided approximately into 20 regions, defined, after Swiss cantons, according to their geography, economy, and ethnography. Some time ago Dimitri Von Mohrenschildt (1981) argued that Drahomanov advocated “a federal constitution in Russia with historical regions as units of the federation” (p. 131). In fact, the criterion for defining his future Russian states was of an utmost importance for Drahomanov, who tried to avoid both historical or national grounds for defining those units. At that particular moment, he argued, division of Russia into separate national regions according to the historical or ethnographic map would be very doctrinaire-like, especially taking into consideration that historical and national borders did not always correspond to the borders of economic basins. Therefore, after Drahomanov, an a priori creation of provinces according to their history or prevailing nationalities could have contributed to the emergence of national centralisms similar to those already existing in the crown lands of Austria-Hungary. Besides, already in the 1880s Drahomanov anticipated a critique of national-territorial autonomy, which is
today associated solely with Austro-Hungarian Marxists. He argued that creation of separate Ukrainian national unit would leave out of it and deprive of their national rights those Ukrainians, which resided in other parts of the Russian Empire. On the other hand, the existing governorates were inappropriate units for the reconstructed Russia as they were created for administrative reasons, often very haphazard in nature. In the end, his Free Union project was grounded not only on some peculiar attribute of the land or population, but as far as possible on a totality of the area’s peculiarities: natural, which determine the unity of the economic interests of its inhabitants, and also national, determining unity of its moral interests, while at the same time we paid attention to the peculiarities of the first kind. [. . .] This is why in some cases of our project of Russia’s division we tolerated a mixed population, in another a population of one nationality is divided into several regions, as in the case of the large and widespread populations of Great Russians and Ukrainians. (Dragomanov, 1884, p. 46)

Thus, among the projected federal states of Russia, its southern, Ukrainian territories, did not constitute a separate and indivisible national body, but were divided into four separate provinces: Polessia, Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa (Dragomanov, 1884, pp. 281–282 ft) (Figure 1), reminding one more of military or educational districts of the empire. What is more, none of these provinces was solely a Ukrainian one; for instance, Odessa region included not only Ukrainian, but also Romanian population of the empire: for Drahomanov it did not make economic sense to create a separate province of Bessarabia.

Except for the judiciary, the supreme power in these regions was to belong to the elected local assemblies/parliaments (oblastnym dumam). They were in charge of local economy (including an imposition of direct state taxes), welfare, and culture.

Only the affairs, related to the whole state, as well as implementation of state laws, had to be conducted and passed by a central bicameral parliament. Its first chamber

![Figure 1. Mykhailo Drahomanov’s division of Ukraine into four provinces. Source: Bilimovich, A. (1918)](image)
was to be a State Duma, whose members were to be elected throughout the country during the general elections by all Russian citizens, who were older than 21 years. The same age limited one’s ability to be elected to local representative institutions, whereas to be elected to regional and state parliaments one had to reach 25 years. This electoral system had two important peculiarities. First, even though he did not specify it in this project, most probably, under “all Russian citizens” Drahomanov meant both men and women as in his other texts he was very explicit in his support of sharing political rights of men with women (Drahomanov, 1892, p. 202). This, after Drahomanov, was especially important for Eastern Europeans, who still discussed the rights of women to attend universities (Drahomanov, 1892, p. 203). Second, the elected deputies had to represent not only the inhabitants of all Russian regions, but also of all occupations, and not just of a majority, but also of minority. The last stipulation was especially important for the territories with mixed national composition (Dragomanov, 1884, pp. 11, 49–50).

The second chamber of the proposed parliament was to be called a Union Duma, whose members were to be elected by the regional parliaments. The latter would have a right to provide its representatives in the Union Duma with instructions (nakazy), and if those were not followed, they had a right to replace them with other deputies. State ministers were responsible before both chambers of the Parliament, and could even be brought to court by them. In addition to that, as a representative of regions, Union Duma was in charge of all state property. The head of state could dissolve the State Duma, but not the Union one—not the representatives of the regions. In case of a coup d’état the public order had to be restored exactly by the regional assemblies; in this case all army units, which were located in their regions, were to obey those regional assemblies.

Members of both of these chambers, State and Union Dumas, would constitute a State Council (Gosudarstvenny Sbor)—the only institution, which could approve changes of the state’s Fundamental laws (Dragomanov, 1884, pp. 7–14).

Drahomanov was well aware of the contemporary criticism of a bicameral parliament, especially of the British aristocratic and conservative House of Lords. This is why he explicitly underlined that his Union Duma was different from the upper chambers or senates of European states, but similar to the U.S. Senate or Swiss Council of Estates. He argued that these two models were neither anti-democratic, nor conservative, but simply representatives of states or cantons, whose main aim was to block those decisions of the central government and of the second chamber of the parliament, which contradicted substantial interests of the regions (Dragomanov, 1884, p. 56). Of course, he recognized that a need to pass decisions, which had to be approved by a number of additional institutions, would slow down a process of administering of the state. However, for Drahomanov, a system of regional checks and balances of the central authorities was still worth it as it would not allow the latter to initiate reactionary actions. Out of his own experience in Switzerland, all the progressive measures were initiated exactly by the regional authorities and not from the center (Dragomanov, 1884, pp. 57–58).

Finally, Drahomanov acutely recognized a problem of summoning such a parliament in contemporary Russia, where not only Caucasus and Siberia, but even its whole western European part did not enjoy the activities of zemstvo—in his opinion, the latter being an appropriate school of a representative government. Although the current rulers made him rather pessimistic about this project, Drahomanov still argued that extension of zemstvo throughout the whole empire would become the first necessary step toward a convention of a future state parliament. He laid especially big hopes on those Russian regions, which were the least affected by serfdom: the most northern provinces, Ural and Volga regions, Cossack lands, some districts of New Russia and Left Bank Ukraine.

Conclusion

Ukrainian parliamentarism and constitutionalism have a long history. Its brightest episode occurred 100 years ago, in 1917–1921, when the Ukrainian activists tried to cope with the breakup of the Romanov Empire by suggesting various projects of its reconstruction. In this article, I argued that the history of these projects began at least half a century earlier, when a young professor of history at Kiev University, Mykhailo Drahomanov, started to reflect upon future reorganization of the Russian Empire into a parliamentary state. Being an ardent advocate of turning the empire into a representative democracy, Drahomanov still felt uneasy about unapologetic support of parliamentarism. Having embraced Proudhonian idea of anarchy or self-government, he realized that the existence of parliament was not a universal cure for all political ills of the Russian Empire, especially for the main one—extreme state centralization. Hence, his views of political reconstruction of the empire did not necessarily mean transforming it into the Russian republic. It seems that a reasonable and reasoned monarch, who could turn the empire into a federal state with a wide local self-government, would totally fulfill Drahomanov’s ideas of future Russia. His enormous influence upon the pre-war Ukrainian intellectuals explains why only few of them seriously discussed an idea of Ukrainian state independence in 1917 as well as why even in 1920 Otto Eikhel’man dreamt of a federal Ukrainian republic, governed by a bicameral parliament.


**Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This article was prepared within the research project of ERA.Net RUS Plus “Post-Imperial Diversities – Majority-Minority Relations in the Transition from Empires to Nations-States” and was funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, research project 18-59-76001.

**Notes**

1. Russian Ukrainian journalist Vasyl Domanytsky defined parliament as an assembly of elected deputies, who establish state laws, and control, how the officials follow them. For a parliament to be a real national organ one needs: 1) that the whole nation elects its deputies during the universal, direct, equal, and secret ballot; 2) that the parliament not only passed the laws (with no-one else having a right to do it), but also controlled the government; 3) that the ministers were totally subordinated to the parliament and resigned immediately when parliament did not support even one of them; 4) that the parliament was a regular institution, based on a fixed state law, upon a constitution, and the constitution provided the citizens with intact political rights and did not allow the government to ruin elections to the parliament or institute any changes in the parliament itself. (Domanytsky, 1906, p. 84)

2. Austrian Ukrainian philologist Kuzelia (1910) defined parliament more simply: as a French word, meaning “an assembly of representatives of a nation, state council, where deputies pass laws” (p. 228). Maybe, the reason was that the concept of parliament was already quite widespread among the Austrian Ukrainians.

3. History of veche and zemsky sobor and their comparison to the similar institutions in the Western Europe are still discussed by the historians. On criticism of equating early-modern Muscovite “Councils of the Land” with early-modern parliaments, see Kollmann (2017, p. 137).

4. Even though Drahomanov (1893a) did not consider liberalism and inclination toward freedom a natural trait of Ukrainian character and argued that “a conscious liberalism” appeared in Ukraine only at the end of the eighteenth century (p. 143), he nevertheless looked for their predecessors in Ukrainian history. In 1891, he even criticized Maksim Kovalevsky, the author of Modern Customs and Ancient Laws of Russia, for not even mentioning Ukrainian Cossack councils of the end of the seventeenth–beginning of the eighteenth centuries in his book as examples of local demands of democracy in the long eighteenth century (Drahomanov, 1891b, p. 216).

5. Thus, it seems that Mark von Hagen’s assertion that Drahomanov “was careful to distinguish his local-based federalism from that of the anarchists Proudhon and Bakunin” (von Hagen, 2007, pp. 504–505) should be refined. Even if Drahomanov’s attitude toward Bakunin might be considered ambiguous, his adherence to Proudhonian anarchy is unquestionable.

6. Drahomanov objected to the use of russkiy instead of rossiyskiy for a designation of a Russian state on a number of occasions (Dragomanov, 1905, p. 154; Dragomanov, 1906, p. 865).

7. (1) Polessia (made of the eastern parts of Sedlets and Lublin provinces, the southern districts of Grodno province, Pinsk and Mozyr districts of Minsk province, and Volhynia province, apart from the south-eastern districts [Zhytomir and Novohrad-Volynskyi up to the Sluch River]); (2) Kiev (south-eastern part of Volhynian province, Kiev province, Chernigov and Poltava provinces without south-eastern districts [Konstantinograd, Poltava, Kobelyaky, and the eastern part of Kremsenchug]); (3) Odessa (Podolia, Bessarabia, Kherson provinces, western part of Ekaterinoslav [up to the Dnepr River] and Tavria provinces); 4. Kharkov (Melitopol and Berdiansk districts of Tavria province, eastern part of Ekaterinoslav province, the south-eastern districts of Poltava province, Kharkov province and southern, Sloboda-Ukrainian districts of Kursk and Voronezh provinces).

8. It seems that Pyotr Struve was right to point out that although Drahomanov could design this project only as a Ukrainian, but not as a Ukrainian nationalist, for Drahomanov was not a nationalist: “None of the Ukrainian nationalists, even those free of any chauvinism, would recognize the Free Union as their own program. They would insist on the national autonomy of Ukraine as a solid, national, cultural, political, and social entity” (Dragomanov, 1906, pp. xlii–xliii). This was clearly not on Drahomanov’s agenda. He unequivocally stated that as Ukraine—my fatherland—is divided into two parts, Austrian and Russian, and as the first one has political freedom, which is absent in Russia, thus, in my opinion [...] the Ukrainian nation can get its political freedom in Russia, in my opinion, not by means of separatism but only with the other nations and regions of Russia by means of federalism. (Dragomanov, 1908, p. xxxi)

Drahomanov made the same point discussing national unification of Austrian and Russian Ukrainians referring to the example of Italy. While praising its unification he underlined that not all Italians were united in one state. Some Italians preferred to stay out of Kingdom of Italy and remain part of Switzerland, where they not only had a parliament, but also self-governed cantons. Thinking about division of Ukrainians between Russia and Austria, Drahomanov (1915) specifically stated that national identity was one thing, and state unity of nationality—another. [...] National unity in one state not always led to a greater freedom, and an idea of nationality could be a reason of violence against people and of great untruth. (pp. 11–13)

9. “Zakony [...] dolzhny byt sostavlenny takim obrazom, chtoby vybrannye mogli predstavlyat ne tolko zhitieve vsekh mestnostey, no i, po vozmozhnosti, vsekh rodov zanyaty, a takzhe ne tolko bolshinstva, no i menshinstva” (Dragomanov, 1884, p. 11).

**References**


Dragomanov, M. (1877). *Vnutrennee rabstvo i voyna za osvodozhdelenie* [Internal slavery and a war for emancipation]. H. Georg.


Dragomanov, M. (1905). *Sobranie politicheskikh sochineniy* [Collected political works]. Société nouvelle de librairie et d’édition.

Dragomanov, M. (1906). *Sobranie politicheskikh sochineniy* [Collected political works]. Société nouvelle de librairie et d’édition.

Dragomanov, M. (1908). *Politicheskie sochineniia* [Collected political works]. Tipografia tovarishchestva I.D. Sytina.


Drahomanov, M. (1901). *Perepyska* [Correspondence]. *Ukrains’ko-rus’ka vydavnycha spilka.*


Lytvyn, V. (Ed.) (2010). *Istoriiia ukraїns’koho parlamentaryzmu* [History of Ukrainian parliamentarism]. NANU.


Zagirnya, M. (1906). *Iakyi buvai derzhavnii las’? [What state systems exist?]*

**Author biography**

Anton Kotenko is an assistant professor at the Department of History of National Research University “Higher School of Economics” (St. Petersburg). In 2014, he defended his PhD thesis “The Ukrainian project in search of national space, 1861–1914” at Central-European University in Budapest. Currently, he finalizes the manuscript of his book and starts a new project on spatial history of Ukrainian nationalism of the long nineteenth century.
Late Qing parliamentarism and the borderlands of the Qing Empire—Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang (1906–1911)

Egas Moniz Bandeira

Abstract
The article examines the relationship between the late Qing constitutional movement of 1905–1911 and the vast borderland regions of the Qing Empire—that is, Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. It traces how intellectuals and officials concerned with devising constitutional policies foresaw the integration of these regions into the nascent parliamentary institutions at the provincial and central levels. The article argues that the status of the borderlands played a significant role in late Qing constitutional debates, and that debates on borderland constitutionalism were a phenomenon of a wider constitutional wave affecting Eurasia in the 1900s. Chinese intellectuals and officials felt the competition of the emerging parliamentary institutions in Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and anticipating that constitutional and parliamentarist movements among Mongols, Tibetans, and Turki could lead to the separation of the respective regions, they hoped that parliamentary representation, albeit limited, would be an instrument against centrifugal tendencies on the borders. Hence, they called for constitutional reforms in China and for the inclusion of the borderland populations into the new parliamentary institutions. Yet, arguing with the sparse population of the borderlands as well as with their alleged economic and cultural backwardness, they denied the direct application of the constitutional plan to these territories. The differentiated policies eventually applied to the borderlands were a lackluster compromise between these conflicting interests.

Keywords
Constitutional history of China, history of Mongolia, history of Xinjiang, imperialism, Late Qing History, parliamentarism in China, Political Consultative Council (Zizhengyuan)

It would be disastrous to give the new colonies representative government in the sense of a government appointed by popular election; but a really representative government can be formed by other, and in certain circumstances better, means than voting. It is not difficult for an impartial authority, such as the Crown, or governors appointed by it, to select the best men of every important section of the community, and to select them in numbers proportionate to the importance of each section, and form them into a council more truly representative than any that could be created by any system of election.

Charles Arthur Roe (1841–1927) on South Africa, 1902
Roe (1902, p. 347)

Now, the habits of Mongolia are still nomadic, and those of Tibet are those of a superstitious religion; the level of their people is far below that of the inner regions, by several degrees. In the future, elections for the Lower House will naturally be difficult to be carried out. Since there would, for now, not be a single person to represent them in the Lower House, one has to plan how to place them in the Upper House. . . . We would say that it behooves us to treat Mongolia copying the method with which England treats Scotland and Ireland,

Center for East Asian Studies, Autonomous University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain
Corresponding author:
Egas Moniz Bandeira, Center for East Asian Studies, Autonomous University of Madrid, Francisco Tomás y Valiente, 3 Madrid, 28049, Spain.
Email: Egas.Bender@uam.es

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).
letting their leagues, according to their comparative size, respectively appoint one—or two or three—people to be members of the Political Consultative Council. It behooves us to treat Tibet copying the method with which England treats the monks, appointing a few of their Lamas, Kalonpas, Kablons, Tsongkhaps, &c., to act as members of the Political Consultative Council.

Statement of the “Political News Association” (Zhengwenhe 政聞社), 1908 Dagongbao (1908a, pp. 1–2)

**Introduction**

The political reforms of the last years of the Qing dynasty, from around 1906 to 1911, carried out under the label of “constitutional preparation,” envisaged the creation of a “strong and prosperous” (fuqiang 富強) nation-state (Meienberger, 1980, pp. 88–89; Zarrow, 2006). These reforms are mostly recounted as part of “China’s response to the West” (Teng & Fairbank, 1979), and held to have been inspired by Japan’s meteoric rise on the international stage. Yet, they took place in an international environment in which several Eurasian powers—Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia—were more or less simultaneously undertaking constitutional reforms aimed at overcoming the deep political and economical crises which were afflicting these polities (Moniz Bandeira, 2017a).

Core part of the constitutional reform program was the establishment of deliberative assemblies at all political levels as a preparation for a National Assembly to be convened when the final constitution would come into effect. Parliamentary representation, it was hoped, would foster nationalism and strengthen the state by bringing people and government closer together. In reality, this policy strongly exacerbated existing tensions between the central and local governments. At the same time, as the central government was criticized for trying to strengthen its rather weak position, the new provincial assemblies provided local elites with platforms to push forward their own interests.

These provincial assemblies remained limited to China’s Inner Provinces. Mongolia and Tibet were still governed as separate domains within the Qing Empire under the jurisdiction of the Board of Inner Asiatic Affairs (Lifan yuan 理藩院). Xinjiang (at the time still often literally translated into English as the “New Dominion”) had only been recovered by the Qing Empire in 1877 and then lied in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Inner Asiatic Affairs until 1884. It was then officially created into a common province (see Millward, 2007, pp. 136–139), but due to its scarce population of largely non-Han ethnicity, it still posed special problems similar to Mongolia and Tibet, and was still mostly treated in conjunction with those. Accordingly, no such institutions were created in Mongolia and Tibet, and the one established in Xinjiang remained a façade.

Yet, the creation of Xinjiang into a province was a phenomenon of a larger trend. By the late 19th century, Chinese intellectuals had come to see the Qing Empire as one of several “large entities locked in competition” (Mosca, 2013, p. 3), and the foreign threat to “virtually the entire circumference of China’s borders” had caused Chinese intellectuals to reevaluate these remote regions as “vitally important ‘shields’ on which the very survival of China depended” (Ewing, 1980, p. 151). As Chinese nationalism emerged, Chinese intellectuals had to conceptualize the nation in light of the various non-Han ethnicities, and later keep the territorial claim over these regions in Republican times (for studies on the topic see, for example, Esherick, 2011; Leibold, 2007; Matten, 2012).

But if the borderlands were so “vitally important” for China, as Thomas Ewing writes, how did Chinese intellectuals conceive of them in relationship to the “constitutional preparation” of the late 1900s? How did the emergent constitutional law of the Qing Empire address its political diversity, which was coupled to considerable ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity?

This article shows that the role of the borderlands was indeed a significant aspect of late Qing constitutional debates, and argues that the treatment of the peripheries of the Empire in late Qing constitutional debates reveals their embeddedness in the Eurasian constitutional wave of the 1900s. At the same time as Chinese intellectuals and officials judged that the populations of Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Tibet were not yet ready for parliamentary government, they also anticipated nationalist, reformist, and constitutional movements among them. They were not only wary of foreign imperialist powers such as Russia or Great Britain trying to take advantage of these regions’ lacking integration in the Chinese Empire, but were also moved by fears that these regions might secede from China in favor of other constitutional or constitutionalizing Empires where ethnic minorities were gaining parliamentary representation, such as Russia or even the Ottoman Empire. Thus, showing consciousness of ethnic support bases for their proposed policies, they came to think of parliamentary representation as a way to secure the loyalty of borderland elites, and to counter centrifugal tendencies of the borderlands.

Hence, this article argues that officials and intellectuals had to define the status of the borderlands within the emerging constitutional architecture against the background of two main conflicting tendencies—traditionally autonomous regions with populations deemed to be unfit for constitutional rule vis-à-vis the need of national integration and parliamentary representation of the borderlands in light of their perceived vulnerability. The practical result was a compromise which did not create local parliamentary institutions and only left a rather unremarkable borderland presence in the newly created proto-parliament at central government level. The newly created institutions, thus, did not fully reflect the significance of the borderlands in late Qing constitutional debates.
Mongolia, Tibet, and the creation of provincial assemblies

Gradualism and “constitutional preparation”

One of the defining features of late Qing constitutionalism was the creation of some kind of representative institutions, even if only for deliberative rather than for legislative purposes—with some observers going as far as equating one with the other (e.g., United States Department of State, 1910, vol. 1, pp. 179, 191). The official policy in regards of this was one of gradualism, which sprang out of the reasoning that a parliamentary system could not be grafted onto the Chinese polity from scratch, but had to conform to China’s national conditions. In particular, a parliamentary system could only be adopted for an educated people, a condition which, in the eyes of the government and of many intellectuals, was not yet met with in China.

On September 1, 1906, the Qing government officialized this position, declaring that it would undertake “several years” of thorough reforms and then decide on a date to implement a constitution (Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang’anbu 故宮博物院明清檔案部, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 43–44; for English translations see United States Department of State, 1910, vol. 1, pp. 349–350; Meienberger, 1980, pp. 42–44; for a German translation see Betz, 1908, pp. 3119–3121). It is noteworthy that the goal of “constitutional preparation” was not only addressed to China proper, but also expressis verbis to the borderland regions. Arguing that the people were “not yet properly equipped with the necessary knowledge” (minzhi wei kai 民智未開), the edict ordered “all the Tartar generals, viceroyals, and governors to instruct the gentry classes and the common people to study with ardour” (jafen wei xue 發憤為學; the translation is adapted from United States Department of State, 1909, p. 350, and from Meienberger, 1980, p. 44).

A few months later, when asked about their opinion on preparatory reforms of provincial government, most viceroyals and provincial governors argued against the proposal in the same vein of lacking education. The borderlanders were no exception to this—as will be seen, policymakers perceived the situation of education there to be exceptionally dismal. On behalf of the government of Xinjiang, governor Liankui 聯魁 (1849–?) declared that the people there “were too low-level and did not yet have the qualifications for local self-government” (Xinjiang renmin chengdu tai di, shang wu zizhi zige 新疆人民程度太低，尚無自治資格; Zhongguo shixuehui, 1957, vol. 4, p. 23). As a matter of fact, provincial leaders saw an additional cultural, educational and economical gap between Xinjiang and the rest of China and would come to disagree sharply among themselves about how to close that gap (Schluessel, 2016, pp. 85–103).

For the Empire as a whole, the central government decided that all kinds of norms had to be drafted and the people had to be educated before a national assembly could convene. However, part of the reform program consisted in slowly accustoming the population of all political levels to the new constitutional system of representative assemblies, and many members of local gentries increasingly pressured for the speedy introduction of deliberative assemblies. The central government tried to follow the Japanese experience. There, in the eighth year of Meiji (1875), the government had instated the Council of Elders (Genrōin 元老院), which was later tasked with preparing a constitutional charter and was abolished together with the convening of the National Diet in 1890. Accordingly, the first reform of “constitutional preparation” carried out by the central government in November 1906, dealing with the reorganization of central government, foresaw the creation of a proto-parliamentary assembly before the establishment of the National Assembly. The so-called “Political Consultative Council” (Zizhengyuan 資政院) as a place to “broadly collect public speech” (bocai qunyan 博采羣言; Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing Dang’anbu, 1979, vol. 1, p. 472). An edict of September 20, 1907 put this stipulation into practice, creating the Council and appointing a Manchu prince and a Han official as its two directors (Zhu & Zhang, p. 645, also contained in Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang’anbu, 1979, vol. 2, p. 606).

Although the Zizhengyuan was the first deliberative assembly to be created by Imperial edict, in September 1907, the plan was forming assemblies from bottom to top, and the national Zizhengyuan only convened 3 years later. Before the Zizhengyuan could convene, local and provincial councils had to be established. An edict of October 19, 1907 officially provided for provincial assemblies (ziyiju 諮議局) to be created, which in turn should care for the establishment of assemblies (yishihui 議事會) in the lower administrative units (Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang’anbu, 1979, vol. 2, p. 667). A year later, the central government issued first detailed regulations about the Zizhengyuan (July 8, 1908; Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang’anbu, 1979, vol. 2, pp. 631–637) and about the provincial assemblies (ziyiju 諮議局, on July 22, 1908; Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang’anbu, 1979, vol. 2, pp. 667–684; for an English translation see United States Department of State, 1912, vol. 1, pp. 182–188).

Representation for Mongolia and Tibet

However, such provincial assemblies were not established in the entirety of China. They were only established in provinces—thus excluding Mongolia and Tibet. For one, as they stood outside of the provincial system and were largely autonomous, the central government could not dictate such a profound change in their internal political structure in the same way as it could for the provinces. At the same time, however, the exclusion of Mongolia and Tibet was not a matter of course. It was the result of lively political debates about how to treat the non-provincial territories.
The first official documents concerning the deliberative assemblies on national and provincial levels, such as the “List about the officialdom of the Zizhengyuan” (Zizhengyuan guanzhi qingdan 贊政院官制淸單; Zhongguo di-er lishi dang’anguan, 1991, pp. 91–92; pp. 93–97), issued in late 1906, ignored Mongolia and Tibet. The exclusion of Mongolia and Tibet was expressly favored by some members of the intellectual public, such as Yang Du 杨度 (1875–1931), a constitutionalist reformer. In his Doctrine of Gold and Iron (Jintiezhuyi 金鐵主義), written in 1907, Yang defended a wide-reaching policy of total assimilation (tong-hua 同化) of all borderland peoples. For him, active and passive voting rights should only be decided by a single “cultural standard” (wenhua zhi biaozhun 文化之標準), which would be the domination of the Chinese language. Himself not a speaker of any other language of the Qing Empire, he thought that literary languages like Mongol, Tibetan, or Chaghatai were not only less useful than Chinese, but also did “not even reach a ten thousandth of the beauty and richness of Chinese” (wenzi zhong suo baohan zhi meifu bu ji Hanren wanyi 文字中所包容之美富不及漢人萬一; Yang, 1986, pp. 368, 371).

Yang argued that this task could not be undertaken immediately for reasons of logistics, but that it would be feasible after the adoption of a constitution and creation of a parliament. As the criterion for access to the National Assembly was the Chinese language, Mongolians, Tibetans and Turkic peoples would have a strong incentive to learn it, thus fostering the national unity of a new Chinese national state:

Now, equality between the Han and the Manchu, as well as the assimilation of Mongols and Muslims is what I defend, and the opening of a National Assembly is the easy method which I hold up as a slogan for the Empire. I solve all problems in the country with the four words “Convene a National Assembly,” and both the equality between Han and Manchu and the assimilation of Mongols and Muslims are also included in it. . . . As to what I have laid out above, it is the grand strategy to force the Mongols and Muslims by way of a National Assembly. Maybe someone questions the ease of assimilating the Mongols and Muslims. But according to the proportion of populations, it is like 123 people converting a single person. If only the administration is ordered after the convening of a parliament, since the transportation will be convenient and the education will greatly thrive, what difficulties would there be to speak of? (Wang, 1986, p. 371; all the translations are by the author himself, if not otherwise noted.)

Yang Du’s position that the borderland peoples needed to be assimilated before their regions could be incorporated into the emerging Chinese nation-state on equal terms as the inner provinces was in fact frequent across the political spectrum, even though the actual approaches to such an assimilation differed considerably (see, for example, for the position the revolutionary T. Zhang, 1907, p. 9, translated by Pär Cassel in T. Zhang, 1997, p. 30. On Zhang’s position and debate with the constitutionalists see Schneider, 2017, pp. 143–210). Yet, for a great number of Han intellectuals, the borderland regions nonetheless had to be represented in the provisional parliamentary assembly as well as in the coming National Assembly. In the wake of a general movement for a speedy establishment of a parliament, quite a few Han officials and scholars noticed the omission of Mongolia and Tibet from the early documents on the Political Council, and pleaded to change this. For example, in the beginning of 1908, the Cantonese Zhu Ruzhen 朱汝珍 (1870–1942), a member of the Hanlin Academy, submitted a memorial in which he suggested that the Court should appoint “Mongol princes, Tibetan monks, and wealthy merchants as members of the Zizhengyuan,” so as to “settle the people’s minds and pacify the borders” (pai Meng wang Zhang seng ji yinshi shangmin wei Zizhengyuan yiyuan, yi gu renxin er an bianyu 派蒙王藏僧及殷寶商民為贊政院議員，以固人心。而安邊圉； Daqing lichao shilu: Daqing Dezong Jing Huangdi shilu, n.d., cap. 586, p. 28). Remarkably, Zhu Ruzhen also saw the problem of a lacking mutual language, but came up with a surprisingly reciprocal solution: One should not only set up Chinese language schools in Mongolia and Tibet, but also schools of Mongol and Tibetan languages in China proper (yu neidi she Mengzangyu xuetao 於內地設蒙藏語學堂; Daqing lichao shilu: Daqing Dezong Jing Huangdi shilu, n.d., cap. 586, p. 28).

This position calling to appoint elite members of the borderlands to the Zizhengyuan is best represented by another statement submitted in February 1908 by the Political News Society (Zhengwenshe 政聞社) to Prince Pufun 溥倫 (1874–1927), who was the designated Manchu director of the Zizhengyuan. The text, drafted by the ostarized Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), but signed by Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯 (1840–1939) and others, circulated widely at the time, in slightly differing versions. Its arguments, which show a good knowledge of foreign constitutional models and recent developments, reflect many of the issues at hand in the contemporary intellectual debates about the borderlands, and accordingly, its policy proposals were shortly later adopted by the Qing court.

The memorial’s main argument for conferring political participation to the borderland elites was that parliamentary representation was a powerful factor in political cohesion. Mongolia and Tibet were especially vulnerable to imperialist ambitions, and if their elites were not properly represented in Peking, they could instead opt to succumb to the pressures of Russia and Britain, respectively, where they would be better represented:

If one eavesdrops the people there, they are in utter despair. They say that the Zizhengyuan is the fundament for the future parliament, and if they are now excluded from the Zizhengyuan, one could know that they will also be excluded from the future parliament. Although the whole country trusts that the Court absolutely does not have any discriminatory intent, if there were this suspicion, it could serve as a basis for rumours.
Currently, both Russia’s (policy) towards Mongolia and England’s (policy) towards Tibet are that of uttering sounds of friendliness and currying their favour. Since the Russian parliament has convened, the Mongols in the European parts of Russia have the right to vote. Currently, although our country is trying its hardest to conciliate (the nationalities), it still has difficulties to make sure that their hearts absolutely do not have centrifugal tendencies, and how much more so (would that be so) if we give them a pretext to disintegrate (Ma, 2014, p. 70).

Hence, the memorial argued that the Qing Empire had to do what Russia and Great Britain were doing, that is, giving Mongols and Tibetans political representation. However, in Russia, Mongol peoples such as Buriats and Kalmyks were able to vote for the Lower House, the State Duma, while the Zhengwenshe’s statement expressly denied electoral representation (on the Russian Far East in the inter-revolutionary Russian Empire see Sablin, 2019, pp. 33–73). Instead, the Qing Empire’s policies should model themselves on Great Britain solely, giving Mongols and Tibetans Upper House representation. Remarkably, the Zhengwenshe’s argument built on the status of Scotland and Ireland, not touching upon the example of British India—which would have been the closest for someone afraid of Tibet succumbing to British imperialist pressures. But it was only adducing the British Lords Temporal and Spiritual that the memorial could argue in favor of Mongol and Tibetan elite representation in the Political Assembly:

We have checked that in the English Upper House, there are 28 members from the Irish aristocracy, 16 members from the Scottish aristocracy, and 26 members from the clerical aristocracy. When our country defines the place of Mongolia and Tibet, it would truly behoove it to take this as an example . . . We would say that it behooves us to treat Mongolia copying the method with which England treats Scotland and Ireland, letting their leagues, according to their comparative size, respectively appointing one—or two or three—people to be members of the Zizhengyuan. It behooves us to treat Tibet copying the method with which England treats the monks, appointing a few of their Lamas, Kalonpas, Kablons, Tsongkhaspas, &c. (Lama ji Galunbu, Gabulun, Zongkanba deng 噶布倫總堪巴等), to act as members of the Zizhengyuan.2 [Even though one would provide them useless, sinecurial jobs of no importance,] by professing the sincereness of the Court’s unsellish fairness, one could strengthen their intention to turn their heads and come back to the center. This is truly how to strengthen the border and stabilise the foundations of the state, and one must carefully consider this. (The text in square brackets is included in Dagongbao, 1908a, p. 1; Beiyang fazheng xuebao, 1908, pp. 5–7.)

It can only be speculated why the versions of the text based on the publication in the magazine Zhenglun 政論 no. 4 (Ma, 2014, p. 70) omit the part about the borderland representatives being “useless, sinecurial jobs of no importance” (beizhi banshi, wu zu zhongqing 備值弁食無足重輕). Possibly, it was a conscious decision in order to avoid polemics concerning the proposal to create “useless” jobs when the public demanded the abolition of sinecures, but it could also have been a simple editorial oversight. The comparison of the different variants also shows two different modes of argumentation as to why lower house representation was to be denied to Mongols and Tibetans. One version writes that Mongolia and Tibet are vast and sparsely populated (di guang ren xi 地廣人稀; Ma, 2014, p. 70), and that the Chinese administrative system of prefectures counties had not yet been implemented there. As there would be “for now, not a single person to represent them” (can wu yi ren yi daibiao zhi 暫無一人以代表之; Ma, 2014, p. 70), it would be “difficult to suddenly handle elections for the Lower House” there (Xia yiyuan zhi xuanju, yi ju nan cuo-shou 下議院之選舉，亦驟難措手; Ma, 2014, p. 70). The second version gives a more cultural argument, stressing the alleged inferiority of Mongolia and Tibet:

Now, the habits of Mongolia are still nomadic, and those of Tibet are those of a superstitious religion; the level of their people is far below that of the inner regions, by several degrees. (Dagongbao, 1908a, p. 1; Beiyang fazheng xuebao, 1908, pp. 5–7.)

Although the Zhengwenshe was soon after disbanded as an organization, the position voiced in its memorial was the dominant one, and the policy recommended by it was adopted by the Qing government in July 1908 (see below for details of the Zizhengyuan’s set-up). That the central government’s reasoning coincided with the Zhengwenshe’s becomes clear from a memorial of April 14, 1909, in which the Ministry for Inner Asiatic Affairs reported about special measures for “borderland constitutionalism” (fanzhu xianzheng 藩屬憲政):

Although the circumstances of the Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim regions are different from the inner territories, their land and population are equal to those of all provinces of the inner territories. They are an integral part of the national territory (guojia wanquan zhi lingtu 國家完全之領土) and are governed by one and the same sovereignty. Because provincial assemblies are hard to be established at once, hereditary nobility from these regions should naturally enter the selection as delegates of the upper half, together with the Imperial family and Manchu and Han princes and hereditary nobility. (Xuebu guanbao, 1909, p. 5a, and Yubei lixian gonghui bao, 1909, p. 15.)

**Elections for Mongolia and Tibet?**

It seems, however, that to some Han intellectuals, mere Upper House representation was not enough. In the political discussions going on in the capital, some held the opinion that political representation to the Mongols and Tibetans should not be given only by appointing their elites to the Zizhengyuan, but also by way of voting. In October 1908, under the heading “Should Mongolia and Tibet obtain
voting rights?" (Meng Zang de wu xuanjuquan hu 蒙藏得無選舉權乎), the Tianjin paper Ta Kung Pao 大公報 summarized this more far-reaching idea:

Since Mongolia and Tibet are Chinese territory, its people naturally have the right to vote for members of parliament;Recently, there are a whole lot of people who advocate this opinion. (Dagongbao, 1908b)

This position also reached the attention of the government. However, on the grounds that the level of development and education in the borderland regions was allegedly too low, it refused to go further than the elite representation in the Upper House which had been accorded in July 1908. As the Ta Kung Pao writes, central government bigwigs Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909) and Lu Chuanlin 鹿傳霖 (1836–1910) flatly denied any requests for voting rights arguing that "in Mongolia and Tibet, popular knowledge is not yet developed—it is extraordinarily limited. If one goes along with this and accords them the right of political participation, this would truly not be the right thing to do" (Mengzang minzhi bu kai, yichang zhixai, ruo zuo yu yi canzheng zhi quan, shi fei suo yi. 蒙藏民智不開，異常窒塞，若遵與以參政之權，實非所宜; Dagongbao, 1908b).

Zhang’s and Lu’s assessment was somewhat unfair, as some members of the Mongol elite had long been interested in Qing constitutional politics. Perhaps, the most prominent and active of them was Prince Palta of the Torgruits (1882–1920), whose court was in Karashahr in Xinjiang (on Palta see Batdorj, 2016). As early as 1904, he had published a 12-point “political memorandum” (zhengzhi tiaochen 政治條陳) containing proposals concerning the development of education, economy and politics of Mongolia ([Palta], 1904, pp. 46–47). Art. 8 proposed that the league captain-generals be elected by the tribes (gongju 公舉) instead of by the Board of Inner Asian Affairs (the original nomination process was more complicated, as the captain-general was first elected by the noblemen of the league before the proposal reached the Board of Inner Asian Affairs; see Hsieh, 1925, p. 326, on the function of the league captain-general see further Hagihara, 1990).

In 1906, Palta visited the father of the Meiji Constitution, Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841–1909), who was acting as the Japanese Resident-General in Korea, and discussed the Qing Empire’s constitutional plans with him (see Asahi Shimbun, 1906). As many Japanese observers, Itō maintained a very cautious view about China’s constitutional plan (see Moniz Bandeira, 2017b, pp. 155, 161–175), and tried to convince his Chinese interlocutors, including Palta, to be more prudent ([Palta], 1906). These words of circumspection did not stop Palta’s constitutional enthusiasm (on it see further Bayilduɣi, 1997, p. 23). In 1910, Palta was one of the founders of the Mongolia Industrial Company (Menggu shiyе gongsi 蒙古實業公司). When the Zizhengyuan 睿智院 convened for the first time, he and his business partners Amurlingyui (1886–1930), Lhawangbürügjil (1870–1931), and Sūjüütbaɣuyatur (1889–1926), the three of whom were from Inner Mongolia, demanded listening access to the session, which was about to discuss the industrial development of the borderlands (Dagongbao, 1910d).

Against this background, Zhang’s and Lu’s verdict did not close the debate. The Ministry for Inner Asiatic affairs envisioned the creation of such an assembly in 1909, with elections foreseen for 1912 (Shenbao, 1909b). By the time when the Zizhengyuan convened, these Mongol dignitaries continued to call for the establishment of a provincial assembly in Mongolia, especially in Inner Mongolia, and received full support from Minister Shouqi 壽耆 (1859–?). Yet again, the political elites at the directorate of the Zizhengyuan and the Constitutional Office rejected this alleging that “knowledgeable gentry and merchants” were “extremely few” there (you zhishi zhi shenshang jishao 有知識之紳商極少; Shenbao, 1910).

Mongolia and Tibet, thus, remained without elected provincial assemblies throughout the late Qing period. This lack did not mean that no thoughts had been devoted to them in the constitutional debate: there had, including calls for a provincial assembly in Inner Mongolia, which was more populous and had closer connections to the central government than Outer Mongolia and Tibet. Because of the ethnic, linguistic, social and economic differences of these regions to Inner China, elections were thought not to be feasible there. Yet, intellectuals were aware of centrifugal tendencies of these regions, not least because of the constitutionalising tendencies of Eurasia, as, for example, Mongol people were gaining representation in Russia. Hence, the traditional mode of governing these regions had to be adapted to parliamentary government—instead of by local elections, the loyalty of local elites should be assured by giving them a voice in the projected upper chamber of a parliament.

The constitutional reforms and Xinjiang

The “provincial assembly”

This was the situation in Mongolia and Tibet. But what about the erstwhile borderlands which were now governed as provinces, that is, Xinjiang and Manchuria? The case of Manchuria did not differ much from China proper. In the wake of the constitutional reforms, the region was incorporated into the provincial system in April 1907. The court appointed a Viceroy for the “three Eastern Provinces” (Dong san sheng 東三省) of Mukden (Fengtian 奉天), Jilin 吉林, and Heilongjiang 黑龍江, and the Tartar generals ruling them were converted into governors. In July of that year, the Qing court reformed the structure of provincial governments, introducing some new offices and a rudimentary division between executive and judiciary, and declared that the reform should first be tested in the three Manchurian provinces as well as in Zhili and Jiangsu 江蘇 for a period of 15 years (Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing
Different, however, was the situation in Xinjiang. There, a provincial assembly was created in July 1908, together with all others, but never functioned as such. The reason for this lay in both the conditions set by the central government and in the reluctance of parts of the provincial government. Article 3 of the regulations on provincial assemblies of July 22, 1908 stipulated that all voters for the provincial assemblies had to be male, of at least 25 years of age or older, and to fulfill at least one of the following five requisites: the candidate had to (a) have been successfully engaged for 3 years or more in teaching or in some other occupation conducive to the public good; (b) have graduated from a (new-style) middle school; (c) possess an old-style literary degree; (d) have held a high civil or military official position, or (e) have a business or real estate valued on above 5,000 dollars. Furthermore, articles 6–8 of the regulations gave a list of negative conditions which disqualified many voters, including those who were currently holding a public or military office (Gugong Bowuyuan Ming-Qing dang’anbu, 1979, pp. 671–673).

These conditions limited suffrage to a small percentage of the population even in China proper. For example, in as rich a province as Jiangsu—which was home to a vigorous pro-constitutional movement—there were about 877 voters per seat in the provincial assembly (Report no. 38 [“Report on proceedings of Chiangsu provincial assembly”], December 9, 1909, FO 228/2209, National Archives, Kew, p. 190.). In Xinjiang, the conditions basically left no voters at all, let alone conditions to hold elections in which the potential candidates did not basically choose themselves. In theory, the provincial assembly should be comprised of 30 seats, which was the smallest projected assembly in the Empire, together with the Manchurian provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang. As the provincial government reported, there was not a single elector qualified under (a) or (b), and as the provincial quota for the old-style examinations had been of only two graduates per exam, very few were qualified under (c), most of whom fell under one of the exceptions of article 7 or 8. There were no civil officials qualified under (d), and the qualified military officials were disqualified for lacking education according to article 6. Finally, the few wealthy merchants who qualified under (e) were of Han ethnicity and on bad terms with the native non-Han population (Shenbao, 1909a; File no. 474 [“Report on the provincial assemblies”], December 20, 1909, FO 228/2209, National Archives, Kew, pp. 253–254).

Under these circumstances, the provincial government did not carry out elections. However, given that the provincial government opposed the elections on the basis of the enormous difficulties of implementing the constitutional policies in Xinjiang, why was the region included into the official scheme of provincial assemblies in the first place? The Qing government did not provide official explanations, but a report about all provincial assemblies prepared by the British legation to Peking for the Foreign Office gives a possible cause:

The remoteness of the New Dominion, in conjunction with the wide differences of race and custom of the bulk of the population, which is scantly and scattered, must have suggested a doubt whether the inclusion of the region in a scheme of popular government was practical or wise, but the Central Government evidently considered that the political risk run by differentiating it from the rest of the empire, and so perhaps facilitating a future separation, were greater than any immediate danger likely to arise locally from the new experiment. (File no. 474 [“Report on the provincial assemblies”], December 20, 1909, FO 228/2209, National Archives, Kew, 252)

We can corroborate the likelihood of this diplomatic assessment by adducing Chinese sources which show this preoccupation with their country’s sovereignty over Xinjiang. Indeed, these concerns reflected quite closely those about Mongolia and Tibet, but the different political status called for a different policy. Urban intellectual circles, which often tended to be enthusiastic about constitutionalism being the key to solving China’s woes, declared the adoption of constitutional policies to fundamental for maintaining Qing sovereignty over Xinjiang. Thereby, they used an argument very similar to the one encountered in the Zhengwenshe statement: the local elites might otherwise break away from a Qing Empire which did not follow the tide of the times. The Shanghai newspaper Shenbao 申報, for example, discussed the constitutional policies which were being carried out in the thitherto ailing Ottoman Empire, foretelling that the country would rapidly recover through these policies. The article was sure that the Muslims of Xinjiang (and other Muslim-majority regions in China) would demand a similar constitutional government from China. The Shenbao then also introduced the well-known argument of foreign imperialism—but with the somewhat surprising Ottoman Empire as protagonist. Noting that the European powers were using Christianity as a means to expand their spheres of influence, the article feared that, if China did not carry out constitutional reforms, the Muslims of Xinjiang would turn to the constitutional Ottoman Empire for protection:

In the past, she [Turkey] was but sleeping and dreaming, but now she has mightily awakened. With the progress of events, if she demands to sign a treaty in accordance with international law, our government will not have a reason to reject it. But our Xinjiang, Shanxi, and Gansu have all for a long time been Muslim colonies. The Muslims are wont to follow the old religion, but they are also willing to respect a new constitutional government, and thus they will certainly oppose it if no
Constitutional government is established. Turkey, then, will
make use of this group of people to expand her powers, and, in
accordance with the example set by France protecting the
religionists, demand to protect Islam. The Muslims will rely on
their protectors and carry out reckless resistance. It will be
hard to guarantee that the provinces of the Northeast do not
repeat the disastrous events of Macedonia, and Turkey will
take the profits from this while our country will suffer the
losses! (Shenbao, 1908)

Positions on constitutionalism within the provincial government

Chinese-language literature sometimes contends that the
Xinjiang Assembly was never opened (e.g., Chang, 2007,
p. 52), but this is not completely accurate. By the end of
1911, the government is reported to have had assembled a
group of 31 “assembly members,” most of whom were not
native to the province and none of whom was Turki (see
Gao & Zhao, 2005, p. 46, with further reference). This
group remained unnoticed and at any rate could not have
much of an impact due to the demise of the Qing. But the
provincial assembly had been, in fact, opened in 1908 as an
organization office for the local implementation of consti-
tutional policies lato sensu. It was led by the provincial
treasurer (Wang Shunan 王樹枏, 1851–1936), the provin-
cial education commissioner (Dutong 杜彤, 1864–1929),
and the provincial judge (Rongpei 榮霈, ?–?) as its heads
(File no. 474 [“Report on the provincial assemblies”],
December 20, 1909, FO 228/2209, National Archives,
Kew; see also Shenbao, 1909a).

The constitutional and parliamentary questions, thus,
emerge as part of a larger debate of how to approach
Xinjiang—and other frontier regions—which went on well
beyond the late Qing. In his recent doctoral dissertation,
Eric Schluessel (2016, pp. 85–103) has found certain fac-
tionalism within the Xinjiang government as to what
approach was the right one for the province, since the
memorials of governor Liankui to the Throne often contain
the differing, even contradictory voices of Dutong and
Wang Shunan. Dutong was generally positive toward con-
stitutional reforms: He sought to elevate the local Turkic
populations into the new national community through edu-
cation (Schluessel, 2016, p. 102) and, impressed with the
Japanese model, built hundreds of schools which also
taught in the medium of the local language (Schluessel,
2016, p. 88).

On the other hand, it was Wang Shunan who pressed to
see Xinjiang as a “colony” (zhimindi 殖民地). Seeing the
local populations as “uncouth barbarians” (shengliao 生獠野蠻; Shenbao, 1909a), Wang’s stress lay on
exploiting and developing the colony economically (see
Schluessel, 2016, pp. 91–92). Just as the intellectuals who
were discussing the topic in the capital, Wang was well-
informed about global affairs, and made use of foreign
examples to corroborate his positions. However, in contrast
to Liang Qichao/Ma Xiangbo, who shunned the example of
British India and rather turned to Ireland and Scotland, as
well as to Russia, to advocate for limited borderland repre-
sentation, Wang used the Indian and other models to justify
as little representation as possible. Confering civil liberties
to the natives of Xinjiang through voting rights was out of

Xinjiang ziyiju 新疆諮議局, the “provincial assembly” of Xinjiang at Ürümchi. Photograph by the Australian journalist George Ernest
the question for the moment. After all, he argued, the constitutional governments of Great Britain, France, and Japan, too, governed their colonies like India, Annam, and Taiwan, autocratically. Wang observed that Great Britain had different categories of colonies governed according to the proportion of their white population and their supposedly correlated level of civilization, ranging from crown colonies with neither representative institutions nor a responsible cabinet, up to fully self-governed ones such as Australia, Canada, and Natal (Shenbao, 1909a). Wang’s model was not Australia or Canada (Schluessel, 2016, p. 91), but India, for

...If the state suddenly confers sovereign rights of self-government to the natives in places were the natives were the majority and the whites the minority, the whites will not be able to control the natives, and there surely will be a rupture that will destroy the order and harm security. (Shenbao, 1909a)

However, although he saw Xinjiang at the level of a crown colony ruled directly by a governor, Wang did not see this as a permanent condition, or, at any rate, he could not express such a view because the central government had already decreed the establishment of a legislative assembly. His words, thus, had to offer a vision of how to gradually proceed to representative government, or as he himself put it, of how to slowly proceed “from autocracy to self-government, from self-government to unity” (you zhuanzhi er zizhi, you zizhi er tongyi 由專制而自治由自治而統一).

His text in Liankui’s memorial of 1909 takes up the question of language education, which, together with his emphasis on representative institutions only being present in colonies ruled by the “same race” (tongzhong 同種), reflects the discourse about assimilation that was being led by Yang Du, Zhang Taiyan and others (Shenbao, 1909a). The language question was, however, one aspect in his “developmentalist” and “radically materialist” perspective (Schluessel, 2016, p. 91): More than the education of the locals and the establishment of parliamentary institutions, what mattered most in this view was the economic exploitation of the colony. Or as Yuan Dahua 袁大化 (1851–1931) put it, Liankui’s successor as governor who followed Wang Shunan’s line, China should first develop railroads, the industry and the finances of the region, before the development of “military administration, education, police, judiciary, elections, self-government” and the like would become easy tasks (Shenbao, 1911a, 1911b).

Wang Shunan’s position was only that of one of the two factions within the Xinjiang government, and it was also severely criticized in mainstream constitutionalist Chinese media (see, for example, Meng Sen 孟森, 1909, p. 300, calling it “utterly shameful”—shu kekui 殊可愧). When the court investigated Wang for corruption, the censor Ruixian 瑞賢 (1845–?) also accused him of ignoring the constitutional reforms (on the faction and the investigation see Schluessel, 2016, pp. 93–98). Yet, he was not only one of the key figures in the last years of late Qing Xinjiang; out of his circle also emerged the long-term provincial strongman in the Republican period, Yang Zengxin 楊增新 (1864–1928, r. 1912–1928), whose rule, “in many ways” was “a realisation of Wang’s ideas” (Schluessel, 2016, p. 98; on the patron-disciple relationship between Wang and Yang see also Jacobs, 2016, p. 20).

The case of Xinjiang was a hybrid between a province that had to conform at least formally to the standards as all other provinces and a borderland that was not deemed not to be equal to the inner provinces. As such, it is perhaps the one which best highlights the tensions around which the debate about “borderland constitutionalism” revolved. Due to Xinjiang’s status as a province, the central government had more direct control than in Mongolia and Tibet, meaning that it was also pressed to treat it in equal terms as the provinces of Inner China, but also enabling discourses such as that of Wang Shunan defending its use as a colony. Pressure from foreign imperialism due to the low economic development and doubtful loyalty of the local population was feared in all borderland regions, but it was Xinjiang’s large Muslim population which prompted the Shenbao’s comment that without constitutional reform in China, Xinjiang might fall to the Ottoman Empire. Although, given the geographical distance between Xinjiang and the Ottoman Empire, such a fear might have seemed far-fetched even at that time, the comparison is revealing of the Eurasian constitutionalising pressures at work around 1908.

**Borderland representation at the central level**

**The Zizhengyuan and its set-up**

Although, thus, Xinjiang was in theory equal to all other provinces of the Empire, in practice, it remained without a representative assembly, just as the two other borderland regions of Mongolia and Tibet. But all these regions were integrated into the emerging late Qing parliamentary system through the Zizhengyuan (for a monographic treatment of the Mongol members of parliament in late Qing and early Republican times see J. Zhang, 2012). Carrying in itself the seeds of a future bicameral system, it was composed of 200 delegates, 100 of whom were to be sent by the provincial assemblies—the future lower house—while the other half was to be appointed by the Imperial Court—the future upper house. In the lower half of the Council, the representation of each province was roughly determined according the population of each province, with Xinjiang being accorded the minimum of two seats. As elections were not held there, the two seats remained vacant. When the Political Council convened, in 1910 and 1911, the total
number of delegates for the lower half was thus of 98 instead of the planned 100 (see also Gao, 2011, p. 353).

As delineated, borderland representation happened in the upper half of the Council, where 14 were reserved from nobility of the Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim regions. The Regulations for the Election of the Members of the Zizhengyuan (October 26, 1909; Xia, 2004, pp. 91–102) went into further details. Art. 1 of the section on the borderland delegates gave a list of titles defining what exactly was meant by “nobility of borderland regions,” while Art. 3 of the section further distributed the 14 slots geographically. The overwhelming majority was accorded to Mongol representatives: The article mandated that each of Inner Mongolia’s six leagues had to be represented by one delegate and each of Outer Mongolia’s four leagues had to be represented by one delegate. Kobdo and the Mongol banners in Xinjiang were represented by one delegate, as were the Mongol banners of Qinghai and elsewhere. Tibet and the Muslim regions were represented by one member each. The status of Xinjiang was rather peculiar. As the region had up to two slots in the upper half of the Zizhengyuan, it was in theory doubly represented in the Zizhengyuan, evidencing the region’s hybrid status between province and traditional borderland area.

Suitable candidates were to be selected in a first step by the Ministry of Inner Asiatic Affairs, and then to be confirmed by the Zizhengyuan, which would retransmit the list to the Court. The Court would then use the Zizhengyuan’s list to determine the 14 delegates for the next session of the Council. Notwithstanding the complaints heard in the capital about the scarcity of prepared people in Mongolia, in 1909, the Ministry of Inner Asiatic Affairs identified 259 candidates who were eligible for the 14 slots (Su & Wu, 2008, p. 69; Xuebu guanbao, 1909, p. 5b, have 279 candidates; for a full list of the 14 borderland delegates see J. Zhang, 2010, p. 199).

What was then the significance of these 14 borderland slots in the emergent upper house? As Su Qin 蘇欽 and Wu Xianping 吳賢萍 (2008, p. 68) have noted, the borderland representation scheme respected the system of governance over the Mongol regions which had been adopted since the beginning of the Qing Empire, treating their nobility on equal terms with the Manchu and Han nobility. It was an attempt to transpose the personalized old system of creating loyalty among the non-Han elites into a new parliamentary setting. By doing so, it was also the first time when representatives of the non-Han population of the three borderland regions had a right to directly participate in an organ of the central government with jurisdiction for the whole Empire (Su & Wu, 2008, p. 70). Although many of the 14 minority members remained un conspicuous, perhaps most remarkable among them were the business partners of the aforementioned Mongolia Industrial Company, three of whom were elected to the Zizhengyuan: Günsangnorbu (1871–1930), Nayantu (1873–1938), and Bodisu (1871–1914). For them, the participation in the Zizhengyuan was only the first parliamentary experience, as they would later become members of the Republican Senate (On the first ones see Atwood, 2002, pp. 83–87, 96–98, 278–281, 311, 947–949, and passim).

Prospects for a definitive national assembly

The Zizhengyuan was only temporary, to be abolished after the establishment of a permanent National Assembly. But what were, then, the long-term plans for the application of the Qing constitution to the borderland territories? Indeed, both the government and a large part of constitutional scholarship considered how to deal with the borderland regions. As the conditions were so different from inner China, most of scholarship proposed to continue with a differentiated solution in the definitive Imperial constitution for as long as the real conditions on the ground did not substantially change.

A full official draft of the final constitution was never produced, as the drafting process was interrupted by the Xinhai revolution, but the two private constitutional drafts that were published in book form at that time both mention the issue of the borderlands. The Japanese scholar Kitaoni 北鬼三郎 (?–1912), in the prefatory remarks to his Draft Constitution for the Qing (Daishin kenpōan 大清憲法案), published in 1909, only included a brief remark on the topic, excusing the lack of norms concerning the borderlands with his not yet having examined the issue. It is perhaps telling of the limitations to the role of Japan as a model for the late Qing constitution that it was the Japanese scholar Kitaoni who did not offer a substantial contribution to the borderland question. Although he also studied the application of mainland Japanese law to Taiwan, Karafuto, and Korea (Kitaoni, 1910), it did not occur to him to draw parallels to China. Instead, Kitaoni wrote, the borderland lacuna in his draft should neither mean that the borderlands should be treated the same as inner China—at the moment, at least, he deemed this to be clearly impossible—nor that they should continue to be governed according to the old system (Kitaoni, 1909, p. 4).

Where Kitaoni was not able to offer a clear answer to borderland constitutionalism except that these regions merited special treatment, Zhang Bolie, a Qing-loyal Chinese student who resided in Japan, offered a specific norm with a long justification in his Hypothetical Draft of a Constitution for China (Jiading Zhongguo xianfa cao'an 假定中國憲法案), which was published in the same year of 1909. His art. 42 explicitly foresaw a specific borderland representation in the Upper House of parliament, not unlike the one already stipulated for the Zizhengyuan. The article contained an astonishing blunder: Its justification (B. Zhang, 1909, pp. 36–37) was a plagiarism of the Zhengwenshe statement originally drafted by Liang Qichao. Zhang maintained the criticism of the Qing government for failing to provide political representation to Mongolia and Tibet, without noticing that the government had heeded that
exact criticism. Thus, his norm, independently drafted by him as a suggestion for a final parliament, closely reflected the already existing constitutional practice of the Qing, at least in regard of the borderlands:

The Upper House shall be organised according to the election law passed by the Upper House. It shall be composed of imperially selected (nobles with a status of) princes and higher and of borderland princes, as well as of as popularly elected delegates who have undergone a second round of selection (by the provincial assemblies). (B. Zhang, 1909, p. 36)

Zhang’s arguments were all also to be found in Bao Tingliang’s 保廷樑 (1874–1947) œuvre On Qing constitutional law (Daqing xianfa lun 大清憲法論), which is probably also the opus magnum of late Qing constitutional scholarship. At 507 pages, it was the most extensive compendium of constitutional law produced in Qing times. Discussing all kinds of problems of constitutional law with copious references to foreign scholarship and legal norms, it also gave detailed recommendations as to what policy the Qing Empire should apply. In contrast to Zhang and the official policy, Bao foresaw popular representation for the borderlands, albeit, citing the remoteness of the border regions and difficulties of transportation, a very modest one: Two delegates for Inner and Outer Mongolia each, and two delegates for Western and for Eastern Tibet each (Bao, 1910, pp. 206–207).

Bao’s stress, therefore, also lay in the Upper House (Bao, 1910, pp. 149–150). For him, borderland representation was a matter of course (dangran 當然), as the term “Qing Empire” used in Art. 1 of the official Outline of a Constitution was not restricted to the provinces of Inner China. Bao’s argument, thus, also was directed at China’s national sovereignty. Having the same outer imperialist threats in mind as Zhang and others, Bao spelled out how important borderland representation was to foster national cohesion in the creation of a unified nation-state:

To discuss this from the facts, it happens that although (the central government) has instituted supervisory officials for Mongolia and Tibet, (these regions) do not usually have contacts with the inner territory. Script and habits are separated like heaven and earth. Although by name they belong to the territory of the Great Qing, in reality one could well-nigh forget that they are the same country. Furthermore, strong neighbours are lurking and frequently use lure and coercion (qie qianglin 尷廹蠱脅), for which the government tried to address these by providing interpreters to the delegates (Dagongbao, 1910b). However, problems with the new format of public oral debates in the Zizhengyuan were not exclusive of the borderland delegates, but included all imperially appointed members, who had had no experience at the provincial assemblies, and for whom the government created a “training ground” (lianxisuo 練習所; Dagongbao, 1911b) to prepare for the second session of 1911.

The delegates from Outer Mongolia, particularly, seemed to have difficulties taking part in the activities of the Zizhengyuan because of linguistic difficulties (Guofengbao, 1910, p. 6; Dagongbao, 1910b). The government tried to address these by providing interpreters to the delegates (Guofengbao, 1910, p. 6; Dagongbao, 1910b). However, problems with the new format of public oral debates in the Zizhengyuan were not exclusive of the borderland delegates, but included all imperially appointed members, who had had no experience at the provincial assemblies, and for whom the government created a “training ground” (lianxisuo 練習所; Dagongbao, 1911b) to prepare for the second session of 1911.

Some of the more dismissive comments about the borderland delegates, such as the Guofengbao’s, probably reflected a certain patronizing attitude by the public, but they also coincided with a regional division within the Mongol group of delegates. As noted above, a regional assembly was considered for Inner Mongolia, and it were mainly Inner Mongolian elites who were interested in the Qing constitution. In addition to them, some Western Mongol figures were also known for their involvement in constitutional politics, such as the aforementioned Prince Palta from the Torghut Mongols of Xinjiang, as well as the Kobdo delegate in the Zizhengyuan, Sodnomjamtsoi (Suotenamuzhanuchai 索特那木札木柴, ?–?), who was noted for both his knowledge of Chinese and his enthusiastic work (Dagongbao, 1910c). This relative closeness of Inner and Western Mongolia to the constitutional reforms had deep-seated historical roots:

**The borderlands in the practice of the Zizhengyuan**

If late Qing officials and intellectuals spend so much energy in defining the place the borderlands in the nascent deliberative assemblies of the Empire, how did the regulations work out in practice? According to the rhetoric used in the commentaries to the legal norms, authorities stressed the importance of the matters concerning the borderlands before both sessions of the Zizhengyuan (1910 and 1911). In 1910, for example, Prince Regent Zaifeng 戟煐 (1883–1951) stated that “all motions concerning Mongolia” were “more important than the others” (suoyou guanyu Mengfan yi an, jiao ge yi an you wei zhong yao 所關於蒙古事，較各議案尤為重要; Dagongbao, 1910a; for a similar statement the next year see Dagongbao, 1911c). Such matters included, among others, the industrial development of Mongolia, which had a lobby group in the assembly in the form of the partners of the Mongolia Industrial Company. Yet, reality was much less rosy.

One often finds complaints about the borderland delegates being out of place and not contributing anything to the Council, such as the magazine Guofengbao 國風報, which reported that most borderland delegates even “did not know what the Zizhengyuan is” (duo bu zhi Zizhengyuan wei he wu 多不知資院為何物; Guofengbao, 1910, p. 6). Indeed, while some of the Mongol delegates were already resident in Peking, some others came from their home regions and had little knowledge of Chinese in either spoken or written form (Uljitokto, 2009, p. 40). The Tibetan delegate, an ethnic Mongol, was hindered by the difficult transportation from Tibet to Peking, arrived two months late and missed most of the session (Guofengbao, 1910, p. 6).

The delegates from Outer Mongolia, particularly, seemed to have difficulties taking part in the activities of the Zizhengyuan because of linguistic difficulties (Guofengbao, 1910, p. 6; Dagongbao, 1910b). The government tried to address these by providing interpreters to the delegates (Guofengbao, 1910, p. 6; Dagongbao, 1910b). However, problems with the new format of public oral debates in the Zizhengyuan were not exclusive of the borderland delegates, but included all imperially appointed members, who had had no experience at the provincial assemblies, and for whom the government created a “training ground” (lianxisuo 練習所; Dagongbao, 1911b) to prepare for the second session of 1911.

Some of the more dismissive comments about the borderland delegates, such as the Guofengbao’s, probably reflected a certain patronizing attitude by the public, but they also coincided with a regional division within the Mongol group of delegates. As noted above, a regional assembly was considered for Inner Mongolia, and it were mainly Inner Mongolian elites who were interested in the Qing constitution. In addition to them, some Western Mongol figures were also known for their involvement in constitutional politics, such as the aforementioned Prince Palta from the Torghut Mongols of Xinjiang, as well as the Kobdo delegate in the Zizhengyuan, Sodnomjamtsoi (Suotenamuzhanuchai 索特那木札木柴, ?–?), who was noted for both his knowledge of Chinese and his enthusiastic work (Dagongbao, 1910c). This relative closeness of Inner and Western Mongolia to the constitutional reforms had deep-seated historical roots:

Over the
nearly three centuries of Qing rule, Inner Mongolia had differed much from the regions further in the north. Inner Mongolia had surrendered to the Manchu as early as in 1636, much earlier than the Mongolian tribes further north. Inner Mongol princes then had helped the Manchu conquer China and intermarried more with them, being generally closer to the Manchu elite. Furthermore, the regions of Inner Mongolia came to be much more penetrated by Han agriculturalists and merchants. Inner Mongolia became more urbanized, had more administrative infrastructure developed and was under closer control of the Manchu government. (see Lan, 1996, pp. 47–59; see further Atwood, 2002, pp. 23–42)

Hence, it was especially among a part of Outer Mongolian princes that an incipient independentist sentiment was palpable around 1910. As the Qing system was eroding, they were loath of the increasingly aggressive policy led by Peking, which threatened to replace the traditional relationship of suzerainty to the Manchu by the sovereignty of a Chinese state (see Liu, 2006, p. 7; Rupen, 1954, pp. 235–236). Khalkha nobles then declared independence on December 1, 1911, 2 months after the beginning of the Wuchang 武昌 Uprising, which led to the proclamation of the Republic of China. However, preparations for secession had begun months earlier, and while the Wuchang Uprising may have triggered the declaration of independence, its actual roots lay in late Qing times (Rupen, 1954, p. 249; Liu, 2006, p. 7; Tachibana, 2014, pp. 69–70). In this context, it certainly did not help that, at the first session of the Zizhengyuan in 1910, none of the motion proposals concerning economic, military and educational matters of Mongolia was successful, leaving some of the delegates so disappointed that they declared not to come again the next year (Dagongbao, 1911a).

The high importance of Mongolia and Tibet in rhetoric was not fully replicated in practice. If political actors had hoped that the system of borderland representation would help prevent centrifugal tendencies in the outer regions during China’s transition from empire to nation, the two sessions of the Zizhengyuan in 1910 and 1911 did not advance this goal. Nonetheless, borderland representation in the parliament considerably outlived the Qing dynasty. In Xinjiang, where there had been no real interest in breaking away in late Qing times, the status as a province given to it in late Qing times precluded special Muslim representation, but Muslim aristocrats continued to demand it (see Brophy, 2012). However, Republican electoral practice for Mongolia, Tibet, and Qinghai, came close to granting ethnic quotas for these regions (Brophy, 2012, pp. 350–351; Su & Wu, 2008, p. 70).

**Conclusion**

In view of the underwhelming results of the first two sessions of the Zizhengyuan in its Mongolia-related matters, Zhang Jianjun 張建軍 has argued that the Mongol delegates “were only a few pawns used to increase and protect the governing power of the Qing Court” (zhì shì xie zengjiǎ wèihu chaoting tongzhi shìli de fáma 祇是些增加維護朝廷統治勢力的砝碼; J. Zhang, 2010, p. 203). However, the function of late Qing borderland representation cannot be so easily dismissed. In as far as it was devised to integrate the Qing-Empire’s vast non-Han regions into the Qing Empire’s emerging constitutional system and thus to secure sovereignty over these regions of doubtful loyalty, it was a significant element in the creation of a modern Chinese nation-state.

The inclusion of Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim candidates into the upper half of the Zizhengyuan was the result of a compromise. On the one hand, the majority opinion did not see Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang as fit for the new parliamentary institutions, which were “premised on the existence of a pool of educated Han gentry outside the bureaucracy—a milieu conspicuously lacking” there (Brophy, 2012, p. 350). On the other hand, the integration of these regions into the new constitutional system was indispensable in the eyes of Chinese intellectuals and officials, not least because the frontier regions were deemed to be especially vulnerable to secession as well as foreign imperialism.

In a way, the borderland representation scheme devised in this way transposed traditional modes of differentiated government into the constitutional age. David Brophy (2012, p. 358) distinguishes two models of managing diversity: the “patrimonial” one whereby the Qing gave aristocratic privileges in return for loyalty to the Han governor on a personal basis, and the “constitutional” one, which sought for parliamentary representation for China’s non-Han ethnicities. These two models were not entirely separate, however. In fact, the borderland representation scheme in the late Qing constitution was an attempt to convert the old method of bestowing aristocratic privileges in return for loyalty into a new method of bestowing parliamentary representation in return for loyalty.

At the same time, the borderland representation scheme was also informed by a knowledge of constitutional systems outside of China. In contrast to the frequent analysis of the Qing constitutional movement under the Japanese prism, the Japanese experience did not offer too many references in regard to the borderlands, except for the occasional mentioning that the Meiji constitution did not apply to Taiwan and Hokkaidō. Rather, the argument that similar minority representation existed in the case of Great Britain’s “internal colonies” such as Scotland and Ireland prevailed over comparisons with overseas colonies without any representation, such as British India. Perhaps most importantly, in spite of the often condescending and patronizing attitude toward the frontier regions, there was a significant fear that the global constitutional trend might inspire reformist and constitutionalist movements in Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, leading to separatism if the Qing Empire did not carry out...
constitutional reforms herself. Hence, the debate about how to deal with these regions was a local element of a Eurasian movement defining parliamentary assemblies and constitutions as indispensable elements of modern statehood.

**Acknowledgements**

The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewer as well as to Christopher Atwood, Jargal Badagarov, Pelin Chiu, Asanuma Chie, Pei-chih Chou, Stanley Ong Gieshen Setiawan, Lisa Lindkvist Zhang, Ying-kit Chan, and Hung Tak Wai for their helpful comments and suggestions.

**Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement no. 649307.

**Notes**

1. These Tibetan names (Tibetan: Bla-ma, Bka'-blon-pa and Ka'-blon, Tsong-ka-pa) are not meant to be an accurate description of possible appointees, but are rather a token enumeration of titles and names associated with Tibetan Buddhism: Kalonpa and Kablon are variations of the same title, while Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) was a famous thinker and reformer.

2. This is the version of Dagongbao (1908a) and Beiyang fazheng xuebao (1908, pp. 5–7). Ma (2014, p. 70) and B. Zhang (1909, p. 37), write, “It behooves us to treat Tibet copying the method with which England treats the monks, whereby a few of their Lamas, Kalonpas, Kablons, Tsongkhapas choose a few people as members of the Zizhengyuan.”

**References**

Asahi shimbun 朝日新聞. (1906, October 4). Shinkoku rikken to [Essential news: Plan to establish a training ground for impe-


Batdorj. (2016). Pala Altai-yin kereg sidkegči daruy-a-yin tsiy-

yal-du bayigu qurcvay-a-daki Altai Qobdu-yin qarlqva-y (1912–1914 on) [Relations between Altai and Kobdo at the time when Pala was Governor of Altai (1912–1914)] (MA dissertation, Inner Mongolia University, China).


Beiyang fazheng xuebao [Beijing: The Official Gazette]. [1908b, October 9]. Zhengwenshe shang [Statement asking to correct organisation and attributions of the Zizhengyuan, submitted to Prince Pulun by the Political News Society] (pp. 1–2).

Dagongbao 大公報. (1908a, February 9). Zhengwenshe shang Lun beizi qing lizheng Zizhengyuan zuerqi zuxian shuote 保廷樑大公報. (1910a, June 10). Beijing: Jiao yu shenzhong [Essential news: Plan to establish a training ground for impe-


Liu, X. (2011a, August 24). *Xinjiang weizhuang ri zeng 新疆危狀日增 (The perilsituation of Xinjiang gets worse by the day)* (p. 4).

Liu, X. (2011b, September 4). *Yuan Dahua zhili Xinjiang zhi zhengjian 袁大化治理新疆之政見 (The difficulties of holding elections in Xinjiang)* (pp. 4–5).


Xuebu guanbao. (1909). Lifan bu zou choubei fanshu xianzheng ying ban shiyi fenbie jihuian zeyao tuixing zhe 理藩部奏籌備藩屬憲政應辦事宜分別急緩擇要推行摺 [Memorial submitted by the Ministry for Inner Asia about the implementation of selected important matters which should be arranged in order to prepare for constitutional government in the borderlands, ordered by urgency]. Xuebu guanbao 學部官報, 10, 4b–7a.


Author biography

Egas Moniz Bandeira holds a PhD from the University of Tohoku. He is currently working as a post-doctoral research fellow at the Autonomous University of Madrid within the collaborative research project “East Asian Uses of the European Past—Tracing Braided Chronotypes,” supported by the HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) network. His research interests include modern Chinese and Japanese history, global intellectual history, and constitutional history.
Imperial parliament for a hybrid empire: Representative experiments in the early 20th-century Russian Empire

Alexander M. Semyonov

Abstract
This article argues that the history of Russian constitutional and parliamentary reform in the early 20th century can be cast in a new light in view of the global transformation of political life under the challenge of imperial diversity and mass politics. The article points out that imperial diversity as a challenge to democratic government was not unique to the Russian Empire. The character of the Russian Empire was marked by peculiarities; it was shaped by composite and hybrid imperial space, which placed the challenge of imperial diversity at the center of political practices and imaginaries. The article traces the history of political reform in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century focusing on the reform of the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland and the novel practices and political imaginaries of imperial diversity in the first and second State Duma. The exploration of the history of the constitutional reform in the Russian Empire of early 20th century demonstrates that rather than being absolute antagonists to representative government, Russian imperial politics and traditions of imperial sovereignty nested possibilities of compromise and redefinition of political solidarity in the space of diversity.

Keywords
History of the Russian Empire, history of the State Duma, global history of parliamentarism, pseudo-constitutionalism, Russian liberalism

A parliamentary crisis in a European country
In 1914, a major political crisis loomed large in one of the European countries. The crisis developed in several phases and concerned multiple issues of constitutional life: the relations between the upper and lower houses of parliament in the context of growing democratization of political life, the integrity of the liberal political program, and the parliamentary solution to the challenge of democracy in a multinational empire. The crisis started off with the liberal majority in parliament in 1905. In 1909, the liberal majority prepared a new budget containing a progressive tax and a variety of social welfare programs. The budget was blocked by the upper house of parliament for fears of creeping socialism. The budget was ultimately passed in 1910, but it took two general elections (de facto plebiscites), the threat of royal prerogative to change the composition of the upper house, and the reform of the upper house. The confrontation between the lower and upper houses of parliament did not end in 1910. Tensions rose even higher because the majority formed in the general elections of 1910 hung on the representatives of a non-dominant nationality that demanded autonomy for their region in return for political alliance. The project of autonomy was prepared, passed the
lower house of parliament, was blocked three times by the upper house of parliament, and was sent for royal assent, bypassing the upper house. In a countermove an amendment bill was introduced, a sort of backstop provision in view of the increasing prospect of implementation of autonomy in that said region of empire. The amendment bill led to a general standoff. Shortly before the breakout of the World War I, the monarchy convened a special conference on the question, but it failed to resolve the conflict due to “differences of substance, which were, for the time being at any rate, unbridgeable and irreconcilable.” Meanwhile, local armed movements were set in motion in the territory of proposed autonomy and there was even a loss of control by the imperial command over the armed forces in the said territory. This extra-parliamentary political contestation was also framed by proposals of territorial partition, on the one hand, and threats of provisional government and secession, on the other. In short, a civil war was very much on the horizon. The solution to this crisis was the adoption of the controversial bill “in the interests of the Empire” and immediate suspension of its effect in view of the outbreak of the “European war.” Such a strange compromise with no clear plan for a lasting democratic solution to the problem of empire worked out largely because of the emergency of the World War I that allowed the crippled liberal parliamentary majority to stay in power and avoid the descent of parliamentary politics into civil war.

One expects that such an acute political crisis of parliamentaryism in a multinational empire in the early 20th century was likely to occur in Austro-Hungary or Russia, the countries with imperial-authoritarian political traditions, socio-economic underdevelopment, historically short experience with constitutional and parliamentary political forms, and weak forces of liberalism. Yet, this is the story of the “people’s budget” drafted by Lloyd George and the complex political dynamics that ensued and involved a standoff between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the reform of the Parliament (1911), and the Third Irish Home Rule Bill that entered the statute books in 1914 (together with the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales), but never took effect (Dangerfield, 1936; Hansard House of Commons [HHC], 1914, pp. 882–920; Mulvagh, 2018; Smith, 1993). The events in question actually took place in Great Britain or, more precisely, as pointed out by Prime Minister Asquith, in the British Empire (HHC, 1914, p. 889). And the empire was not “over there” in India for which discussion the benches of the lower house usually emptied, but at the heart of the modern parliamentary system and party politics.

This article argues that the history of Russian constitutional and parliamentary reform in the early 20th century can be cast in a new light in view of the global transformation of political life under the challenge of imperial diversity and mass politics. As evinced in the above mentioned case of the Third Irish Home Rule Bill, imperial diversity as a challenge to democratic government was not a unique to the Russian Empire. The character of the Russian Empire was marked by peculiarities, it was shaped by composite and hybrid imperial space (Gerasimov et al., 2016), which placed the challenge of imperial diversity at the center of political practices and imaginaries. The exploration of the history of the constitutional reform in the Russian Empire of the early 20th century demonstrates that rather than being absolute antagonists to representative government (Hosking, 1997), Russian imperial politics and traditions of imperial sovereignty nested possibilities of compromise and redefinition of political solidarity in the space of diversity. National consolidation of the political community was not a necessary precondition for a representative government. Indeed, it was the other way around: the nationalizing politics of the Russian imperial center was a disruptive element in the attempt to marry new political forms with the political reality of imperial society. Furthermore, the article contends that late political modernization in the context of relative backwardness was not the only complicating factor for the liberal and democratic reform in Russia. The Russian story was part of the global story of the challenge of mass politics to liberal democracy in the early 20th century and the Russian political actors duly reflected this global entanglement.

The history of the emergence of Russian representative institutions was indeed belated in comparison with the parliamentary history in Western Europe and with other Central European empires, for example, the Habsburg reform of 1867 and the German Empire of 1871. The Russian bicameral parliament emerged in the long process of political reform in the context of the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 revolution. The first phase of the reform was led by government reformers from above in the context of mobilization of political movements and popular unrest from below. The envisaged political reform initially followed the legal logic of composite imperial space, that is, representation was based on inclusion of representatives of organs of self-government (zemstvos) that were created in the wake of Great Reforms of the middle of the 19th century into the existing supreme law-making body of the empire—the State Council. Then, in the second phase of the reform the project was changed into a “popular” representation and a bicameral parliament (the State Council and the State Duma).

The second phase of the reform overlapped with the violence of the 1905 revolution and almost complete loss of control by the government over the country. This second phase of reform after October 1905 produced a constitutional change that included the written constitution (Fundamental Laws of 1906), the expanded suffrage for the lower house (the State Duma), the prerogative of the legislature in passing the laws, and the guarantee of certain fundamental rights to the population of the empire. What is often overlooked in the history of this period is that the
political reform in “Russia” included the reform of the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland on the basis of universal active and passive suffrage and the constitutional realignment of the position of the Grand Duchy of Finland in the overall imperial political structure.

After the wave of the revolution subsided, the new electoral law of 1907 for elections to the State Duma was passed in a coup d’etat that curtailed the political representation in favor of proprietary elements of population and “more Russian in spirit” regions and population groups of the empire. National curiae were introduced in the mixed territories to protect the interests of the “Russian” population. This “Duma of lackeys” dominated by conservatives and Russian nationalists worked until the end of the Russian monarchy.

This short and turbulent history of Russian parliamentarism in the framework of a pseudo-constitutional regime (both in 1906 and 1907) so far fits the conventional narrative of liberal reforms in a backward country with strong traditions of authoritarian rule and the conception that the imperial factor prevented the consolidation of representative government on the basis of national political community. What does not fit this narrative is the reform of the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland which saw the introduction of revolutionary universal suffrage and political inclusion of women, the emergence of political imaginaries and practices aimed at creating political solidarity in the context of pluralism of the first and second State Duma that provided an enduring legacy for post-imperial political visions in 1917 (Sablin, 2018; Sablin & Semyonov, 2018), and the emergence of consolidated political opposition in the form of the Progressive Block in the fourth Duma (in spite of its nickname of the “Duma of lackeys”), that played a crucial role in the fall of the monarchy and in shaping the events of the democratic February revolution of 1917 (Gerasimov, 2017). With those historical events entering the established narrative, the story of Russian parliamentarism acquires a paradoxical twist.

A strange birth of an ultra-modern parliamentary system

While Russian official political narrative at the time carefully suppressed the sense of political rupture instituted in October of 1905 (Tagantsev, 1919), the rupture was duly noted by multiple observers of the process. The eminent Russian legal scholar Boris Nolde (1911) pointed out that the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire of 1906 introduced the first modern definition of the Russian state (Semyonov, 2009, pp. 225–244). Before 1906, the title of the Russian emperor provided this definition through enumerating legal and territorial units absorbed in the course of the imperial expansion. In 1906, the Russian state was declared “one and indivisible” (Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii [PSZRI], 1906, p. 456). This novel and generic definition of the Russian statehood stood in immediate contradiction to the autonomous status of the Grand Duchy of Finland stipulated in the next article of the same Fundamental Laws (PSZRI, 1906, p. 456). The structure of sovereignty created in the course of the development of the Russian Empire was vertically shaped and included both inclusive and differentiated treatment of territories and groups of population (more often it targeted legal entities and groups while the territorial or horizontal dimension of the imperial sovereignty came rather late in its history).

Modern constitutional law was largely shaped by ideas of rational systematization of territorial government and nation-centered optics. The Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire combined the tradition of layered imperial sovereignty and the modern nation-centered constitutional vision. The nation-centered formula of “one and indivisible” state might have smoothed Nicholas II’s acceptance of the constitutional reform (even though he remained personally opposed to this constitutional compromise in view of his mystical and nationalist conception of the Russian monarchy (Wortman, 2000, pp. 392–438)). Still the Fundamental Laws that were in force for this last period in the history of the Russian Empire were eclectic if not hybrid; the modern French revolutionary formula of “one and indivisible” political community coexisted with the historically formed and constitutionally framed definition of autonomy.

Retained and reshaped in 1906 the traditional logic of imperial sovereignty helped quite paradoxically to achieve the universal suffrage in the reformed Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland. It is true that the Grand Duchy of Finland preserved the constitutional autonomy up to the events of 1905 (Jussila, 1989), unlike other historic autonomies in the Russian Empire (the Polish Kingdom, the Cossack Hetmanate, Bessarabia, or the Baltic provinces). However, immediately prior to the revolution of 1905 the Grand Duchy of Finland experienced a wave of russification that aimed at thorough centralization, the legal justification for which stressed the supreme authority of the Russian emperor over the concept of thelayered sovereignty of the empire. The modern practice of boycott and political terror (assassination of governor-general Bobrikov) helped stop this centralization campaign (Polvinen, 1995). The legacy of this period was the consolidation of different Finlandish political parties (Finnish and Swedish) that adopted the so-called Big Petition of 1904 (Jussila, 2009). Already this petition called for universal suffrage and restoration of autonomous status of the Grand Duchy of Finland. There was an interesting local dynamics behind the universal suffrage claim. The mass political participation in the resistance to Bobrikov policies was one factor. The other factor was a suspicion directed at Swedish political parties that their political project aimed at consolidation of political power that was traditionally held in the Nobility House of the Duchy’s quad-cameral Sejm. Thus, the legacy of 1904
called for universal suffrage (i.e., a thorough inclusion of the Finish part of the population into political life), the unicameral parliament (the parting of the ways with the nobility’s dominance in the Sejm), and the proportional system of representation in a reformed parliament (in order to protect the interests of the Swedes and estates without resort to a bicameral or multicameral parliament).

The Russian government shelved the petition of 1904 and suspended the work of the Sejm. The reports by the general-governor Ivan Obolensky from before the spike of the 1905 crisis informed the emperor that the political forces of the Grand Duchy of Finland were led by the Swedish noble activists and pan-Scandinavian federalists who “hated” the Russian state and would take no measure other than the full separation of the Grand Duchy of Finland from the empire (National Archives of Finland [NAF], 1904, 1905a). This Swedish noble elite dominated through the constitutional movement the Nobility’s and Burgers' Houses of the Sejm, while the situation in the Clergy and Peasant Houses was different and they could be expected to be traditionally loyal to the emperor. In the logic of a nationalistizing empire, the constitutionalism and legalism of Finnish political activists were interpreted as a threat to imperial sovereignty and it was believed that the retention of supreme authority could only be achieved through naked force. In the mind of the emperor, this picture must have resembled the situation in Russia: noble activists were at the forefront of the liberal opposition that pressed for the constitutional reform, while the “people” was assumed to be traditionally loyal to the tsar.

In October of 1905, there was a very different situation: the imperial government lost control in the Duchy and the rest of the empire. The white (bourgeois) and red (workers) Finnish militia jointly carried out the police functions even in the capital of the Duchy (Bakhturina, 2006). Obolensky pleaded to send more troops to restore control. But due to the Russo-Japanese war and the general strike in Russia the troops were not forthcoming. The next report from the same governor-general advised the emperor to accept the demands of the Great Petition of 1904. How could such a turnaround happen in the matter of weeks in the head of this particular governor-general and how could the emperor not think that his governor-general had gone mad?

Reading carefully the paper trail leading to the October manifesto (NAF, 1905b), one sees that the paradoxical acceptance by the Russian emperor of the ultra-modern parliamentary system for the Grand Duchy of Finland was made possible by a shift of perspective from the nationalizing empire to the traditional repertoire of imperial sovereignty. Seen from the perspective of imperial sovereignty, the demands of the Big Petition of 1904 were not revolutionary and from the legal viewpoint did not touch the so-called “State Form Law” that regulated relations between the empire and the Duchy. The seemingly radical demand of universal suffrage turned out to concern the elections to the body of self-government of the Duchy and was thus was considered to be an internal affair of the Grand Duchy and quite in line with the retention of institutions of self-government in the rest of the empire. The experience of other self-government organs in the Duchy showed the moderate political disposition of representatives that concerned themselves chiefly with local affairs. There was an experience with women’s participation in municipal self-government and the results were positive. The renewed logic of imperial sovereignty cast the Finnish situation in a legal perspective and foregrounded the individual treatment of this part of the imperial realm in accordance with local peculiarities of the Duchy and the pluralism of the imperial space as a whole.

It is also possible to see that this decision-making also involved the political calculation of actors who wanted to preserve the monarchical regime. The extension of political rights in the Duchy to the common people, including women, that is, beyond the Swedish noble elite and “urban educated and semi-educated classes,” was in line with the concurrent deliberation of the electoral law for the Russian parliament and could be seen as a Caesarist political manipulation or illiberal populism. But this move was also consistent with techniques of “management of rebellious imperial intermediaries” by the imperial sovereign (Burbank & Cooper, 2010, pp. 13–14). The result was the second October Manifesto (issued on October 22, 1905) which, like in the manifesto of October 17 covering Russia, promised civil and political rights and, unlike the earlier Manifesto, committed the crown to the reform of the Sejm on the basis of universal suffrage.

The statute of the reformed Sejm was, however, considered by the special conference in March and April of 1906 in St. Petersburg (NAF, 1906a) to which representatives of Finland were invited. The legal ground for this was the concern with the prerogatives of the Grand Duke of Finland. The Grand Duchy of Finland was represented by the senators of the Grand Duchy of Finland Leo Mechelin and N. Gripenberg and state secretary for the Grand Duchy of Finland Lanhoff. The empire was represented by senator and professor of law Nikolai Sergeevsky (known for his Russian nationalist sympathies) and senator Nikolai Garin. The chairperson of the conference was the chairman of the department of laws of the State Council Eduard Frisch.

The conference revealed a few contentious issues, including the situation with the officers from the Grand Duchy serving in the imperial army and quite emotional discussion of women’s political rights. Unexpectedly, it moved from consideration of vertical relations between the Grand Duke and the political community of the Duchy to uncovering the horizontal entanglement and hybridity of the imperial space. The most controversial of the issues under discussion was the question of potential discrimination of Russian subjects vis-à-vis the citizens of Finland,
the former meaning those subjects of the Russian Emperor who did not additionally enjoy rights as subjects of the Grand Duchy. The participants in the discussion used different designations that often seemed excessive or oxymoronic: “natural subjects of the empire,” the “native population of the empire,” or “the Russian subjects” (NAF, 1906a). This linguistic uncertainty revealed ambiguous and shifting boundaries in the gradient of imperial subjecthood and belonging (Cooper, 2014; Khoury & Glebov, 2017).

Prior to October 1905 there was no problem with this gradient of imperial subjecthood because there had been no universal suffrage in the Grand Duchy, nor had there been political rights granted to the rest of the subjects of the Russian Empire. After October 1905 “Russian subjects” in the rest of the empire were granted political rights, but by fact of movement and residence in the Grand Duchy they happened to be deprived of any political rights because they fell between the two reformed systems. They fell between the two reformed systems because both did not take into account the non-territorial aspects of political belonging in an empire. At the same time, Sergeevsky pointed out, that Finlandish citizens could take part in the Duma elections if they “happened to be in the Empire” (this meant outside of the Grand Duchy of Finland, but within the borders of the Russian Empire) and qualify by criteria of the electoral law to the State Duma. The Finland representatives argued that the political rights were unthinkable without a bounded citizenship and the solution could be the re-registration of “imperial subjects” in the Finnish citizenship. This contention was not resolved at the conference, the emperor in the end, quite surprisingly, agreed with the Finnish proposition but also issued a directive to the Senate of the Grand Duchy of Finland “to elaborate without any delay a new statute on acquisition of the rights of citizens of the Grand Duchy of Finland by the “native-born population of empire” (NAF, 1906b). This directive played a crucial role later in the renewed attempts at Russification of the Grand Duchy when the revolution subsided and the logic of the nationalizing empire returned to the imperial center.

What also remained unclear from the deliberations in 1906 was the relationship between the future Russian parliament and the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Even though an earlier proposal in the Bulygin Duma project envisioned a peculiar mechanism of inclusion of representatives of the reformed Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland into the session of the State Duma for consideration of legislation regarding the affairs of the Duchy, this scheme was not adopted and the question of relationship between the Sejm and Duma was postponed. Members of the State Council openly remarked that raising a question of relations between two parliaments could bring in detrimental effects to the fragile compromise agreed upon on the status of the Finland’s autonomy within the empire and that a different and more flexible approach was required (Tagantsev, 1919). The logic of popular sovereignty even in a pseudo-constitutional political arrangement could powerfully disrupt the composite and hybrid political space of empire. This is what happened after the revolution in the empire subsided and the Stolypin government returned to the policy of centralization with regard to the Grand Duchy of Finland. The law of June 1910 returned to the Bulygin Duma proposal of inclusion of representatives from the Sejm into the State Council and State Duma. Those representatives were envisioned as representatives of the entire population of the Grand Duchy, and therefore the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) acquired quite paradoxically a character of the upper house of parliament. This representation was used by Stolypin as a ground to legitimize the right of the Duma to pass laws in respect to the “entangled affairs of the empire and the Grand Duchy” that is to cover the big Russification program with the fig leaf of popular consent. The nationalizing and conservative policy of Stolypin fully endorsed the notion of undivided popular sovereignty (in his case for the purpose of unification of imperial subjecthood and political space), but this policy backfired later in 1917 when Finnish politics embraced the notion of undivided popular sovereignty in the form of parliamentary sovereignty of the Finnish nation (Ihalainen, 2017, pp. 173–185).

The case of Grand Duchy of Finland prompted critically minded Russian legal scholars to introduce an unconventional angle on political theories underpinning the political debates during the reform of 1905–1906. Concerned with the issue of composite political space, one such critically minded legal scholar Sergey Korf (1908), who read constitutional law at the imperial University of Helsingfors/Helsinki, made the point that both conservative and democratic political camps in Russia (otherwise bitterly opposed to one another) shared a common concept of bounded and undivided sovereignty. The conservatives and some of liberals followed the German mainstream legal theories on the supreme political value of the state and its undivided sovereignty. The radical democratic currents (other liberal and socialists) followed the logic of popular sovereignty and the homogenizing concept of the “people” in the sense of bounded political community (Korf, 1915). Drawing on the political processes in the contemporaneous British Empire (Korf wrote on autonomy in the colonies of the British empire and then followed the phenomenon of imperial conferences) and mindful of the paradoxes of the political reform in the Grand Duchy of Finland, Korf highlighted the blind spot in the current political debate: “In our days the difference between a province and a sovereign state comprises a gradient of dozens of steps, transitory and often hard-to-recognize hybrid and mixed forms, which no longer fit the old theory of state law” (Korf, 1908, 1914, 1917, p. 93). His suggestion was to reconsider the theories of sovereignty and develop a new theory of federalism, which
aimed both at internal devolution of the space of the modern state (allowing emergence of autonomous political representation) and outward universalization of sovereignty through the creation of supra-state organizations (with supra-state political representation). Written from the perspective of legal theory, this was rather a thought experiment with no lasting practical consequences, even though Korf was involved in the administration of the Grand Duchy of Finland after February of 1917. Still, his critical and unorthodox legal and political vision contributed to the expansion of political imagination at the moment of the transformation of the Russian Empire in 1917 and helped empower approaches to the post-imperial political space at the time of the Constituent Assembly of 1917–1918 that were not based on the model of territorial and undivided national sovereignty (Gerasimov, 2017).

**The state duma as an imperial parliament?**

Potential dangers of popular sovereignty were not on the mind of the most vocal political activists in the Russian oppositional movement who prepared themselves for the work in the first Russian elected parliament in spring of 1906. Seen as a secured bulwark against the autocracy, the first Russian parliament was the voice of the “terra incognita of the people” (in the words of the liberal activist of the Great Reforms Fyodor Rodichev) and the sign of “the maturity of the Russian nation” (in the lead article by Petr Struve from the new fin-de-siècle generation of Russian intellectuals; Rodichev, 1983, p. 91; Struve, 1906a, p. 1). In short, the Duma was seen as a progressive step forward taken by Russia to modern political forms based on popular sovereignty.

However, there was an alternative discourse emerging in the space of novel Russian public and electoral politics that reflected the experience of the first Dumas and electoral campaign’s alliances and which started to edge the slogan of popular sovereignty. The official and opposition’s statistics of the electoral results stressed the ethnic, religious, and territorial diversity that surfaced in the first Russian parliament (Borodin, 1907; Russian National Library, 1906). One of the radical liberals Viktor Obninskii (1916) concluded his impressions on the first physical gathering of the Duma deputies in the Winter Palace and Taurida Palace with an observation that the Duma “appeared to be an imperial parliament of the constitutional federal state” dominated by “local, regional, and national interests” (p. 213). Was this parliamentary experiment doomed because of the ethnic divisions in the political space of the Russian Empire? Were not Struve and other national liberals right in assuming that the political solidarity and stability of the majority in parliament depended on the civic nation?

The Russian State Duma in 1906 and 1907 proved both sides wrong. The first two State Dumas unveiled not just the variety of particularisms (ethnic, estate, religious, and regional), but the alternative political language and imaginary that was not compatible with the normative nationalizing discourse. What is even more curious is that the neat differentiation of the political space of the empire along ethnic lines as was initially suggested by Obninskii did not occur in the process of constitution of parliamentary groups and their languages of self-description. What made the first Russian parliament imperial was not that there were far more representatives from the imperial peripheries (west, east, and south) than in London or Paris. It is not the numbers that mattered, but the uncertain picture of the dynamic political process that included fluid taxonomies of difference (ethnic, territorial and non-territorial, religious, estate, or class) and varying understanding and misunderstanding of key terms of the parliamentary debates: autonomy, federalism, nationality, citizenship, language, justice, and property.

Nowhere was the phenomenon of hybrid identification and self-description more evident than in the structure of political groupings of the first and second State Duma. The alignments of deputies in the first and second Duma were defined on the basis of incongruous and asymmetrical criteria. However, in the space of the Duma politics, they were taken by new political actors not as structural determinants but as a resource for different political strategies in the process of negotiating the architecture of a new political community.

The parliamentary groups based on the party electoral ticket included right-wing parties (pravye) and monarchists, the Union of October 17, moderate progressives, the Party of the Democratic Reform, the Constitutional-Democratic (Kadet) party, the Labor group (Trudoviks), the Populist-Socialists, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and the Social-Democrats (which in the first Duma were primarily Georgian Mensheviks elected from the Caucasus). Shortly before the dissolution of the first Duma and in the second Duma the group without party affiliation (largely peasants) was formed, who refrained from taking on a distinct political platform but still deemed it important to institutionalize themselves. The structure of parliamentary groups also included the group of Muslim deputies; the group of regional representatives from Siberia; regionalist and estate group of the Cossack deputies; and nationally defined groups of the Polish Koło, Ukrainian hromada, Estonians, Armenians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. Furthermore, deputies from North-Western and South-Western regions bonded together on a combination of linguistic and regional identification (Lednitskii, 1906; Borodin, 1907; Semyonov, 2009). The most hybrid parliamentary group was the Autonomists that comprised collective and individual membership and displayed elective affinity to the program of liberal social reformism and claims of national and territorial autonomy and even federalization of the Empire. It is important to note that the structure of politically articulated diversity manifested in the formation of parliamentary
groups did not always reflect the statistical distribution of Duma deputies according to social status, confession, religion, or nationality. While the aide of Count Witte Dmitriev-Mamonov busied himself with the task of singling out Jewish deputies in the elected corpus of the Duma (Russian National Library, 1906), thus projecting the existence of a homogeneous group united by their nationally inspired political program, the Jewish deputies themselves refrained from forming a distinct Jewish group and entered into the parliamentary groups of the Kadet party and Labor (Trudovaya), while continuing their representation of the interests of the Jewish communities (Gassenschmidt, 1995, p. 36).

The evolution of the parliamentary group of Autonomists demonstrates a peculiar process of redefining the mobilized imperial diversity. The group of autonomists reflected the rise of national movements in the 1905 revolution and partially originated in the 1905 congresses of non-Russian professionals and civic activists in St. Petersburg that represented non-Russian national movements (Azerbaijani, Armenian, Byelorussian, Georgian, Jewish, Kazakh, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Tatar, Ukrainian, and Estonian) from different regions: the Baltic region, western borderlands, the Kingdom of Poland, South Caucasus, and Central Asia (the steppes region; Shrag, 1906). There was an understanding among activists of those national movements that the nationality question ought to be brought to the Duma, especially with regard to the preceding policies of Russification, and that the common principle of constitution of a political alliance between those groups will be the principle of nationality. But more often than not the most vocal representatives of the national movements were not elected to the first Russian parliament.

The group of Autonomists was formed when the first Duma was in session. This emergence of the group as well as other groups reflected the pragmatic need to forge alliances on the Duma floor and structure the work on the agenda of the parliamentary session. Also important was that the first days of the Duma debates revealed the impossibility to contain the discussion of the “nationality questions” in a separate item of the agenda. The discussion of approaches to the agrarian question, which was a burning element of the revolution of 1905, showed the entanglement of the agrarian question to dimensions of imperial subjecthood, different regional legal traditions, and conceptions about local and particular groups of population (Russian State Historical Archive [RSHA], 1906a, 1906b). Earlier assumptions of advocates of neatly disentangled “nationality questions” gave way to a loose program of autonomism that parted with the concept of exclusive and dominant idioms of nationality and aimed “to transform the collapsing centralist Russian Empire into a strong and united empire of peoples” (Slavinskii, 1906, p. 38). In other words, the hybridity and asymmetric identities of political actors of the first Russian parliament led to a political vision that was both inclusive and pluralist. The pluralism of this vision could accommodate advocacy of linguistic and cultural group rights as well as territorial and non-territorial rights. The vision of autonomism sought political solidarity rather than fracturing it into national compartments. The latter aspect is evident in the debates on the program of federalization of the empire in the autonomist group. The reason why federalism remained part of the language of autonomism was not because it promised symmetric federal rearrangement of the space of the empire. Rather, the meaning of federalism conveyed the sense that not only the most developed national movements in the empire could be recognized and their claim of autonomy honored. This anti-hierarchical rhetorical gesture was directed against the exclusivity of the representatives of the Polish national democracy, their advocacy of exclusive autonomy for the Polish lands in the Duma and meant political inclusion of other parts of the empire into a decentralized political future of the post-imperial space without uniformity or symmetry (de Courtenay & Ignacy Courtenay, 1906).

The peculiar combination of inclusion and recognition of difference, universalism and particularism in the work of the democratic State Dumas prevented the emergence of the language of national minority in the post-imperial visions of the political space. The language of national minority could have reinforced the discourse of popular and territorial sovereignty and would have shaped differently the outcome of the 1917 imperial crisis in Russia, may be more in the direction of the breakup of the Habsburg Empire and the collapse of the Ottoman empire. The inclusive and hybrid political space of empire as it emerged in the first State Dumas of the Russian Empire precluded this political scenario.

**A puzzle of Moisey Ostrogorsky**

Preparing to become an MP in the first Russian parliament, Moisey Ostrogorsky opposed the proposal of forming an exclusive Jewish parliamentary group in the first State Duma (Krol′, 2008, pp. 34–35). The question was discussed at the meeting of the Union for the Attainment of the Full Rights for Jewish People of Russia in May 1906, the union played an important role in political mobilization of the Jewish voters, but it was not a party-based association. The union was a civic-political movement and its ranks included different ideological-party visions, such as the constitutional-democratic, Zionist, and autonomist. It is possible to view the choice by Ostrogorsky as a reflection of political culture of the populist intelligentsia, which, as Max Weber and Russian liberal-conservative critics of the 1905 revolution suggested, lacked appreciation of political forms and discipline needed for modernization of Russia (Struve, 1906b; Weber et al., 1995). But Moisey Ostrogorsky’s opposition to the Jewish
parliamentary group and his general anxiety about replicating western forms of parliamentary life was coming from somewhere else. His critical attitude to western models of parliamentarism was based on his groundbreaking political sociological research into the transformation of parliamentary life under the challenge of mass politics in Britain and the United States (Ostrogorsky, 1902; Weber, 2007, p. 340; Pombeni, 1994). Inspired by James Bryce and British debate on the Americanization of British politics, Ostrogorsky studied the “political forces” behind the democratic government, rather than “political forms.” His pioneering study of political parties in the United States and Britain resulted in a grim picture of bureaucratization, mechanization, and closure of political life that was brought about by political party organizations as chief and unregulated by constitution instruments of representative government. Ostrogorsky discovered that modern political parties were produced by emergence of mass politics that evolved with the process of democratization of modern representative government. These modern political machines diminished the space of freedom of discussion and reflection of changing social forces in a representative government. Ostrogorsky’s pathbreaking political sociology informed his choices as a political figure elected to the first Russian parliament.

In 1905, Ostrogorsky was offered a chair in political science at Cleveland University in the United States, but instead remained in the Russian Empire and ran the electoral campaign as a “democrat” and “Jew” in ethnically mixed Grodno province. Ostrogorsky was elected to the State Duma by the clear majority of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish votes (46 electors out of 60). In the Duma, he was chosen to be the speaker of the committee on Rules and Regulations of the first State Duma and made a crucial contribution to pre-empting the emergence of majoritarian political culture and impact of party machines (among his contributions are the multiple membership in the parliamentary groups and low threshold required for a legislative initiative and constitution of parliamentary group; Ostrogorsky, 1906; RSHA, 1906c). Looking at his choice to remain in Russia, one can see that the grim intellectual prognosis for modern parliamentary political life under the challenge of mass society did not turn Ostrogorsky into a pessimist. In the Russian context of belated political reform, Ostrogorsky thought that a different modality of representative system could be shaped, the one that did not depend on political party machines and majoritarian rule. In fact, his intellectual opposition to political party machines coincided with the pragmatics of the first elections to the Russian parliament which were held in mixed and hybrid imperial society and were ran on the basis of coalitions and multiple and non-exclusive political affiliations. His own successful bid for an elected office proved that there was a room for practicing democratic politics without an exclusive party or ethnic affiliation.

**Conclusion**

This article advanced an argument against narrating the history of Russian constitutional and parliamentary reform in the normative canon of modern political history of representative government and symbolic geography of divergent historical trajectories of the “west” and “east.” It shows the importance of contextual and entangled analysis of the global transformation of political life under the challenge of imperial diversity and mass politics for parliamentary history. The entangled analysis should be differentiated from a comparative historical analysis. The entangled analysis allows to capture the circuits of ideas and comparisons drawn by historical actors in the synchronous space of politics of the early 20th century. As John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party stressed the positive example of the “Czar’s promise of home rule to Poland” in the Russian Empire (HHC, 1914, p. 911), so did Sergey Korf and Moisey Ostrogorsky drew in their political critique and practice on contemporaneous trends in the “west” that were “coming home” in the Grand Duchy of Finland, Grodno, and St. Petersburg.

The contextual analysis requires situating modern political dynamics in the reality of imperial formations or imperial states, and this reality was equally true in the west and east of Europe (Burbank & Cooper, 2010, 2019). Even though the challenge of imperial diversity prior to World War I was not uniform in the British empire and the Russian Empire, this challenge was a universal factor underlying the tensions in the working of political representation both with long history and relatively new, as in the case of Russia. The idea that western European countries by the early 20th century had a working democratic government thanks to the formation of nation-state in the metropole of the colonial empire needs to be reconsidered together with the idea of symbiotic relations between nation and democracy. Compared with the crisis over the Third Irish Home Rule Bill, the Russian imperial center managed rather successfully the ultra-modern reform of representative government in the Grand Duchy of Finland. The condition for this success was a shift from the logic of nationalizing empire to the traditional habit of practicing layered and divided sovereignty. But even in the case of territorially separated Grand Duchy, questions of overlapping citizenship-subjecthood undermined the settlement that was premised on compartmentalization of imperial space and ran against mainstream legal and political discourses on bounded and undivided sovereignty. Similarly, in the State Duma, the shifting and asymmetric identifications of the corpus of MPs proved wrong both the idea of unifying national representation and the discourse of representation of bounded national groups. The development of the language of autonomism and federalism in the Duma was an attempt to both democratize the political imaginary and to eschew the dangers of homogenization and bounded groupness.
Acknowledgements
The author wishes to thank the participants of the Workshop at the University of Heidelberg “Parliaments and Political Transformations in Europe and Asia: Diversity and Representation in the 20th and 21st Century,” Sergey Glebov, Marina Mogilner, Ivan Sablin, Ronald Suny, and anonymous reviewers for their comments on the manuscript.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This article was prepared within the research project of ERA. Net RUS Plus “Post-Impperial Diversities—Majority-minority Relations in the Transition from Empires to Nations-States” and was funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, research project 18-59-76001.

References


National Archives of Finland. (1904, December 28). KKK. HE2. Report by Governor-general Obolensky on the political situation in the pre-Sejm and petition period of the current Sejm of 1904.

National Archives of Finland. (1905a, April). KKK. HE2. Report by Governor-general Obolensky on political situation in the period of the current Sejm in 1905.

National Archives of Finland. (1905b, October 20–November 2). VSV 111/1905. O Vysochaishem manifeste 20 oktiabria/2 noiaebra 1905 g. o merakh k vosstanovleniiu zakonomerno- nogo poriadka v krae (Report by Finland Governor-General to the State Secretary of the Grand Duchy of Finland).

National Archives of Finland. (1906a, March 14–April 14). KKK. VSV 156/1906. Report by Governor-General Obolensky on the political situation of the first State Duma.

National Archives of Finland. (1906b, April 19). VSV 156/1906. Vysochaishe utverzhdennogo soveshchaniia dla rasmotreniia proetka Vysochaishego predlozhenii zenskogo chinam Finliandii o novom Sejmovom ustave [Minutes of the Established by His Imperial Majesty Conference for Discussion of the Project of the Crown’s Proposal to the Representatives of Finland Concerning the New Statute of the Sejm].

National Archives of Finland. (1906b, April 19). VSV 156/1906. Vysochaishe utverzhdennii zhurnal Vysochaishehsovetoveshchaniia dla rasmotreniia proetka Vysochaishego predlozhenii zenskogo chinam Finliandii o novom Sejmovom ustave [Signed by His Imperial Majesty Minutes of the Established by His Imperial Majesty Conference for Discussion of the Project of the Crown’s Proposal to the Representatives of Finland Concerning the New Statute of the Sejm].


Struve, P. B. (1906b). Zamenki publiitsista [Notes of the Public Figure]. Poliaroia Zvezda, 7, 442–449.


**Author biography**

Alexander M. Semyonov, PhD, is a professor of History at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg where he teaches Russian and Soviet history, as well as global and comparative history of empires. He is a co-founder and co-editor of Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post Soviet Space and co-editor with Ronald Suny of a book series “Imperial Transformations” (with Routledge).
Soviet federalism from below: The Soviet Republics of Odessa and the Russian Far East, 1917–1918

Tanja Penter and Ivan Sablin

Abstract
In early 1918, the Bolshevik-dominated Third Congress of Soviets declared the formation of a new composite polity—the Soviet Russian Republic. The congress's resolutions, however, simultaneously proclaimed a federation of national republics and a federation of soviets. The latter seemed to recognize regionalism and localism as organizing principles on par with nationalism and to legitimize the self-proclaimed Soviet republics across the former Russian Empire. The current article compared two such non-national Soviet republics, those in Odessa and the Russian Far East. The two republics had similar roots in the discourses and practices of the Russian Empire, such as economic and de facto administrative autonomy. They also took similar organizational forms, were run by coalitions, and opposed their own inclusion into larger national and regional formations in Ukraine and Siberia. At the same time, both of the Soviet governments functioned as ad hoc committees and adapted their institutional designs and practices to the concrete—and very different—social and international conditions in the two peripheries. The focus of the Odessa and Far Eastern authorities on specific problems and their embeddedness in the peculiar contexts reflected the very idea of federalism as governance based on decentralization and nuance but contradicted the party-based centralization and the exclusivity of the ethno-national federalism in the consolidated Soviet state.

Keywords
Empire, federalism, Odessa, Russian Far East, Soviet

Introduction
During the extended period of the Russian Revolution of 1917, several non-ethnic Soviet republics emerged across the former empire, including the Soviet Republic of Odessa (January 18–March 13, 1918) and the Soviet Republic of the Far East (January 7/April 10–September 17, 1918). The two republics relied on non-Bolshevik political image-ries of a free port or a duty-free zone and of local or regional autonomy, were run by coalitional authorities, at least nominally, and opposed their own belonging to larger national and regional formations in Ukraine and Siberia, both anti-Bolshevik and Soviet. The two republics were never formally recognized as such by the Bolshevik central government, although it communicated with their authorities, and were ultimately taken over by foreign armies—the Central Powers in the case of Odessa and the Allied Intervention in the case of the Russian Far East.

The two republics—maritime gateways of the nascent, composite Soviet polity—showed the Bolshevik leadership another level of the empire’s complexity in addition to ethnic diversity, with the ethno-national sentiments making the Bolsheviks shift from their initial plan of a unitary proletarian state (Rakhmetov & Iakovlev, 1930, p. 72) to the more nuanced approaches to diversity management. The two peripheries contributed to the Bolshevik consent to make Russia a federation, but, unlike the more homogeneous regions (or at least those having coherent nationalist groups to claim such homogeneity), they were to become

University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

Corresponding author:
Ivan Sablin, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg 69117, Germany.
Email: ivan.sablin@gmail.com

Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).
part of a federation of soviets rather than that of national republics.

Both principles made it into the legal foundations of the new regime—the equivocal resolutions of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers,‘ Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies (Petrograd, January 10–18, 1918) which was supposed to take the role of the forcibly dissolved All-Russian Constituent Assembly (Petrograd, January 5–6, 1918). The congress proclaimed the Soviet Russian Republic a federation of free national republics in one resolution, but in another one called it a federation of soviets (sovety or “councils”) with broad local autonomy for regions. The central Soviet authority was supposed to only observe the foundations of the “Russian Federation of Soviets” and was not to violate the rights of different regions which entered the federation. The regional Soviet republics were supposed to decide on their own forms themselves. This right to regional self-determination confirmed to the 1913 program article by Iosif Stalin, in which he favored the regionalist approach to decentralization (Stalin, 1946; Tretii Vserossiiskii s”ezd Sovetov rabochikh, soldatskich i krest’ianskich deputatov, 1918, pp. 90–94).

In its beginnings the “Great October Revolution” was a local event in Petrograd, a coup d’état, purposefully planned and executed by Vladimir Lenin and Lev Trotsky and a rather small group of their followers in the Bolshevik and Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) parties on October 25–26, 1917. Most researchers, however, share the astonishment with the resilience of the Bolshevik authority, rather than with their initial success (see, for instance, Hildermeier, 2013, pp. 36–37). Yet the formation of the new Soviet regime that led to a fundamental, violent change in political, economic, and social relations took months after the coup. While the factual history of the October Revolution in the capital, Petrograd, is now well-researched and firmly anchored in the consciousness of a broader international public, this is not equally true for the revolutionary events in the peripheries of the former Russian Empire. Furthermore, the events which echoed the October coup in Petrograd demonstrated the contingency and fragility of the Bolshevik regime, as well as the very absence of coherence among their ranks.

The research on the Revolution of 1917 for a long time followed a rather centralist tradition and focused mostly on the two capitals, Petrograd and Moscow. With some notable exceptions, most historians shared the silent assumption that the same revolution took place all over Russia. In a way, many Western researchers followed the interpretation of the Soviet historiography, which understood the revolution as a uniform process in all of Russia and left no place for studies of national, regional, or local differences. It was the collapse of the Soviet empire and the emergence of several new states on its former territory that led to a general shift in historiography. Historians increased their attention to the non-Russian nationalisms and to the regional differences. There are still very few regional and local studies of the events in 1917–1918, although some works had already demonstrated the importance of peripheral perspectives for the understanding of the revolution as a whole (Badcock, 2010; Badcock et al., 2015; Figes, 1989; Friedgut, 1989; Getzler, 1983; Penter, 2000; Pipes, 1964; Raleigh, 1986; Sablin, 2016, 2018; Snow, 1977; Suny, 1972).

With the “imperial turn” (Gerasimov, 2017; for an overview of literature, see Sunderland, 2016) in historiography opening up national and local histories of the revolution, the spaces between “Russian” and “non-Russian” peripheries, such as the non-Ukrainian majority city of Odessa or the multiethnic region of the Russian Far East, remain understudied. Seeking to highlight the significance of local factors on such “middle-ground” peripheries and open up a new, comparative discussion, this article looked for similar patterns and differences in the revolutionary processes in the two maritime peripheries at the two different ends of the empire. Investigating the national, regional, and social factors that shaped the revolution in their complexity and interconnections, the article also sought to contribute to the understanding of the new Soviet regime in the making, specifically the new and diverse institution of soviets.

Reaching back to the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 and the anti-parliamentarism of anarchist intellectuals and activists (Kriven’kii, 1998, pp. 230–234, 241–242; Kropotkin, 1906, pp. 89, 101), the soviets quickly turned from the idealized bodies of class-based socialist democracy, alternative to its liberal counterpart, into an instrument of the Bolshevik party dictatorship. Between Lenin’s incorporation of the anarchist anti-parliamentarism into the Bolshevik program and the consolidation of the new unequal and indirect representation in the Soviet Constitution of 1918 (Rossiiskaia Sotsialisticheskai Federativnaia Sovetskaia Respublika, 1918), the practice of soviet rule in the peripheries proved as diverse as the empire itself. Although the geneses of the two regimes in Odessa and the Russian Far East were similar, with roots in the imperial practices and discourses, their functioning heavily depended on the particular social and ethnic constellations, as well as the international contexts.

**Contexts and roots**

In the multiethnic port city of Odessa, the revolution developed in the area of tension between the social revolution in Petrograd and the national revolution in Kiev. After the October Revolution in Petrograd and the proclamation of the Ukrainian People’s Republic by the Ukrainian Government in Kiev in November 1917, Odessa was increasingly caught up in the tensions created by the growing Ukrainian–Russian conflict between the Petrograd-based Soviet government and the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kiev. The Rada made territorial claims to Odessa and the Kherson Province, while complex interrelationships developed between the events in Petrograd, Kiev, and Odessa.
Odessa’s proximity to the Romanian Front and the influence of various military organizations there had also significant impact on the course of events.

In the region of the Russian Far East, the revolution played out differently, yet there were some similarities. The region was claimed by the Bolshevik (Irkutsk) and anti-Bolshevik (Tomsk and Omsk) Siberian governments, while internally there was a competition between two Soviet polities—the Far Eastern one centered in Khabarovsk and the Amur Republic centered in Blagoveschensk. Moderate socialists, united around zemstvo and municipal self-government, and Cossack warlords proved to be the main opposition to the Bolsheviks. The social and national aspects of the revolution intertwined in the competition between the Slavic (Russian and Ukrainian) and East Asian (Chinese and Korean) settlers based on their unequal access to economic resources. Furthermore, there was a regional Ukrainian national movement which sought connection to the Central Rada in Kiev as part of the larger post-imperial Ukraine, while many Koreans envisioned the region as the base for their struggle against the Japanese Empire. The location of Vladivostok, Russia’s only functioning ocean port during World War I, in the region made it of prime strategic value for the Allied command, resulting in the naval presence of the United States, Great Britain, and especially Japan there already in late 1917 to early 1918.

In Odessa, the urban population, which was firmly integrated into Russian majority society both culturally and linguistically, rejected the Central Rada’s claims to the city. The Ukrainian nationalist movement held a very weak influence even among the small Ukrainian minority. The majority of Odessa’s residents did not identify with an autonomous Ukrainian Republic within a Russian Federation, and certainly did not identify with an independent Ukrainian state. At the same time, the Bolshevik Party, which claimed the power of the state in Russia after the Petrograd October Revolution, did not enjoy the same popularity in Odessa as in the capital cities. This was evident, for example, during the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917, when the Odessa Bolsheviks gained only 19% of the votes in the city. Neither Petrograd nor Kiev promised a path that met with approval among the majority of the urban population. Odessa’s residents were left with the choice of the lesser evil.

Odessa is a wonderful case study on account of its socially and ethnically heterogeneous population, which enables an examination of the complex interpenetration of the social and nationalist revolutions of 1917 in Ukraine, and the social mobilization of the urban population along the dividing lines of “class” and “nation.” The lack of backing for the Central Rada in the major cities, in which industrial resources and strategically important communication and transport facilities were concentrated, contributed significantly to the failure of the efforts to found a Ukrainian state. In the confused historical situation of the revolution, and in view of the unresolved power struggle between the Ukrainian Central Rada and the Petrograd Soviet government, a power vacuum developed in Odessa that provided particular opportunities for the evolution of aspirations to local autonomy. They found expression in two competing concepts, the liberal, bourgeois “free city” and the proletarian “Soviet Republic of Odessa.”

As an economic concept, local autonomy already had a long tradition in Odessa: From 1819 to 1859, Odessa had been one of the two special economic zones with free ports in the Russian Empire. By this policy, the imperial government intended to attract foreign maritime trade and thereby support the economic development of the whole region of Novorossiia. In 1859, the special economic status of Odessa was abolished, mainly to reinforce the integration of the city into the empire and to stop Odessa’s development into a “state within a state.” Over the ensuing years, local economic autonomy nevertheless remained a priority objective of the economic elites in Odessa (Hausmann, 1998, p. 56). Besides, from 1803 until 1917, Odessa constituted a separate administrative division, a so-called gradonachal’stvo (“city governorship”). The head of the gradonachal’stvo had the same authority as provincial governors.

When the concept of local autonomy in Odessa came to life again in December 1917, it expressed not so much the demands of the population for economic autonomy, but rather those for political autonomy in the face of “forced Ukrainization.” Furthermore, the city dwellers feared that Odessa would become only the “second” city in Ukraine after the Ukrainian capital Kiev, which could negatively influence its economic growth. The Municipal Duma commission under the leadership of the university lecturer G. I. Tiktin worked out maximum and minimum programs for Odessa’s future: the maximum program provided for the institutionalization of Odessa as a sovereign state with full membership in the future Russian Federation. For this, the German city of Hamburg served as a model. The minimum program intended for autonomy within the Ukrainian People’s Republic, following the example of Croatia as an autonomous region in Hungary.

The composition of the new government in Odessa remained a disputed issue. Whereas the Municipal Duma demanded the participation of its members in it, some deputies of the city Soviet preferred an entirely Soviet organ. In the end, a pragmatic solution was found: a provisional government of the “Free City” of Odessa had been appointed temporarily until the final resolution of the question. Its 10 members included 2 Duma representatives. It appears that the autonomy concept was also an attempt to integrate the three largest ethno-confessional groups of Odessa’s population, namely the Russians, Jews, and Ukrainians. At least this was promised by the new language policy: official languages of the local government would simultaneously be Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish. The project of declaring Odessa a “free city” probably got
the approval of the majority of Odessa’s population, although a planned referendum, which could have given more precise information, never took place. The concept had been supported by the Municipal Duma and the local soviets. It found supporters not only in the Constitutional Democratic (KD) Party but also in the socialist parties including the Bolsheviks (for a detailed discussion, see Penter, 2000).

The revolution in the Russian Far East was informed by several comparable discourses and developments inherited from the empire. Just as the free-port status was taken from Odessa, a duty-free regime (porto franco) was introduced in the recently annexed Amur territory (Priamur’e) in the 1860s, attracting settlers from Europe and Asia and contributing to the booming rise of Vladivostok and a less dramatic yet significant development of Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk. Despite the abolition of duty-free trade in 1900, the population continued to grow in the region thanks to the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway and the extension of Russia’s military presence. The duty-free regime was reintroduced during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, and keeping it proved to be a prime issue for regional administrators, business circles, and peasant settlers alike. In the Third and Fourth Duma of the Russian Empire, the deputies from the Amur, Maritime, and other North Asian regions campaigned against its revocation individually and as part of the Siberian caucus. The consolidation of the region, which became commonly known as the Russian Far East during the Duma debates, was also stimulated by the formation of the Priamur Governor Generalship with the center in Khabarovsk in 1884 and the brief existence of the Viceroyalty of the Far East (1903–1905), which did not survive the Russian defeat against Japan (Milezhik, 2007; Safronov, 2012; Stephan, 1994, pp. 67–68). Despite the predominance of opposing voices in the region, the duty-free regime was abolished in the ports of the Far East on January 16, 1909, although some goods indispensable to the settlers remained free of tariffs (Gorchakov et al., 1999, pp. 66–79; Troitskaia, 2012, pp. 326–334).

The similarities between the two discourses (especially on the part of federalism and autonomism) notwithstanding (Von Hagen, 2007), Siberian Regionalism proved much less potent as Ukrainian nationalism. The idea that North Asia was different from the rest of the empire in economic and ethnographic terms (Iadrintsev, 1892) and the slogan of its autonomy seemed to have attracted interest only among regional intellectuals. Siberian Regionalism nevertheless contributed to the debates on the reconstruction of the Russian Empire into a federation (or a unitary state with autonomies) and, since the late 1917, helped rally the anti-Bolshevik opposition around Siberia as a polity alternative to Soviet Russia. Although there were some supporters of Siberian Regionalism in the Russian Far East, the general attitude toward being part of an autonomous Siberia before the October coup in Petrograd was disinterest. The seven representatives of the Amur and Maritime Regions were a minority among the 182 delegates at the Siberian Regional Congress in Tomsk in October 1917, and none of them joined the Siberian Executive Committee, which was supposed to coordinate the formation of the autonomy (Pervyi Sibirskii oblastnoi s’ezd 8-17 oktiabria 1917 goda v g. Tomsk: Postanovleniia s’ezda, 1917).

This did not mean that Far Eastern politicians were reluctant to defend regional interests. On the contrary, the socialist State Duma deputy Aleksandr Rusanov, who was appointed Commissar of the Provisional Government for the Far East, and others participated in revolutionary self-organization of the Russian Far East, which involved inter alia the convocation of regional congresses of soviets and the formation of the Far Eastern Committee of Soviets in Khabarovsk.9 Regional authorities appealed for the reintroduction of duty-free trade, but the Provisional Government rejected it.10 Overall, regional politics featured few confrontations until the fall of 1917. With the exception of Vladivostok, where like in other major urban centers of the empire anarchism and radical socialism gained a foothold over the summer of 1917, those politicians and activists who supported democratic change through universally elected self-government bodies (zemstvos and municipal dumas) and the All-Russian Constituent Assembly predominated in the region. Even the Social Democrats had only split into the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks in the fall of 1917.11

Rusanov’s initiative to conceptualize a Far Eastern autonomy, however, brought little result, and a minor congress of revolutionary authorities, which he convened on the matter of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in August 1917, agreed that only a fourth level of zemstvo, that is economic self-government, was desirable for the Russian Far East.12 The formation of the universally elected zemstvos, which were supposed to be the main step toward the elections to the Constituent Assembly, was interrupted by the coup in Petrograd. The vast majority of regional organizations, however, voiced their support of Rusanov and the forming zemstvo authorities.13 The supporters of the organized Ukrainian and Korean movements in the region also tended to join the moderate socialist coalitional authorities.14 The November 1917 elections to the Constituent Assembly became a major success for the SRs in the Russian Far East (with only one Bolshevik elected thanks to the Vladivostok voters), reaffirming the broad support of the population for democratic development.15

Just like in the case of Odessa, the first proper revolutionary government in the Far East—in the sense of one claiming supreme authority—emerged as a response to the political chaos of the October Revolution in Petrograd and the formation of a Siberian Soviet government in Irkutsk. Rusanov convened the First Territorial Congress of Municipal and Zemstvo Self-Governments (Khabarovsk, December 11, 1917) of three representatives from the Amur
Region and six from the Maritime Region and passed his authority to it. The congress then formed the Provisional Bureau of Zemstvo and Municipal Authorities under the SR Mikhail Timofeev. In its first act, the Bureau proclaimed supreme civil authority in the Russian Far East. Although there was a Bolshevik representative from the Maritime Region, Abram (Aleksandr) Krasnoshchekov who recently returned from the United States (where he was naturalized as Abraham Stroller Tobinson), he only supported the transition of authority from Rusanov to the congress but not from the congress to the Bureau (Troitskaya, 2017, pp. 309–311).

Organizational forms

The first coalitional constellations in both Odessa and the Russian Far East did not survive until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. Indeed, by the end of 1917, the different social, ethnic, and political groups of Odessa population united in their support of the “free city” as a pragmatic concept of local autonomy, which appeared to be an opportunity for them not to get involved in the Ukrainian–Russian conflict and to run their own politics in Odessa. But the Ukrainian–Russian dualism of the concept was possible only within a Russian Federation. After the Central Rada had declared the independence of Ukraine on January 9, 1918, the concept lost its basis. In addition, there were several other reasons why the city dwellers withdrew their sympathies from the Central Rada and actively or passively supported the Soviet government in Petrograd.

In January 1918, the growing tensions led to struggles between the Red Guard and Ukrainian soldiers in the streets of Odessa. With the support of warships of the Black Sea Fleet, the Red Guard won the battle and the “Soviet Republic of Odessa” was established under the leadership of Bolshevik emissaries from Petrograd. Following the model of the Soviet of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) in Petrograd, the new government of Odessa was called the “Soviet of People’s Commissars.” As in Petrograd, it consisted nearly exclusively of Bolsheviks, some of them emissaries from the party headquarters. In formal terms, the new government of Odessa subordinated both to Sovnarkom and to the new regional Soviet government of Ukraine in Kharkov, which had been formed already in December 1917.

Just like the Central Rada, the Extraordinary Siberian Regional Congress (Tomsk, December 6–15, 1917) refused to recognize Sovnarkom and the Irkutsk Soviet government (Tsentrkosibr) and established provisional Siberian authorities, which in January 1918 consolidated into the Provisional Siberian Government, which nevertheless had soon to relocate to the Chinese Eastern Railway Zone. In late December 1917, major street battles, second only to Moscow in death toll, took place in Irkutsk, but the Bolsheviks managed to keep control of the city (Shilovskii, 2004).

The formation of the first Soviet government in the Russian Far East, however, was less violent. The Bureau of Zemstvo and Municipal Authorities did not become a de facto government on December 11, 1917. Krasnoshchekov, who participated in both the self-government congress and the Third Far Eastern Congress of Soviets, about to start in Khabarovsk, organized the arrest of Rusanov through the Khabarovsk Soviet (Popov, n.d.). At the latter congress, which opened under Krasnoshchekov’s chairmanship on December 12, 1917, the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs were a majority due to the radicalization of local soviets. Despite some opposition from moderate socialists, the congress proclaimed Soviet rule with the goal of “abolishing private property and establishing socialist democracy” on December 14, 1917. Although the declaration of Soviet rule included support for the Constituent Assembly, it cautioned workers, soldiers, and peasants that “real balance of economic power” and not “debates and paper constitutions” of the parliament would resolve the issues of class struggle (Zav’ialova et al., 2015, pp. 205–206). On December 20, 1917, the congress elected the new Far Eastern Committee of Soviets.

Yet the Bolsheviks did not establish a solid Soviet government in the region. The involvement of the Allied forces in the Chinese Eastern Railway Zone resulted in the consolidation of anti-Bolshevik forces there. Furthermore, in late December 1917–early January 1918, Japanese and British ships entered the port of Vladivostok. Attempting to consolidate their rule in view of the foreign support for municipal and zemstvo bodies, on January 5, 1918, the Bolsheviks and their allies reformed the Far Eastern Committee of Soviets into the Far Eastern Territorial Committee of Soviets of Workers,’ Soldiers,’ and Peasants’ Deputies and Self-Government Bodies (Dal’kom), opening to zemstvo representatives. Krasnoshchekov (chairman) and other Bolsheviks took up most of the seats in the Khabarovsk-based Soviet government.

The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd the very next day seemed to have consolidated the Soviet regime, “legitimized” by the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Yet the relations between the Soviet governments on the ground proved challenging to a large extent due to their different approaches to the very idea of Soviet rule. The relationship between the Soviet Republic of Odessa and the Soviet government of Ukraine was characterized by rivalry. Already the organizational structure of the Soviet Republic of Odessa, which had its own Commissar for Foreign Affairs, expressed its autonomous power claims. Until March 1918, three independent Soviet republics—of Odessa, Crimea and Donetsk–Krivoi Rog—had been established in Ukraine and competed with each other for food and other resources. The individual Soviet governments felt responsible at best toward Petrograd but not toward the Kharkov Ukrainian Soviet government, which claimed authority over whole Ukraine (Vargatiuk & Kuras, 1990, pp. 601–604).
In contrast to the radical Irkutsk Soviet government, Krasnoschekov’s conciliatory stance toward zemstvo prevailed in the Russian Far East, despite the opposition of the Vladivostok Soviet and the leader of Blagoveschensk Bolsheviks Fedor Mukhin. With zemstvos supposedly representing the peasants, Dal’kom built a system different from that implemented by Sovnarkom, which gradually eliminated zemstvo. At the same time, it reserved only 5 out of 23 seats for regional zemstvo, while the remaining 18 passed to the soviets of workers, ‘soldiers,’ and (still barely existing locally) peasants’ deputies. This ensured the soviets’ control over Dal’kom. The Maritime Regional Zemstvo Assembly nevertheless sanctioned the authority of Dal’kom, which proclaimed itself the “supreme body of Soviet government” in the Far East on January 7, 1918. The support of the Maritime Zemstvo helped Krasnoschekov ensure peaceful dissolution of the still lingering Bureau of Zemstvo and Municipal Authorities. Dal’kom, however, did not subordinate to Irkutsk and also established own Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Popov, n.d.; Semenov, 1969, pp. 15, 31–37, 44, 47, 50–51, 129). A more radical Soviet emerged in Blagoveschensk, where Mukhin came to prominence thanks to the support of sailors of the Amur Flotilla and metalworkers. It did not openly challenge Dal’kom, yet carried out its own policies substituting zemstvo and municipal bodies with soviets (Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 36–46).

The Republic of Odessa: a social revolution

Unlike in Petrograd and Moscow, where the Bolshevik leadership had been setting the tone in the soviets since early September, the Odessa Soviet, which was still dominated by the SRs and Mensheviks in January 1918, was not suited as the headquarters of the October Revolution. Among the most radical forces and bearers of the revolutionary movement that led to the establishment of the Soviet government were the qualified industrial workers. This “vanguard” of the working class, from whose ranks the majority of the Red Guards were recruited, included above all the workers of the armament factories and railway workshops as well as the seamen of the merchant fleet. However, their number in Odessa was much smaller than in the capitals. The Bolsheviks in Odessa found important support in the “Soviet of the Unemployed.” Odessa had an influential unemployed movement in 1917, which created its own soviet and stormed onto the city’s political stage with radical demands. Due to the war, revolution, and economic decline, a very large new underclass had developed in the city, made up of a diverse array of people (Penter, 2015). According to the trade unions, approximately 6,000 qualified workers and 5,000 unskilled workers were affected by unemployment in October 1917. In addition to this, there were approximately 10,000 unemployed soldiers and a large number of unemployed people from graduate professions, whose precise number was difficult to determine.22

The unemployed Jewish teacher Khaim Ryt recognized the revolutionary potential of this diverse new underclass. Ryt himself remembered later:

We understood the term “unemployed” very broadly: we included all those who at that time could not and did not find work for their workers’ hands. As it turned out in retrospect, all the miserable people, from professional beggars to factory workers or craftsmen who had been thrown onto the streets by war or revolution, gathered there.23

Together with the large number of the unemployed and the general power vacuum, the emergence of Ryt, a talented orator who was capable of uniting the underclass under the flag of unemployment, proved a major factor for the movement’s success. The Soviet of the Unemployed was also attractive to groups within the urban Jewish population. As far as is apparent from the sources, interethnic conflicts were of no significance within the Soviet of the Unemployed. By contrast to other parts of Russia, where the records show that the unemployed movement occasionally became involved in anti-Semitic pogroms, this was not the case in Odessa (Budnitskii, 2006, p. 275; Kleinbort, 1925, pp. 288–290; Kolesnikov, 1923, pp. 37–39; Penter, 2000, pp. 298–320).

When fighting for power in Odessa broke out, many jobless men also joined the ranks of the Red Guard and took part in battles against the Ukrainian Central Rada’s troops. In return, however, they wanted a stake in “Soviet power” and made massive demands that went as far as participation in local government with the same number of representatives as the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets. The great influence of the Soviet of the Unemployed on the first Soviet government is testified by the memoirs of Vladimir Iudovskii, the Bolshevik chairman of the Odessa Soviet of People’s Commissars:

Khaim Ryt stirred up the unemployed against us, and if he did not agree with us, then he operated with these unemployed people. He indisputably held a special kind of power in his hands (Iudovskii, 1927, pp. 143–144).

The unemployed were a real social force with the potential to become dangerous for the recently installed Soviet government in Odessa. This was also evident when the slogan “All power to the Soviet of the Unemployed!” was heard at mass demonstrations of unemployed people.24 The unemployed directed massive demands not just at the bourgeoisie, but also at the workers, whom they called “aristocrats.” When conflicts between the workers and the unemployed escalated, the nascent Soviet government wanted to resolve the problem by “cleansing the city” of the unemployed. Above all, the numerous unemployed people who had moved to the city were to be sent back to their

[1] Penter and Sabin
home regions. However, the Soviet government did not succeed in implementing this plan.²⁵ On February 19, 1918, the presidiums of the different soviets in the city jointly declared the Soviet of the Unemployed to be an “anti-Soviet” organization.²⁶

A few days earlier, Ryt had stated at a meeting of the Soviet’s Executive Committee, “Indeed, there are two powers in the city, two social forces—they are the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies and the Soviet of the Unemployed. The power apparatus will soon fall, but the flag of anarchism will remain.”²⁷ The Soviet of the unemployed even managed to demand a contribution of 10 million rubles from the Odessa bourgeoisie (an extraordinary amount for that time). Ryt believed that the Workers’ Soviet only united the skilled workers and therefore no longer represented the quintessence of the revolution but had outlived its time and needed to be replaced by the Soviet of the Unemployed.²⁸ With his Soviet of the Unemployed, Ryt posited a concept that was intended to integrate all the representatives of the underclasses, including traditionally stigmatized groups, and as such was opposed to the Soviet and trade union functionaries’ attachment to “elitist” ideas about the superiority of certain occupations and the characteristics of different classes.

In the context of the political split and given that the first Soviet government in Odessa was soon deposed by the invasion of the Central Powers, its activities were quite provisional and uncoordinated. Just as in Petrograd, the most important political posts were held by a small Bolshevik elite. The lack of binding guidelines led to the commissars handling the applications of the urban citizens according to their “own revolutionary awareness,”²⁹ as a coworker of the Commissar for Labor remembered. The decrees of the People’s Commissars were often issued according to their role model in Petrograd, but this was not necessarily always the case. For example, while the Soviet government in Petrograd had merged all private banks and declared them to be state property, Leonid Ruzer, the Commissar for Finance in Odessa, was seeking the cooperation of the private bankers.³⁰ The municipal budget continued to be administered by members of the Municipal Duma. Even though the Duma was officially discontinued on February 20, its technical apparatus was indispensable for the Soviet government. Therefore, all employees and members of the Duma were instructed to stay at their posts until further notice. All the supply facilities stayed under the control of the Duma as well.³¹ The independence of the Soviet government in Odessa from the central authorities also became visible during the imminent territorial conflict with Romania, caused by the occupation of Bessarabia by the latter. In this situation the Soviet republic of Odessa was able to pursue an autonomous foreign policy, signing a peace treaty with Romania at the end of February 1918, which led to the withdrawal of Romanian troops from Bessarabia.³²

There can be no doubt that the short term of the first Soviet government in Odessa was terminated by external factors, namely the invasion of the Central Powers. Still, while retreating from Odessa, the people’s commissars could not ignore the fact that they had nearly no support among the city population. They were able to gain the sympathies of the lower classes for the fight against the Central Rada as fast as they had lost them when it became evident that the Soviet government was not able to resolve the urgent social and supply problems of the city. The Soviet government destroyed its initial support with unpopular slogans like the repeated call for mobilization. Another reason for the loss of trust was its failure to restore order and to effectively fight the increasing crime. In fact, after the change of power, the criminals in Odessa experienced “paradisiac times” and the city turned more and more into a “legal vacuum.”³³ Hence, the short period of the first Soviet government in Odessa was to a large extent a period of complete anarchy and powerlessness.

In the years of the Russian Civil War, authorities changed in Odessa nine times. The Red Army, the Ukrainian nationalists, and Anton Denikin’s White Army competed for power together with the German, Austrian, and French troops. During this turbulent period violent crimes were on the rise in the city, and the lines between criminal and revolutionary activity remained fuzzy (Yeykelis, 1997). Soviet control was finally consolidated in February 1920. From 1920 onward, Odessa was part of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic and part of the newly founded Soviet Union since late 1922. The concept of local autonomy in the form of an independent Soviet republic of Odessa was not to be relaunched. The economic enterprises of the city and the port had suffered enormous destruction during the Civil War, which confronted the new Soviet government with major reconstruction tasks. At the same time, Odessa had not been hit by anti-Jewish violence to the same extent as many other cities in Ukraine, which were convulsed by pogroms in 1918–1919. This partly owed to the well-organized Jewish self-defense units in Odessa (Abramson, 1999; Klier & Lambroza, 1992).

During the New Economic Policy (NEP) era, the Soviet government kept a rather loose grip on the city, permitting private trade to contend with shortage and social problems. During the first half of the 1920s crime in Odessa remained rampant, and black marketeering as well as smuggling across Romania flourished. The Bolshevik government repeatedly declared war against bandits and gangs who terrorized the population. Odessa played a prominent role in the cultural explosion that emerged (to a large degree outside of state control) in literature and film in the 1920s. The open atmosphere of the Black Sea port city in the 1920s is testified to by the literary works of Isaak Babel, Il’ia Il’f, and Evgenii Petrov—the mythmakers of Odessa in the early Soviet literature (King, 2012, pp. 177–200; Tanny, 2011, pp. 82–90).
The Republic of the Far East: a nexus of global politics

Given the configuration of the Far Eastern periphery in terms of its territory, population density, and international situation, the events there developed along a different logic. Despite its conciliatory stance toward zemstvo, Dal’kom launched radical policies, involving confiscations, requisitions, and censorship, in January–February 1918. As an authority, Dal’kom was present only in the cities of Khabarovsk and Vladivostok and the mining settlement of Suchan. Military-revolutionary committees in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk arrested bank directors, managers, newspaper editors, and officers. Dal’kom’s land redistribution, which included allotments to Koreans, received cold reception from Cossacks and old settlers. Grain requisitions caused further hostility, and the SRs remained popular in rural areas throughout 1918. The Red Guard of arsenal workers, the sailors of the Amur Flotilla, garrison troops, the “internationalists” (former German and Austrian POWs), and Korean groups, however, became the backbone of the new regime, while the demobilized soldiers and Cossacks, many of whom returned home thanks to the Soviet truce with the Central Powers, helped the Bolshevik regime in Transbaikalia (Stephan, 1994, pp. 114–115, 117–118; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 36–46).

The anti-Bolshevik forces, which in the Far East featured the non-radicalized Cossacks, attempted to topple the Soviet regime in March 1918, just when Krasnoschekov was in Blagoveshchensk seeking to ensure Mukhin’s subordination. Krasnoschekov and other Soviet leaders were arrested, and the moderate anti-Bolshevik leaders attempted to create a coalitional authority of self-government bodies, the Amur peasant soviet, and the Amur Cossacks, with the participation of workers’ soviets. Yet the offensive of the 12,000-strong Red Guard, which then also included Ukrainian new settlers, reinforced by the returnees from the front, forced the anti-Bolsheviks to retreat to China later the same month. The forces of the Cossack warlord Grigorii Semenov, which advanced in Transbaikalia, were also pushed to China, but those of Ivan Kalmykov, another Cossack, managed to get a foothold in the eastern part of the Far East for 3 months (Rynkov, 2012, p. 132; Semenov, 1969, pp. 56, 78–81, 86, 88, 90–91, 127; Stephan, 1994, pp. 119–121; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 48–51).

Following these clashes and the logic of the resolutions of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets, two Soviets of People’s Commissars emerged in Chita and Blagoveshchensk in late March—early April 1918. Furthermore, the coalition of Bolsheviks, Left SRs, SR Maximalists, and anarchists under Mukhin proclaimed the formation of the Amur Toilers’ Socialist Republic or “the autonomous Amur Socialist Republic” as “part of the Great Russian Soviet Federative Republic” and engaged in even more radical policies than Dal’kom or the Blagoveshchensk Soviet before the proclamation of the new republic. In the meantime, Japanese and British troops took control of Vladivostok following an attack on Japanese businessmen in early April 1918. In this context, the Fourth Far Eastern Congress of Soviets (Khabarovsk, April 8–14, 1918) foregrounded both defensive nationalist and regionalist slogans. Krasnoschekov spoke of the “united toiling people of the Far East,” which was “detached from European Russia” and “surrounded by a hostile world,” and the region of the Far East (which he extended to include the Transbaikal and Yakut Regions). Although he underlined its belonging to Russia and accused the anti-Bolsheviks of conspiring with foreigners, Krasnoschekov called the congress “a constituent assembly” of the new Far East of the toiling people. The congress’s resolution on nationalization called the region “the workers’ and peasants’ Soviet Republic of the Far East,” but mentioned that it remained part of Russia and denounced “the traitors of the people and the Motherland” (Semenov, 1969, pp. 112–113, 115, 118–128, 153; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 51, 54–57, 61, 63).

Although the Japanese withdrew on April 25, 1918, returning Vladivostok to Soviet control (Moffat, 2015, pp. 55–56), Dal’kom further consolidated its autonomous authority renaming itself the Far Eastern Soviet of People’s Commissars (Dal’sovnarkom) on May 8, 1918. This may be seen as a response to the formation of the Amur Republic, which Krasnoschekov criticized for “separatism” and for which Dal’kom competed with Tsentrosibir. Dal’sovnarkom predominantly consisted of Bolsheviks, and Krasnoschekov was its Chairman and Commissar for Foreign Affairs. The Commissariat of War took over the territorial command of the Red Army, consolidating the region’s state-like status. Dal’sovnarkom engaged in independent policies, abolishing, for instance, administrative regions. The Far Eastern Soviet government envisioned the new Far Eastern polity as ethnically inclusive. The Fourth Far Eastern Congress resolved to allot land to foreigners, especially the Chinese and Koreans, on equal basis with the Russians. Dal’kom appealed to Sovnarkom for naturalizing all those Koreans who lived in Russia for many years and worked the land themselves. Dal’sovnarkom eliminated all discriminatory passport restrictions on the Koreans and Chinese making them equal to other foreigners (Klipov, 1957, pp. 106–107; Semenov, 1969, pp. 131, 137–152, 171–175; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 55–62).

Krasnoschekov claimed that Dal’sovnarkom allowed full subordination of the region to Moscow without the unnecessary mediation of Tsentrosibir,33 but in practice there was no full subordination. In May 1918, for instance, Dal’sovnarkom received a telegram from the Moscow authorities, forbidding all local bodies to engage in nationalizations without an approval. Dal’sovnarkom, however, interpreted the telegram as an official permission to continue nationalizations. The same month Dal’sovnarkom openly rejected the suggestion of Tsentrosibir’ for “closer cooperation” (Semenov, 1969, pp. 178–179, 181–182, 185; Tsypkin et al., 1933, p. 64). Still, Moscow did not seem to recognize the reform of the Soviet
government in the Far East calling Dal'sovnarkom the “Far Eastern Territorial Soviet” but not a “Soviet of People’s Commissars.” According to Vladimir Vilenskii (Sibiriakov) of Tsretosibir, Krasnoshechekov’s “large personal ambition” undermined the united Soviet front in the summer of 1918—during the full-scale Allied Intervention of Japanese, American, British, French, Chinese troops which joined the Czechoslovak Legion already on site—and contributed to the swift collapse of all Soviet governments in North Asia (Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 84–86; Vilenskii-Sibiriakov, 1926, pp. 16–17).

Dal’sovnarkom staked on anti-imperialist solidarity instead. According to Albert Rhys Williams, Chinese officials were benevolent during their negotiations with Dal’sovnarkom in late June 1918, thanks to its policies toward the Chinese (Williams, 1969, pp. 307–316). The stake, however, did not pay off. Although in May 1918 Krasnoshechekov sponsored the creation of the Union of Korean Socialists in Khabarovsk, the majority of Korean activists, many of them being Russian citizens, preferred to side with the SRs. In June 1918, a major Korean congress did not support Dal’sovnarkom despite Krasnoshechekov’s speech and promises of “many good things” to the Koreans. Instead, it resolved to demand national self-determination on the basis of “freedom, equality, and fraternity,” siding with the moderate socialist opposition to the Bolsheviks (Anosov, 1928, pp. 19–21; Troitskaia, 2004, pp. 11–12).

Ukrainian nationalists also did not submit to Dal’sovnarkom. A regional Ukrainian congress criticized Soviet policies in April 1918 and resolved to continue independent self-organization through ethno-national radas (councils). Furthermore, one such rada in Manchuria, the Chinese Eastern Railway Zone, proclaimed the territories of Ukrainian settlement in the Far East (the Green Wedge) as part of the Ukrainian state in May 1918. After the Far Eastern Secretariat, the executive body of the regional Ukrainian movement, declared its neutrality in the Russian Civil War in June 1918, Dal’sovnarkom forced its closure and departure from Khabarovsk (Chernomaz, 2009, pp. 165–166, 168, 171, 451–455; Chornomaz, 2011, p. 227; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 90–94).

Although they were ultimately toppled by foreign troops, the positions of Krasnoshechekov’s and Mukhin’s governments among the peasants also dwindled. The Fifth Far Eastern Congress of Soviets (Khabarovsk, August 25–28, 1918) backed Krasnoshechekov’s government, opposing the intervention, but a rival peasant congress, which happened simultaneously, resolved to recall Cossacks and peasants from the Red Army and support a democratic authority. Furthermore, it welcomed the Allied forces and demanded that Mukhin’s government, loosely subordinate to Dal’sovnarkom, gave up its authority. Following the advance of the Japanese and anti-Bolshevik forces, Dal’sovnarkom formally dissolved on September 17, 1918. Although eventually nationalist mobilization helped the Bolsheviks in view of the intervention, with a large guerilla movement emerging in the region, some Red Guardsmen and “internationalists” went over to Semenov and Kalmykov (Stephan, 1994, p. 130; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 87–88).

During the Russian Civil War, Semenov and other warlords controlled much of the region, although it was nominally subordinate to the Aleksandr Kolchak government in Omsk, whereas Japanese and American troops were stationed in major cities and along the railway. The presence of the large intervention force contributed to the large-scale guerilla movement, with different affiliations of individual bands and the participation of Chinese and Korean combatants. With the fall of the Kolchak government in early 1920, several regional governments of different political orientations—from anarchist to monarchist—emerged in the areas east of Baikal. The Bolsheviks and their sympathizers managed to establish the nominally democratic and capitalist Far Eastern Republic (FER) in 1920, Krasnoshechekov, who returned as its leader, drew direct parallels with the 1918 Soviet Republic of the Far East. The FER, however, managed to consolidate its control over the region only in late October 1922, when the Japanese troops departed from the mainland part of the region (remaining nevertheless on Northern Sakhalin) and the last oppositional armed groups were defeated. In November 1922, the FER was transformed into the Far Eastern Region, which had some informal autonomy, and in December 1922 became part of the nascent Soviet Union (Sablin, 2018).

The foreign policy considerations, including the export of the socialist revolution to Mongolia, Korea, and beyond, informed the Bolshevik authorities during and after the Russian Civil War, while the region’s diversity also remained an important issue over the 1920s. The Buryat-Mongol activists managed to get part of the region included into their newly formed autonomous republic, but no Korean autonomy was created. The NEP period featured the continuing presence of foreign business, with the Japanese receiving especially many concessions. After the Japanese formally ended the occupation of Northern Sakhalin in 1925, the region was transformed in the Far Eastern Territory, and the appeals of the regional officials to formalize its autonomy were denied. The Russian Far East remained nevertheless accessible for foreign business well into the 1930s and, in the case of the Japanese concessions on Northern Sakhalin, into the early 1940s (despite the military clashes in the late 1930s). The continued fears of the Soviet officials to lose the region, however, contributed to the increased military presence in the 1930s and the deportations of the Chinese and Koreans. The deportation of almost all Koreans from the region to Central Asia in 1937 became one of the largest Stalinist ethnic cleansings (Chernolutskaiia, 2011; Khromov, 2006; Sablin, 2018).

Conclusion

The imperial structures, featuring economic autonomy and openness, population diversity, and special administrative
status, proved crucial for the design and justification of the first revolutionary authorities in both cases. In ways similar
to each other, the two peripheries did not immediately
come part of the Petrograd October Revolution. In both
cases, it was external factors, including the formation of
alternative polities, which contributed to the consolidation of
“autonomous” units. When the first Soviet regimes were
established, they also proved similar in the most basic organ-
zational forms. Yet, despite taking the names of Soviets of
People’s Commissars, the Soviet governments of Odessa and
the Russian Far East functioned differently. As ad hoc com-
mittees, they focused on different issues—the social and eco-
nomic problems in the former case and the international
situation and ethnic diversity in the latter. The two republics
relied on different principles, had different memberships,
policies, and plans, with the republic of Odessa concentrat-
ing on local matters, and that of the Far East supposedly
seeking to export the revolution to East Asia.

Ironically, however, the very differences between the
two distant Soviet republics may be seen as evidence of
genuine makeshift Soviet federalism of 1918. Indeed, the
Soviet (Bolshevik and Left SR) leadership in Petrograd
offered only rough guidelines and declared its respect for
regional autonomy, perhaps without having a clear plan
about the ultimate design of a Soviet federation or per-
haps as a mere rhetorical device. The rough guidelines
reflected in the reliance on soviets, as bodies of unequal
representation, and in the formation of Soviets of People’s
Commissars, which gave the whole process a dash of
structuration. In this respect, the implementation of the
principle of regional and local self-determination, alter-
native to national self-determination, was not region-
locality-specific. At the same time, the adaptation of the
respective Soviet governments to specific problems and
conditions reflected the very idea of federalism as decen-
centralized and nuanced governance.

Howbeit, the two republics fell to external factors.
Although both of them had lost much of the popular sup-
sport by the time of their dissolution, there is no way to
know if they could become part of a more diverse Soviet
federation. Krasnoschekov’s attempts to revive his vision
of regional autonomy in the FER (1920–1922) demonstr-
ated, however, that the Moscow leadership was not inter-
ested in regional self-determination, let alone any genuine
federalism (see Sablin, 2018). Despite the existence of
larger administrative regions in Soviet Russia and the
Soviet Union, the ethno-national principle became the sole
principle of Soviet federalism on paper, while in practice
Soviet federalism largely proved nominal.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for
the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This arti-
cle was completed as part of the project “ENTPAR: Entangled
Parliamentarisms: Constitutional Practices in Russia, Ukraine,
China and Mongolia, 1905–2005,” which received funding from the
European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s
Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement
no. 755504).

Notes
1. This name was used once in an official document, but the
formation of the Far Eastern Committee and later the Soviet
of People’s Commissars with foreign and war depart-
ments implied the claims to the region’s political autonomy
throughout the period.
2. Here, the region is understood as the territory of the pre-rev-
olutionary Primur Governor Generalship encompassing the
Amur, Maritime, Sakhalin, and Kamchatka Regions.
3. Odeskii listok [Odessa paper], November 16, 1917: 2;
Odeskii novosti [Odessa news], November 16, 1917: 3;
November 17, 1917: 3.
4. In 1917, nine of these gradonachal’stvo existed in entire
Russia, in Petrograd, Moscow, Rostov, Sevastopol, Nikolayev,
Odessa, Baku, Kerch-Yenikale and Yalta, GARF (State Archive
of the Russian Federation), f. 1800, op. 1, d. 163, l. 6 (Ministry
of the Internal Affairs of the Provisional Government).
7. DAOO (State Archive of the Odessa Region), f. R-3,829, op.
1, d. 86, l. 42-43; (Trilisskii, 1927).
9. Izvestiia Soveta Rabochikh i Voennykh Deputatov gor.
Vladivostoka [News of the Soviet of Workers’ and Military
Deputies of Vladivostok], March 25, 1917: 3; Izvestiia
Vladivostokskogo Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskikh Deputatov
[News of the Vladivostok Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’
Deputies], May 28, 1917: 4; Priamurskie izvestiia, June 24,
10. Priamurskie vedomosti [Priamur news], April 6, 1917: 2;
Priamurskie izvestiia [Priamur news], April 22, 1917: 5;
April 25, 1917: 2; April 27, 1917: 7; May 16, 1917: 5; June 1, 1917:
11. Izvestiia Vladivostokskogo Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskikh
Deputatov, September 10, 1917: 1, 4; September 13,
1917: 1–2; September 19, 1917: 3; September 29, 1917: 3;
September 20, 1917: 3; September 21, 1917: 4; September 22,
1917: 1, 3–4; September 26, 1917: 4; September 27, 1917: 4;
September 30, 1917: 1–2; October 1, 1917: 1–2; October 5,
1917: 1; October 11, 1917: 3; October 18, 1917: 3; October 19,
1917: 2; October 21, 1917: 1; October 25, 1917: 2; October
27, 1917: 2; Priamurskie izvestiia, October 5, 1917: 3.
12. Priamurskie izvestiia, August 27, 1917: 3–4; August 29,
1917: 3–4.
13. Izvestiia Vladivostokskogo Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskikh
Deputatov, November 1, 1917: 1, 3; November 9, 1917: 1;
Priamurskie izvestiia, October 28, 1917: 6; October 29, 1917:
2; October 31, 1917: 2–4; November 2, 1917: 3; November
14. Priamurskie vedomosti, March 28, 1917: 5; Priamurskie
izvestiia, August 12, 1917: 1; August 17, 1917: 2; August 20,
1917: 2; (Chernomaz, 2009, pp. 283, 367–369).
15. Priamurskie izvestiia, September 23, 1917: 2; November
2, 1917: 2; November 11, 1917: 4; November 16, 1917: 3;
November 24, 1917: 4; December 2, 1917: 3; (Tsypkin et al.,
1933 pp. 19–25).
17. *Gолос революции* [The Voice of the Revolution], January 20, 1918; February 15, 1918; February 27, 1918; *Odesskiye novosti*, March 1, 1918; *Malen kie odeskii listok* [Small Odessa paper], January 19, 1918; DAOO, f. P-2, op. 1, d. 143, l. 28-29 (Memoirs of Party members), RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History), f. 70, op. 3, d. 60, l. 1–38 (Istpart TsK VKP[b]: Memoirs); (Baker, 2016; Pipes, 1964, pp. 122–123).
18. Albert Rhys Williams (1969, pp. 44, 307–309) described Krasnoshechkov very favorably yet stressed his non-proletarian background of a lawyer and an educator. According to Williams, Krasnoshechkov concealed his belonging to the middle class and was popular among the workers who perceived him as one of their kind.
20. *Izvestiia Vladivostokskogo Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskikh Deputatov*, January 6, 1918: 1; *Zabaikal’skii rabochii* [Transbaikal worker], January 4, 1918: 2; January 5, 1918: 2–3; January 6, 1918: 2; (Petrov & Plotnikova, 2011, p. 155; Tsypkin et al., 1933, pp. 31–36).
23. DAOO, f. P-2, op. 1, d. 1005, l. 1 (Memoirs of Khaim Ryt).
24. DAOO, f. R-3,829, op. 1, d. 126b, l. 36 (Odessa Soviet of Workers’ Deputies).
26. DAOO, f. R-3,829, op. 1, d. 31a, l. 9–10 (Odessa Soviet of Workers’ Deputies).
27. *Proieug*, February 7 (20), 1918: 3.
28. DAOO, f. R-3,829, op. 1, d. 31a, l. 15 (Odessa Soviet of Workers’ Deputies).
29. RGASPI, f. 70, op. 3, d. 61, l. 10 (Istpart TsK VKP[b]: Memoirs).
30. Later on, he had to explain his policy in the Bolshevik party headquarters, see RGASPI, f. 70, op. 3, d. 60, l. 17-18 (Istpart TsK VKP[b]: Memoirs).
31. DAOO, f. R-3,829, op. 1, d. 126b, l. 37 (Odessa Soviet of Workers’ Deputies). In Petrograd the change of power was similar. There most of the new commissariats were merged in the old ministries as well. Most of the civil servants were able to stay in their former position (Altrichter, 1996, p. 17).
32. DAOO, f. P-2, op. 1, d. 143, l. 21 (Memoirs of Party members); GARF, f. 130, op. 2, d. 494, l. 135 (Sovnarkom).
34. RGIA DV, f. R-919, op. 1, d. 6, l. 10–12 (A. M. Krasnoshechkov, *The October Revolution, the Civil War, and the struggle against foreign intervention in the Far East, 1917–1922*, dictated to A. N. Gelasimova in 1932).
35. RGIA DV, f. R-919, op. 1, d. 6, l. 6, 12, 16-17 (A. M. Krasnoshechkov, *The October Revolution, the Civil War, and the struggle against foreign intervention in the Far East, 1917–1922*, dictated to A. N. Gelasimova in 1932).
36. RGIA DV, f. R-786, op. 1, d. 7, l. 136 (From Sovnarkom to the Far Eastern Territorial Soviet of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies, May 15, 1918).

**References**


Iadrintsev, N. M. (1892). *Sibir’ kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom otnoshenii* [Siberia as a...


**Author biographies**

Tanja Penter is professor of Eastern European History at the University of Heidelberg (Germany). She is a specialist in the history of Ukraine with the focus on the social and political history of the 20th century.

Ivan Sablin leads the Research Group “Entangled Parliamentarisms: Constitutional Practices in Russia, Ukraine, China, and Mongolia, 1905–2005,” sponsored by the European Research Council (ERC), at the University of Heidelberg (Germany). His research interests include the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the history of parliamentarism, and global intellectual history.
An old Soviet response and a revolutionary context: Dealing with the national question in the committees of the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies (1989–1991)

Carolina de Stefano 1,2

Abstract

The article deals with the parliamentary representation of ethnic/national interests and demands in the crisis years between 1989 and 1991, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union. It focuses primarily on the proliferation of committees dealing with ethnonational questions after the creation of the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies, a parliamentary body that existed from 1989 until 1991. The article shows that the new parliamentary architecture was not only the inevitable consequence of social and national mobilization but also an expression of the Union center’s response to the ongoing national crisis. Building mostly upon unpublished archival material, the article focuses on debates in 1989–1991 within the Committee of Nationalities Affairs and Interethnic Issues of the USSR Supreme Soviet. In so doing, it identifies some of the dilemmas the committee faced and some of the changes in its functioning brought about by glasnost and perestroika. The article makes two key contributions. First, it helps to shed much-needed light on Soviet nationalities policy during perestroika. Second, the analysis of debates internal to parliamentary committees in those critical years contributes to the existing literature on Soviet and Russian parliamentarism and institutional transformation during the transition from the USSR to the Russian Federation.

Keywords

Congress of People’s Deputies, ethnic diversity, parliaments, perestroika, Soviet Union

Introduction

The article investigates the evolution of the representation of ethnic and national interests and grievances during perestroika in the Soviet parliamentary system, from 1989 until 1991. Above all, it shows—against the backdrop of democratization and increasing national mobilization under Gorbachev—how traditional institutional responses of the Union’s leadership to popular discontent started to function differently and even contributed, in some cases, to strengthening the position of the representatives of the republics and ethnic territories, leading to unexpected and watershed outcomes.

An extensive academic literature since the early 1990s has analyzed in detail the significant impact glasnost and perestroika had on the “national question” in the Soviet Union (natsional’nyi vopros). 1 These studies largely agree that the creation of a new parliamentary body—the Congress of People’s Deputies (CPDs)—in 1989 and the holding of the first semi-democratic elections in Soviet history had an outsize impact on national mobilization. 2 However, the specific consequences that reforms and the rapidly evolving sociopolitical circumstances of these years

1 Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland
2 Center for Russian, Caucasian and Central European Studies (CERCEC), EHESS, Paris, France

Corresponding author:
Carolina de Stefano, Center for Russian, Caucasian and Central European Studies (CERCEC), EHESS, 54, Boulevard Raspail, 75006, Paris, France.
Email: carolina.destefano@ehess.fr

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).
had on parliamentary representation of republican and ethnic interests have been overlooked.

The article tackles this issue by looking at the phenomenon of the proliferation of parliamentary committees that resulted from the creation of the Congress in 1989 that were aimed at discussing, and dealing with a varied set of ethnnonational issues and demands. These included demands for territorial sovereignty and, toward the end of the crisis period, independence; the expression of ethnic grievances (beginning with the demand for rehabilitation of populations that were repressed and massively deported under Stalin); and interethnic conflicts and tensions.

Building on a collection of largely unpublished materials from the Fond of the CPD of the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and interviews conducted in Moscow in 2019, the article shows that the establishment of parliamentary committees and subcommittees to address the national question reflected not only the new and evolving circumstances of democratization but also the traditional bureaucratic reflex in Soviet policy-making. In so doing, it sheds much-needed light on the evolution of Soviet nationalities policies in the twilight years of the USSR.

It is generally assumed that the Union’s leadership—beginning with the USSR leader Michail Gorbachev—underestimated the national question and proved unable to control and dissuade centrifugal forces during perestroika. Although correct, this approach fails to provide an in-depth analysis of the role that the Union’s central elite played in the political and institutional evolution of center–periphery relations in the years prior to the collapse of the USSR. It notably overlooks the amount of room to maneuver and the range of options open to the Soviet leaders in reacting to and addressing national problems. The extensive use of ministerial and parliamentary committees to deal with national issues offers us evidence of this.

Second, by delving into the functioning of the Congress Committee for Nationalities Affairs and the evolution of its internal debates, the article contributes to the existing literature on Russian and Soviet parliamentarism during the transition from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation. Besides, the debates in the Committee for Nationalities reflect and follow the deepening of the Soviet institutional crisis in 1989–1991 and the increasing inability of central authorities to deal with the “national question.”

The article is divided into three main parts. The first part sketches the political background to the establishment of the Congress, detailing the uncertainty and rapid shifts in center–republic relations and the intensifying national mobilization of the period. The second part analyzes the Soviet “committee response” to the national question after 1987, particularly within the new parliament. The third section focuses on the organization and meetings of the Committee for Nationalities and Interethic Affairs of the Supreme Soviet to identify some of the main novelities in the way national issues were debated during perestroika. In addition, it offers a brief sketch of important decisions reached by some of the ad hoc committees established by the Congress in 1989.

### The CPDs and the parliamentarization of the “national question”

At the XIX Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in the summer of 1988, its secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, announced radical reforms of the Party and the country’s parliamentary system (Pikhoia, 2019, p. 11; Taubman, 2017, pp. 337–375). Next to a substantial transfer of power from the Communist Party to the State, the most significant institutional change the program envisaged—in line with the series of reforms of democratization underway—was the establishment of an unprecedented two-tier legislative structure. In addition to the two existing parliamentary chambers of the USSR Supreme Soviet (VeKhovnyi Soviet SSSR), the Soviet of the Union (SoVyet Soyuza SSSR) and the Soviet of Nationalities (SoVyet Natsional’nostei), a new body was set up—the CPDs (Se’ezd Narodnykh Deputatov SSR) (KPSS, 1988, p. 58).

The CPDs, with its 2,250 deputies, became the Union’s highest legislative body and the only one elected directly by the population. In turn, its functions included electing the members of the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet. Six months later, the structure and functioning of the Congress were defined with the law of 1 December 1988, on “amendments and additions to the USSR Constitution (Fundamental Law)” (Zakon USSR ot 1 dekabrya, 1988a). On the same day, it was also decided to schedule elections for 3 months later, in March 1989 (Zakon USSR ot 1 dekabrya, 1988b).

Whereas the general structure and competences had been determined, in March 1989, the impact of the new Congress and institutional reforms on the representation of the titular nationalities (titul’nye natsi)—above all within the Soviet of Nationalities—was still unknown. More broadly, it remained unclear how the growing national and ethnic demands, grievances, and tensions emerging in almost every corner of the country would play out. Formally, the legislation of 1988 introduced no substantial changes in the logic of representation or in the factual composition of the chamber. The second chamber of the Supreme Soviet was composed of deputies coming from national–territorial districts, with the only substantial novelty being the quota of deputies coming from social organizations (Art. 111, Zakon USSR ot 1 dekabrya, 1988a).

The establishment of the Congress came, however, at a moment of rapid and dramatic exacerbation of national issues. Since 1987, popular fronts, particularly strong in the three Baltic republics, had increasingly advocated republican sovereignty under the banner of glasnost and...
perestroika (Lapidus, 2004, p. 133). At the beginning of 1988, a conflict between the Armenian and the Azeri population exploded in Nagorno–Karabakh and interethnic tensions mounted in several regions, especially in the Caucasus (de Waal, 2003). Thus, the 1988 legislation on the new Congress reflected in part the increasing salience in the country’s politics and decision-making process of what in the Soviet Union was referred to as the “national question” (natsional’nyi vopros).

Anatoly Lukyanov, the future head of the USSR Supreme Soviet, was the principal architect of the institutional architecture of the new legislative chambers (Remington, 2001, p. 55). The two chambers of the Supreme Soviet have been de facto equal in competences in the prior system of organization. Under the new dispensation, the decision was made to differentiate them depending on composition and specificities. In this framework, the Soviet of Nationalities strengthened its “national and nationalities” profile. For the first time, it recognized the “constitutional responsibility” of the Soviet of Nationality for interethnic (mezhnatsional’nye) relations.

Uncertainties over the role of national issues in the new parliament, and concerns about these among that part of the Soviet establishment that had opposed the creation of the Congress, intensified during the electoral campaign of these first (and, indeed, last) semi-democratic elections in Soviet history, which saw an unprecedented social and national mobilization.

In the late summer of 1989, the Letter Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party registered with concern a dramatic surge in incoming letters about “interethnic issues” to the CPSU from Soviet citizens and Party members of different republics. Between 1988 and the first half of 1989, some 57,700 messages related to national problems were received (RGANI, Fond. 100, op. 1, d. 309, 2). According to a departmental report, the letters proved the “complexity of the situation of national issues” and how interethnic tensions had reached boiling point all over the country. Indeed, in the first half of 1989, the vast majority of the letters received by the Central Committee complained about the worsening of interethnic relations, calling for a central solution to the national question (RGANI, Fond. 100, op. 1, d. 309, 3).

The Communist Party secured a large, and predictable, landslide victory at the March polls. Nevertheless, as borne out, among others, by the testimony of Sergey Stankevich, a deputy member of the then Inter-Regional Group, it appeared clear at the very opening of the Congress in May 1989 that the political strength of the leaders of the popular fronts and “the opposition” had exceeded expectations and the formal number of seats at their disposal.7 As the historian Rudolf Pikhoya affirms, the establishment of the Congress legitimized republican demands by providing them with an unprecedented political platform. In other words, the Congress had the effect of parliamentarizing the national question, turning it into one of the most heated subjects within the CPDs and the Supreme Soviet. In this sense, it dominated general discussions at the Union center and became the sharp end of criticism leveled against it right through to the end of the USSR.

Committee policy-making. An old Soviet response in search of a new nationalities policy

The unprecedented role acquired both by the leadership of the popular fronts and by several singular, specific demands (such as the rehabilitation of the population repressed under Stalin) was reflected, in practice, in the immediate establishment of a series of parliamentary committees dealing with national issues. In June 1989, the Soviet of Nationalities authorized the creation of two permanent commissions—the Committee for social and economic developmental issues of the Union’s and autonomous republics (Komissiya po voprosam sotsial’nogo i ekonomicheskogo razvitiya sovetskich i avtonomnykh respublik) and the Committee for nationalities policy and interethic relations (Komissiya po natsional’nostym i mezhnatsional’nym otnosheniyam, see below) (Pravda, 1989a, p. 1).10

At the same time, the creation of additional committees was supported by the representatives of the popular fronts in the first place, notably to investigate the recent military repression of popular rallies in Georgia that had taken place only 1 month before, in April 1989, and to ascertain the existence of the secret protocol of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact that had led to the Soviet annexation of the Baltics in 1940. The commission on the Tbilisi crackdown was ultimately created at the sixth session of the First Congress. It was headed by the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) deputy, lawyer, and future St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak and composed of 24 members representing, among others, nine Soviet Socialist Republics. The Committee was called to report on the results of the investigation at the second CPDs to be held 6 months later, in December 1989 (Sobchak, 1993).

For its part, the Commission for the Political and Legal Assessment of the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 was established in July 1989 under pressure from the popular fronts and a decision by the first CPDs (Bergmane, 2019). A significant number of its members were representatives of the popular fronts of the Baltic republics, including the future chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, and the next Estonian Prime Minister, Edgar Savisaar (Sato, 2010). Committees were also created to determine the conditions for the return of Crimean Tatars to Crimea and handle the question of the German Russians (Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR, 28 November 1989). Finally, several local representatives requested to create ad hoc committees—and even subcommittees, beginning with the one...
on “small populations” (malochislennye narody)—to analyze other critical national issues (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 263).

To evaluate these institutional bodies, a first point of order is to recognize that organizing parliamentary work into committees, subcommittees is standard practice in all national parliaments (Martin, 2014). As such, the establishment of new committees in 1989 was not distinctive to the Soviet parliamentary system or the new Congress per se. Second, as briefly explained here, the investigative committees were established under strong pressure from the representatives of opposition forces, which were making their historic debut in the Soviet parliament.

However, it would be wrong to look at the proliferation of committees on national issues in the Supreme Soviet after 1989 as an outcome of mere procedural norms or as a passive reception of demands coming from the republics. It was, in fact, also the result of a genuine attempt by some of the most reform-minded Party leaders to address pressing concerns in the framework of glasnost and democratization. Moreover, it was a function of the urgency among the Union’s central authorities to elaborate a new Soviet nationalities policy and resolve the interethnic conflicts roiling the country.

First, the creation of committees was largely supported by the Union’s establishment—even as Party leaders were bitterly divided on many issues of the period that are beyond the scope of the present article. The role that the Congress committees should play was expressed by Lukyanov himself, when, at the first session, he affirmed, “I am sure that in the field of interethnic relations the majority of issues can and should be solved exclusively through painstaking, very delicate, very consistent work to unleashing all kinds of knots and prejudices.” He continued by saying that these questions had to be analyzed within the Supreme Soviet and that probably what was needed was “not only one committee, but a system of committees” in the Soviet of Nationalities. (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 326)

As for Gorbachev, he fully adopted Lukyanov’s stance when, with reference to a new nationalities policy in line with political developments, he declared, it can be said that a political mechanism is currently being created to ensure a reasonable and fair approach to the issues related to interethnic relations, the development of solutions that would meet the interests of each of the Soviet nations, as well as the interests of the whole nation. I have in mind both the already published drafts of laws on these issues, and the great preparatory work for the Plenum of the Central Committee, specially dedicated to them. Most importantly, the upcoming work of the Supreme Soviet and its Committees, within which national problems should find a comprehensive solution. (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 461)

As for the ad hoc committees, their creation was also made possible by the overt support of those Party reformers who saw them as a necessary step to guarantee and deepen the process of glasnost underway. In the case of the Commission on the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact, a decisive role was played in particular by the Politburo member Aleksandr Yakovlev (Bergmne, 2019, p. 75). Although it should be noted that in the first session of the Congress, many who were not among the reformers—such as the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet Vitaly Vorotnikov—supported the idea of creating an “independent” commission to clarify the dynamics of the Soviet military crackdown of the anti-Soviet and anti-Akhazian rallies that enraged in Tbilisi in April 1989 (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, pp. 48, 531–39).

Apart from the distinct novelties the Congress had introduced from the outset and the intense pressure from the republics, the overwhelming support for the creation of committees to discuss national issues was also an expression of traditional Soviet policy-making. This Soviet “bureaucratic reflex” was characterized, particularly in the Brezhnev years, by a proliferation—if not hypertrophy—of state bodies to cope with problematic societal and economic issues. Against a backdrop of strong Party centralization, committees were hardly meant to reach final or definitive decisions, but instead to dilute or mollify conflicts and avoid a direct challenge to the political center (Barabashev, 2019; Jones, 1984). This pattern continued into the perestroika era, wherein the pre-dominant central institutional reaction to the emergence of overt social and national discontentment was the formation of ad hoc committees and departments—within the Party, the ministries, and other state structures.

Party member Vyacheslav A. Michailov foregrounded the need for new structures to deal with national issues in an early letter addressed to Gorbachev and Yakovlev in 1987. The letter stressed the unjustified absence of a department of nationalities policies within the Party. One was swiftly set up, with Michailov as its head, in the following months. Next to this department—whose goal was to scout for a new and comprehensive approach to nationalities issues—committees had started to emerge outside the parliamentary structures, beginning with the Committee of the Communist Party “on additional analysis of materials related to repression that took place during the 30s–40s, and early 50s.” The Committee was established in 1988 and was headed by Aleksandr Yakovlev.

In this sense, the proliferation of parliamentary committees must also be understood as part of a broader firmament of bodies and institutions created during perestroika in line with the reflexive Soviet bureaucratic approach. These had two primary, albeit distinct, aims. On one hand, for a part of the ruling elite wishing to air dirty laundry they served as an open forum—the right place to unveil the uncomfortable truths of the Soviet past, especially during the Stalin years. On the other, they reflected an attempt by the Union leadership to scout for a new nationalities policy and, more generally, a position of compromise between the central authorities and the republican leadership, as well as solutions to interethnic conflicts.
The national question in the Congress committees 1989–1991: the rise of the experts and watershed decisions

Despite the continuity with the Soviet tradition of policymaking, there were many new elements in the way committees worked within the Congress and the Supreme Soviet. Moreover, throughout the existence of the CPDs (i.e., from 1989 until September 1991), the number and seriousness of national issues grew dramatically.

First, there were uncertainties over the general functioning of the parliamentary committees, and their organization and structure. As the Latvian deputy and university professor, A. Plotniesk noted that neither the constitutional legislation nor the parliamentary regulation clearly defined how they were supposed to be working (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 24). Second, a crucial novelty was debating the composition of the commissions, which had to be negotiated (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, pp. 24–25). In several cases, deputies explicitly requested that “apparatshiks” (i.e., Party and bureaucratic functionaries) be excluded from the committees or demanded “independent members” to deal with investigations (see Note 3).

In the opposite direction, the deputy from the Orlov oblast, V. Samarin, observed that an important number of deputies elected by the Congress to form the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet did not come from the Union but the republican governments. For this reason, he warned of the risk that, once the committees formed, they would end up working not in the interests of the Union, but for personal, localist interests (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 126).

The transcripts of the meetings of the Committee on Nationalities Affairs and Interethnic Relations between 1989 and 1991 help shedding light on the central dilemmas and issues the committee faced and how its members debated national issues. They also pinpoint a degree of evolution in the way the Committee worked throughout these 2 years. In the beginning, the Committee was composed of 41 deputies, was headed by Georgy Tarazevich, and mirrored the multiethnic composition of the Soviet of Nationalities (GARF, F. 9654, op. 7, d. 1050, pp. 16–18).

The Committee met for the first time in June 1989. As emerges from the discussions of that day, the activity, organization, and functioning had to be determined from scratch. Tarazevich started by stressing the difficulty of the issues the commission was called to work on in future months. He called on the members to “think a lot about the structure of [the] committee, about the organization and the working agenda, on the issues [to] deal with, on the relations with other committees of the Soviet of Nationalities, and maybe with the committee of the Council of the Union.” This work, he concluded, would “require creative inputs of each member of the committee” (GARF, F. 9654, op. 7, delo 1050, p. 4).

In this period of glasnost, one of the first issues brought to the table concerned the publicity of the proceedings of the committee, with some of the republican representatives pushing for the minutes of meetings to be made available to the respective electorates (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 13). As archival material shows, one of the main novelties in the way the commission worked throughout its existence in 1989–1991 was its increasing appeal to external experts who came primarily (though not only) from the USSR Academy of Sciences and the tone of the discussions. This was justified by the exacerbation of national and interethnic tensions, and the increasing difficulty of central structures to find adequate solutions. The idea of relying on experts to assess the situation was expressed already in June 1989. Tarazevich affirmed that, maybe, the commission would have needed “to establish a sort of an academic center analyzing these questions,” and noticed that, on the same direction, within the Apparat of the Supreme Soviet, a department on nationalities affairs was already being formed (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, pp. 12–13).

One of the turning points in the evolution of center-republican relations was the elections for the Republican Supreme Soviets in March 1990. The vote, among others, sanctioned the creation of a Russian CPDs, heralded the political ascent of Boris Yeltsin, and paved the way for Russia’s declaration of sovereignty in June 1990 and the “parade of sovereignties” that followed (McFaul, 2001, pp. 78–88).

The evolution of the overall situation, which by September 1990 had become critical, came up in the Committee for nationalities at a meeting that focused on the latest development of the deadly riots between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek populations in the Kyrgyz city of Osh in June (McGlinchey, 2014). The September meeting saw the additional participation of members of the Committee for State Security (KGB), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other ministerial structures. On that occasion, the conclusions of the delegation that had been dispatched on the ground were that

[M]any negative tendencies, linked to the activation of nationalist elements . . . emerged during the campaign for the elections of the Republican Supreme Soviets. The leaders of the oblasts, having flirted with the leaders of informal organizations, yielding to their requirements, lost the initiative and the threads of management. (GARF, F. 9654, op. 7, d. 1053, p. 77)

Having listened to the report, one of the main proposals of the committee to cope with the conflict was to involve more experts on Central Asia to better assess the situation in the republics (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 79).

Only 2 weeks after, on 4 October, the deputy minister of the Committee, Erkin Auelbekov, warned of the committee’s scant knowledge of what was actually happening in the republics. In his view, it was necessary that committee members
[S]trengthen the relations with the Socialist Republics, know the situation there, and provide them with more help. Together with deputies, members of the Supreme Soviet need to go in those places, deal with complaints, provide support in the resolution of concrete issues, particularly those related to national demands, participate in their examination within the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Council of Ministers, and other ministries and departments . . . and rely on the help of academic experts of the USSR Academy of Sciences, who work on the problems of these republics. (Verkhovnii Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 147)

At the end of October, the Committee met with members from the KGB, the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice, among others in attendance. The putative agenda concerned the “500 days,” an economic plan for the transition to a market economy (Pikhoya, 2019, p. 20), although the meeting was soon dominated by discussions on the increasing loss of grip of central structures on the republics and the interethnic conflicts roiling the country. The Congress deputy A. Chekhoev was especially forthcoming with concerns about the situation and the inability of the authorities to restore a sense of control over events: “our commission is not reacting, in any manner. Is this good or bad, is this right or wrong? The republics already act in accordance with their own laws” (GARF, F. 9654, op. 7, d. 1053, p. 156). A key dimension identified was the urgent need to get ahead of conflicts, which were intensifying, before new ones broke out. Chekhoev noted that

We have to forecast interethnic conflicts. . . . First, [we need] a mechanism to liquidate both their consequences and the premises of future ones. Second, we need to have forecasts and analyses of current nationality policy in all corners of the Union. (Verkhovnii Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 162)

In April 1991, after the March referendum on the conservation of the Union, prominent academic experts—sociologists, ethnographers, geographers—were invited to a meeting of the committee to present concrete proposals on “some approaches for the elaboration of mechanisms to overcome interethnic conflicts” (GARF, F. 9654, op. 7, d. 1055), together with members of the department of Nationalities Affairs of the Secretariat of the Congress. Among others, speeches were made by the head of the center for the studies of sociopolitical processes of the Institute of Sociology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (RAN), by the head of the RAN Institute of Ethnography Valery Tishkov, and by the sociologist Leokadia Drobizheva. As was explained at the beginning of the session, this meeting represented the “first attempt at dealing with academic tendencies, to understand the scientific trends that our scientists possess precisely in resolving interethnic conflicts” (Verkhovnii Soviet SSSR, 1989a, p. 17). The head of the committee, Georgy Tarazevich, notably observed how “in other countries” there were several institutes, centers, that concretely dealt both theoretically and in practice with all these questions and how serious those were in the Soviet Union at that moment (Verkhovnii Soviet SSSR, 1989a).

The growing appeal to experts, and the unprecedented frankness of the debates, reflected both the dearth of solutions available to the central authorities in Moscow and the radically new political context that glasnost had given birth to. While comprehensive solutions to solve the national question were not forthcoming, more visible, and watershed decisions were being made by those ad hoc committees that had been established already at the first Congress in 1989 to deal with national demands and critical issues.

First, as decided at the First Congress in May 1989, the Commission on the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was called to report on the results of its works at the Second Congress, on 23 December of the same year. The head Aleksandr Yakovlev read the conclusions publicly. He pointed out that “the consensus was not easy [since] there were many disputes and clashes of opinion.” However, “they did not undermine the general constructive atmosphere of the discussions. With all the diversity of approaches, points of view, emotional shades, the desire not to disclose episodes of the past prevailed” (Pravda, 1989b).

Notwithstanding the nuanced and balanced tone that reflected internal disagreements, the substance of the speech was clear and historical—the Nazi-Soviet pact was an illegitimate annexation and ought to be publicly recognized as such. As the hard-liner Soviet politician Egor Ligachev recalls in his memoirs, Yakovlev’s words sparked “very harsh discussions.” According to his account, a voice from the tribune erupted with bitterness and pronounced the “prophetic words”: “What are you doing?! Come to your senses! You are giving the green light to the breakup of the Soviet Union!” Overall, Ligachev (2010) referred to the historical decision of the Molotov–Ribbentrop commission when he wrote that the “tense, muddling atmosphere at the Second Congress” was a “harbinger of crisis in perestroika” and the stimulus for the growth of the “nationalist wave” in the Baltics at the end of 1989 (p. 227).

The day after, on 24 December, the final report of the committee condemned “the fact that—at simultaneously with the treaties of August 23 and September 28, 1939—secret protocols were signed, whose existence is confirmed by the findings,” defining these acts as having been “a departure from the Leninist principles of Soviet foreign policy.” Having listened to the report, the CPD voted in favor of the declaration that the pact had been void since its ratification in 1939. In so doing, the Soviet parliament recognized that the Baltic countries had been annexed against their will, thus paving the way for their independence (Sato, 2010).

On the same day, the special commission on the military crackdown in Tbilisi in 1989 also presented its final assessment. While conceding that popular rallies in Tbilisi were extremely difficult to handle and that central authorities had the constitutional right to use force to reestablish public
order, the report argued that, on that specific case, violent measures had not been justified and were not proportionate. It noted, in particular, that

General Rodionov (Commander of the Transcaucasian Military District, a.n.), with his ill-conceived actions, allowed the Soviet Army to perform functions unfamiliar to it, grossly violating the directive of the General Command on assigning to the army units only those tasks associated with the protection of specially designated objects.

In addition, the report declared that “The commission notes with special concern that the leadership of the army tried to deny the very fact that toxic substances were used” (Verkhovnyi Soviet SSSR, 1989b, pp. 4–33). In conclusion, the report recognized the responsibility of the local governmental forces in the crackdown against the demonstrators and called for further investigation, and subsequent sanctions, of the people directly, or indirectly, involved in the crackdown (Sobchak, 1993). Overall, both for the way the debate on the matter unfolded and the final decision of the commission, the “Tbilisi Affair” was a watershed and proved that “the center could no longer use force against the population” (Shevardnadze, 2009, p. 181).

Conclusion

During perestroika, one of the primary responses of the central leadership to handle the national question was to set up a long and differentiated series of ad hoc committees, especially after the creation of the CPDs in 1989, but also within the Party structures and the ministries.

This response was in line with an established Soviet tradition of bureaucratic policy-making, although glasnost and the evolving sociopolitical reality brought about, very rapidly, new modes of functioning and discussions of the national question within this archipelago of legislative and governmental platforms. In this sense, the internal architecture of the newly established Congress was not merely an inevitable reaction to the growing emergence of national sentiments all over the Soviet Union but also the result of the support of the central leadership (and not only of its more reformist wing).

The debates of the general sessions of the Congress, as well as the minutes of the ones internal to the Committee of Nationalities Affairs of the Supreme Soviet, helped identifying a series of new elements in the organization and activity of USSR parliamentary committees in 1989–1991. Besides, the latter reflected how, from 1989 until the Soviet collapse in 1991, there was an increasing appeal to external expertise since Committee members and Union’s central institutions were proving unable to find compelling solutions to ethnic conflicts and center–periphery relations more in general. Finally, and contrary to the past mode of functioning of state committees typical of Soviet history, some of them ended up taking decisions that directly, overtly, and publicly challenged central political authorities.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to professors Andrea Graziosi, Jeremy Smith, Ivan Sablin, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on previous versions of this article. Besides, I wish to thank Simon P. Watmough for the editing of the work.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article is supported by the project on “Post-imperial diversities—majority-minority relations in the transition from empires to nation-states,” funded by the Academy of Finland, project no. 16043 under the ERA.Net RUS Plus program.

Notes

2. Both scholars and direct participants fully agree on the assembly’s unanticipated transformation into an arena for the expression, legitimation, and strengthening of national demands and grievances in the USSR, an outcome that was entirely unprecedented in Soviet experience. See, among others, Hough (1997), Pikhoya (2000), Remington (2001), Ryzhkov (2009), and Sheinis (2012).
3. On institutional and imperial transformations at the twilight of the USSR (Sablin & Semyonov, 2018).
4. Like in the previous legislative system, 750 deputies came from ordinary territorial districts, 750 from national–territorial districts (natsional’nye territorial’nye okrugi). In contrast, the most important novelty was the introduction of 750 seats for “social organizations” (obshchestvennye organizatsii), such as trade unions and the Komsomol.
5. A friend of Gorbachev since their university days and a legal expert, Lukyanov had participated in the drafting of the 1977 Soviet Constitution. He was for years an important legal adviser in the Party, performing a range of functions. In 1987, he became a member of the CPSU Central Committee and in September 1988 a candidate Politburo member. From the summer of 1988, Lukyanov (2010) worked on the blueprint for the new legislative system (p. 13). He was elected vice-chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union in March 1989, and then chairman on the following year.
6. The word “mezhnatsional’noe” is generally translated into English as “interethnich,” which is preferred to the literary translation “inter-national.”
7. Interview with the author, Moscow, October 2019. Formally, the Inter-Regional Group was created during the First Congress and met for the first time in June 1989.
8. Interview with the author, Moscow, October 2019.
9. The Congress was dissolved in September 1991.
10. The other two permanent commissions of the Soviet of Nationalities were the Commission for Consumer Goods, Trade, Communal–Domestic, and Other Services to the Population and the Commission for the Development of Culture, Language, National and International Tradition, and Preservation of Historical Heritage.
11. On the rehabilitation of the Crimean Tatar population, see also the documents available on the digital archive of the Yakovlev Foundation: https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/68185.

12. Interview with the author, Moscow, October 2019.

13. An important part of the material, including the transcripts of the meetings, related to the Commission is available on the on-line archival database of the Yakovlev Foundation (https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/). Within the Council of Ministers, there had also been attempts to create a USSR Ministry for Nationalities, although they ultimately failed.

References


Author biography

Carolina de Stefano is a Post-Doc Researcher at the University of Eastern Finland within the Era.Net project on ‘Post-Imperial Diversities: majority-minority relations in the transition from empires to nation-states’ and an associate at the Center for Russian, Caucasian, and Central European Studies (CERCEC),
EHESS, Paris, where she is based. She currently works on her book project on “Moscow’s nationalities policies from the Soviet Union to Russia 1986-1994” on the basis of her PhD dissertation, which she defended in December 2018 at the University of Sant’Anna in Pisa under the co-supervision of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. In 2016–2017, she was a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Russian, European, and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at George Washington University. Her interests focus on Moscow’s management of ethnic diversity and interethnic conflicts in the years of USSR collapse and in the post-Soviet context, as well as, more broadly, on the formation of Russian post-Soviet institutions.
The All-Buryat Congress for the Spiritual Rebirth and Consolidation of the Nation: Siberian politics in the final year of the USSR

Melissa Chakars

Abstract
This article examines the All-Buryat Congress for the Spiritual Rebirth and Consolidation of the Nation that was held in the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in February 1991. The congress met to discuss the future of the Buryats, a Mongolian people who live in southeastern Siberia, and to decide on what actions should be taken for the revival, development, and maintenance of their culture. Widespread elections were carried out in the Buryat lands in advance of the congress and voters selected 592 delegates. Delegates also came from other parts of the Soviet Union, as well as from Mongolia and China. Government administrators, Communist Party officials, members of new political parties like the Buryat-Mongolian People's Party, and non-affiliated individuals shared their ideas and political agendas. Although the congress came to some agreement on the general goals of promoting Buryat traditions, language, religions, and culture, there were disagreements about several of the political and territorial questions. For example, although some delegates hoped for the creation of a larger Buryat territory that would encompass all of Siberia's Buryats within a future Russian state, others disagreed revealing the tension between the desire to promote ethnic identity and the practical need to consider economic and political issues.

Keywords
Buryat, Buryatia, Russia, Siberia, Soviet Union

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union in 1985, he began implementing a series of reforms that permitted people greater freedom of assembly and the right to express their grievances in ways that had not been allowed before. In the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Buryat ASSR), the titular homeland of the ethnic Buryat Mongols, his reforms created a space for the formation of a Buryat nationalist movement that worked together with local, government officials to bring about the first All-Buryat Congress for the Spiritual Rebirth and Consolidation of the Nation in February 1991. The congress met to discuss the future of the Buryat people and to decide on what actions should be taken for the revival, development, and promotion of Buryat culture.

The congress was a formal meeting of representatives from various regions and groups. Widespread elections were carried out in advance and voters selected 592 delegates from the Buryat ASSR and the two Buryat autonomous okruqs (small territorial units): the Ust'-Ordynskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug within the larger Irkutsk territory and the Aginskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug within the larger Chita territory. Buryat delegates also came from Mongolia and China. Government administrators, Communist Party officials, members of new political parties like the Buryat-Mongolian People’s Party, and non-affiliated individuals came together to share their ideas and political agendas.

This was not the first time that the Buryats of Siberia, a minority group within the larger Russian state, were meeting in such a quasi-parliamentary formation to discuss and make decisions about issues of identity, self-government, and nation-building. Between the February Revolution of

Department of History, Saint Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Corresponding author:
Melissa Chakars, Department of History, Saint Joseph’s University, 5600 City Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131, USA.
Email: mchakars@sju.edu
1917 that brought down the tsar and the October Revolution of that same year that ushered the Bolsheviks into power, the Buryats held three All-Buryat Congresses to articulate their demands for the future of the Buryat nation and for the positioning of the Buryat lands in what was to be a new entity to replace the former Russian Empire (Sablin, 2016). In this moment, as in the moment of the All-Buryat Congress of February 1991, the Buryats were on the cusp of a new era: the larger state that encompassed their lands was in flux and in the process of working out a new political, territorial, and economic structure that would significantly alter their lives. In both cases, the Buryats did not call for outright independence. Instead, they worked toward greater autonomy and liberalism in an attempt to ensure that their rights would be enhanced and protected within the framework of a larger, political entity.

The February 1991 All-Buryat Congress took place at an especially pivotal moment in time in a year that turned out to be the last for the Soviet Union. Only a few months prior to the Congress, the Buryat ASSR had made a Declaration of Sovereignty on October 8, 1990. The declaration called for economic self-management, ecological protection, the promotion of the cultural development of the people of Buryatia, and the elevation of Buryatia to the status of a union republic. Leaders believed that the change from an autonomous republic within the Russian Republic to a union republic that held the same status as Russia and the other 14 union republics such as Ukraine, Georgia, or Estonia, for example, would give Buryatia greater autonomy to run its own affairs. However, Gorbachev refused to recognize the declaration. Perhaps this was because he feared the intentions and consequences of such nationalist assertions or perhaps because he was already considering a new structure for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR; Balzer, 1994; Elaev, 2000; Stroganova, 2001).

Gorbachev’s government had decided to appeal to the Soviet people about the future of their country with a national referendum to be held on March 17, 1991. The issue of Buryatia’s status in the Soviet Union and the holding of the All-Buryat Congress in February 1991 was therefore also critical given this upcoming event that would ask Soviet citizens, “Do you consider necessary the preservation of the USSR as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?” (Nolan et al., 2001, p. 492). With this referendum as a start, Gorbachev’s government was putting together a plan to reframe the entire, federal structure of the state and authorities in Buryatia wanted to ensure that when this happened, there would be greater local control and full equal rights within a new federation.

Thus, the congress was also intended, in part, to allow for deliberation about what the status of the Buryat people and Buryat territories was going to be in the rapidly changing Soviet space. Although the congress came to some agreement on the general goals of promoting Buryat traditions, language, religions, and culture, there were disagreements about the political and territorial questions. For example, although some delegates hoped for the creation of a larger Buryat territory that would encompass all of Siberia’s Buryats, others disagreed. What the 1991 All-Buryat Congress and the events surrounding it reveal then, is a balancing act between meeting practical and economic concerns and fulfilling broader hopes and goals about identity. In the end, this act leaned toward the former, disappointing some who had desired greater autonomy for the Buryats.

This article utilizes sources in Russian that are available in the State Archive of the Republic of Buryatia. The archival documents include details about plans made for the Congress, copies of pre-congress publications, transcripts of speeches given at the Congress, and information about the arrangements to be made for cultural organizations and events to be developed afterward. Although these documents tell us much about the local government’s work on the Congress, they provide less information about the Buryat national movement. For the latter, the article relies on works written by scholars in Buryatia, some of whom participated in and lived through the events under discussion. In particular, works by Vladimir A. Khamutaev and Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev, who were members of the Buryat national movement, provide not only historical information, but also criticism of the local government, as well as reflections on the movement’s accomplishments and shortcomings.

**The Buryat national movement and local leadership before the All-Buryat Congress**

The Buryat national movement began to form in 1986 and was led by a group of Buryat scholars, who started publishing articles, as well as holding conferences, roundtables, and seminars to discuss historical and contemporary issues related to the Buryat nation. In March 1988, these people formed an organization called Geser, named after the hero of the Buryat epic poem. The Geser organization was largely composed of intellectuals such as university professors, teachers, artists, and other professionals, as well as students. Buryat intellectuals from outside of the Buryat ASSR were also involved. In May 1988, Geser held its first conference in the central public library in Ulan-Ude, the republic’s capital (Balzer, 1994; Khamutaev, 2005). Leaders at this conference outlined the main goals of the Buryat nationalist movement that would exist throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. These were initiated by Geser, but later reiterated and elaborated on by many others.

Two of Geser’s demands were about reinstating markers of Buryat territory and identity previously granted by the Soviet government and then taken away. During Joseph
Stalin’s campaigns of terror and purges in the late 1930s, he became particularly paranoid about the loyalties of the ethnic groups that resided along the Soviet borders and imagined that they were seeking to carry out traitorous plots. In looking to uncover the supposed hidden dissenters, officials in Moscow and Buryatia invented stories that there were Buryat pan-Mongolists who sought to break away from the USSR and unite all of the Mongolian people of Inner Asia into one state. In addition, they accused some Buryats of helping the Japanese to implement a plan to conquer Siberia. These were serious allegations that threatened Soviet power in the region and those who found themselves accused of these crimes were killed, exiled, or sent to Gulag labor camps (Chakars, 2014).

During the height of this period of terror and purges, orders came from Moscow to break-up the territory of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR and the republic was shrunk by 40%. In 1937, authorities gave some territories to neighboring regions, as well as created two smaller autonomous okrugs—the Ust’-Ordynskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug and the Aginskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug mentioned above. These changes were made without the consent of the government of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR and despite the existence of article 15 in the republic’s constitution that specified that no territorial alterations could be made without local approval (Chichlo, 1987; Elaev, 2000).

By reducing the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR, creating two smaller autonomous regions, and leaving some Buryats outside of any specifically designated Buryat territory, Soviet authorities denied the Buryats a unified homeland. Previously, the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR had encompassed more than 90% of the country’s Buryat population and after 1937, this was reduced to a little more than 50%. In addition, the territorial changes meant that ethnic Buryat representation in the republic dropped to just more than 20% (Zateev & Kharaev, 1999). In the late 1980s, Geser and the growing Buryat national movement demanded that republican leaders re-examine the constitutionality and social consequences of the 1937 break-up of territory, as well as explore methods to reunite the Buryats into one larger territorial unit.

The other major issue concerning the reestablishment of former identity markers was the name of the republic. In 1958, “Mongolian” was dropped from the original name and the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR became simply the Buryat ASSR. The names of the two okrugs, as well as many institutions such as newspapers, publishing houses, and schools also dropped the term “Mongolian.” The official reason was that the Buryats were not Mongols, and therefore the name needed to change. However, the Buryats are one of the many Mongolian people of Inner Asia. They speak a Mongolian language and share similarities with other Mongols with regard to history, traditions, religions, and cultural and economic practices.

Unfortunately, there exists little evidence to clearly explain why the name change occurred in 1958. Some claim that it took place after a conversation was held between the Buryat leader, Andrei Modogoev, and the head of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev supposedly asked Modogoev, “Why do you call your republic Buryat-Mongolia—do Mongols live there?” When Modogoev answered, “No,” Khrushchev suggested that the name be changed. Others have argued that Khrushchev may have had concerns about the name “Mongolian” in the republic’s title because he feared Chinese claims to Mongolian lands. In 1958, the USSR was supporting Mongolia’s entrance into the United Nations and China was not in support of it. Throughout the 20th century, both the Republic of China and Taiwan have made various claims over Mongolian territories, and indeed, Khrushchev may have wanted to use the name change as a way to distinguish Soviet Buryatia from Inner and Outer Mongolia. Many also point to the on-going campaign against pan-Mongolism and argue that the name change was, at least in part, a continuation of this policy, which had begun in the 1930s (Chakars, 2014). By the 1980s, however, many intellectuals wanted to promote the Buryats’ connections to the wider culture and history of the Mongolian people. For that reason, like the issue of the 1937 territorial changes, the Buryat national movement called for republican leaders to examine the issue and to reinstate the former name (Chimitdorzhiev, 2001; Elaev, 2000).

The other concerns expressed by Geser at the conference in May of 1988 were about the decline during the Soviet period of traditional religions, holidays, customs, and the Buryat language, as well as the lack of connections with other Mongolian people. Oppressive Soviet anti-religious policies and campaigns had seriously diminished the presence of the Buryat religions of Buddhism and Shamanism in society and holidays and traditions connected to these religions had been banned. Links between Mongolian people across Inner Asia had been hindered by politics, tight borders, and individual fears over the consequences of being labeled a pan-Mongolist. In addition, Buryat language education had been completely canceled by the early 1970s and the language was steadily being replaced by Russian. These issues were ones that many intellectuals and officials in Buryatia had noted in various ways already, but Geser was the first to publicly address all of them directly and make a strong demand for a revival of them in Buryat society.

Only a few years earlier Geser’s conference at the library would have been impossible due to strict Soviet censorship policies and laws against such gatherings. However, because of Gorbachev’s implementation in 1986 of his policy of glasnost’ that was intended to allow for Soviet citizens to freely discuss problems in their country in the hopes of improving it, such a conference was permissible. Nevertheless, the local government of the Buryat ASSR was slow to respond to Geser’s concerns. This was largely connected to the republic’s leadership. In 1984, an ethnic
Russian, Anatolii M. Beliakov, was appointed to head the republic after the ethnic Buryat, Andrei Modogoev, who had been in charge since 1962, passed away. As the first non-Buryat leader of the Buryat ASSR since Stalin’s reign, many Buryat intellectuals had quietly criticized Beliakov’s appointment. Yet, it was not simply an ethnic issue. Many in the republic—Buryats and non-Buryats alike—increasingly began to complain that Beliakov was not carrying out Gorbachev’s reforms, that he had dismissed many talented people and replaced them with conservative loyalists, and that he tolerated corruption. Journalists began to publish articles expressing these concerns and documenting cases of corruption under Beliakov’s stewardship (Bolotov & Mitypov, 2003; Elaev, 2000; Humphrey, 1996).

Finally, in February 1990, several thousand people came out in Ulan-Ude to protest against Beliakov’s government and demand his resignation. Many also called for the return of two formerly prominent officials that Beliakov had transferred out of the republic: Leonid V. Potapov, an ethnic Russian, and Vladimir B. Saganov, an ethnic Buryat. Some suspected that Beliakov had sent Saganov out of the republic in 1987 because of his sympathy for some of the goals of the Buryat national movement such as reexamining Buryat history and reviving Buryat traditions. Many of the protestors now wanted these men to return and form a new government (Elaev, 2000; Khamutaev, 2005). The demonstrations were eventually successful and officials agreed to remove Beliakov. He was then replaced in May with Potapov. Although an ethnic Russian, Potapov was a man who was widely acceptable as he had worked closely with the previous leader, Modogoev. In addition, by the 1980s, the majority population in the republic was ethnic Russian and by having Potapov placed in charge, this may have assuaged some concerns about Buryat exclusivity in the political arena. Saganov was then appointed to be chair of the republic’s executive body called the Council of Ministers (Bolotov & Mitypov, 2003).

The new government immediately responded to protestors’ concerns and began to initiate Gorbachev’s reforms in Buryatia. It was this new government that also made the declaration of sovereignty on October 8, 1990. In addition, Potapov and Saganov were much more supportive of the cultural demands made by the Buryat national movement than Beliakov had been. For example, the government issued a formal decree to raise Sagaalgan, the Mongolian lunar new year, to the status of an official national holiday, it approved plans for holding an international conference to take place in the summer of 1991 because of his sympathy for some of the goals of the Buryat national movement such as reexamining Buryat history and reviving Buryat traditions. Many of the protestors now wanted these men to return and form a new government (Bolotov & Mitypov, 2003).

The new government immediately responded to protestors’ concerns and began to initiate Gorbachev’s reforms in Buryatia. It was this new government that also made the declaration of sovereignty on October 8, 1990. In addition, Potapov and Saganov were much more supportive of the cultural demands made by the Buryat national movement than Beliakov had been. For example, the government issued a formal decree to raise Sagaalgan, the Mongolian lunar new year, to the status of an official national holiday, it approved plans for holding an international conference to take place in the summer of 1991 because of his sympathy for some of the goals of the Buryat national movement such as reexamining Buryat history and reviving Buryat traditions. Many of the protestors now wanted these men to return and form a new government (Bolotov & Mitypov, 2003).

Potapov also worked with members of the Buryat national movement in the fall of 1990 to create the Center of Buryat National Culture in Ulan-Ude to coordinate Buryat cultural development. The leaders of the new center were scholars and several of them were people who had been involved in the Geser organization. Dashi-Nima Dugarov, a well-respected artist and the head of the Artists’ Union of Buryatia, became the center’s director. The center’s mission was to promote and conduct further research on Buryat traditions, language, culture, and history. An October 1990 decree from the government establishing its official foundation stated that such an institution was necessary because the Buryats are “a geographically divided people and the formation of one nation and one uniting language has been hindered,” and that it was therefore important to promote education “on Buryat culture and national self-consciousness” (GARB, f. P-1, op. 1, d. 10,743, ll. 68–69).

In addition to this new center, a number of the Buryat intellectuals who had been in Geser formed a political party in November 1990 called the Buryat-Mongolian People’s Party (BMNP). Although previously the Communist Party was the only political party authorized to exist in the USSR, Gorbachev’s democratization reforms allowed for greater freedom of assembly that now made it legal to form new parties. The BMNP was led by Mikhail N. Ochirow, a math professor at the Buryat Pedagogical Institute. Other scholars such as the historian, Vladimir Khamutaev, who was a teacher at the time and then went on to become a professor of history, writing his dissertation and then several books on the Buryat national movement, were involved. The BMNP developed a party platform that included supporting a return to the pre-1937 borders and reinserting “Mongolian” into the republic’s name. In addition, the party called for reviving Buryat traditions, culture, and language, as well as facilitating relations with Mongolian people in Mongolia and China. To help facilitate the latter, the party demanded the demilitarization of Buryatia (Elaev, 2000; Khamutaev, 2005; Zhukovskaya, 1995). This was very controversial as the republic had a long international border with Mongolia, was close to China, and held a strategic piece of the Trans-Siberian Railway. For that reason, many Soviet troops were stationed there and a demand to remove them was a serious challenge to Soviet strength in southeastern Siberia (Lukin & Yakunin, 2018).

With the formation of a new government led by Potapov and Saganov, as well as an increasingly active and more organized Buryat national movement, the time was ripe to discuss the future of the nation. In addition, the October 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty and the upcoming March 1991 referendum on the future structure of the Soviet Union required a wider examination of the meaning of Buryat autonomy.

**Contentious issues at the All-Buryat Congress**

Although Gorbachev’s reforms had allowed for greater democratization and the legalization of independent parties
and organizations, there was no question as to who was in charge in Buryatia at the time of the congress: the local government with all of its bureaucratic institutions run by Communist Party authorities. Although many of these officials, such as Potapov and Saganov, were responsive to Gorbachev’s reforms and to many of the demands of the Buryat national movement, they were also a part of the Soviet system that had been in place for decades. Therefore, although activists in the Buryat national movement were involved in pressuring the government for a larger meeting, it was the government that made the decision to hold the first All-Buryat Congress for the Spiritual Rebirth and Consolidation of the Nation in Ulan-Ude between February 22 and 24, 1991. Significantly, February 22 also marked the beginning of the Mongolian Lunar New Year, Sagaalgan, a holiday that the government had just officially adopted.

In part, the government’s decision to hold the congress was in line with the Soviet Communist Party tradition of holding national congresses every 5 years to discuss contemporary issues and determine the future of the country—this too would be a congress to discuss pressing concerns and the republic’s direction with regard to the Buryat nation. Holding a congress was also in line with Gorbachev’s reforms that demanded more interaction between state authorities and ordinary citizens. The congress was then a way for the local government to demonstrate how it was responding to Buryat national demands, show that it genuinely wanted to communicate with its constituents, and put into place new ideas and institutions that would work to fulfill the decided upon goals for reviving the Buryat nation. In addition, the idea of holding such a meeting and calling it a congress was a nod to the Buryat past and the Buryat congresses that had taken place in pre-revolutionary times.

Before the congress, elections for delegates were conducted in the republic and in the two Buryat autonomous okrugs. Invitations were also sent to Buryats living in other parts of the USSR, as well as in Mongolia and China. Although Buryat scholars, such as Khamutaev, mentioned above, and Aleksandr A. Elaev, have noted that these elections were not exactly democratic because they involved the Communist Party bureaucracy at all levels to ensure the attendance of many well-established elites, elections were conducted that did bring together a wide variety of people. In total, there were 592 delegates that attended the congress. The majority were ethnic Buryats from the republic and the two autonomous okrugs; however, there were also Buryat representatives from other Soviet cities such as Chita, Irkutsk, Leningrad, Kiev, Alma-Ata, and Kyzyl. In addition, there were 51 non-Buryat delegates, mostly from the republic, who came from other ethnic groups such as Russians, Ukrainians, and Koreans (Elaev, 2000; Khamutaev, 2005). Although the congress was nominally about the Buryat people, it was impossible to ignore the demographic reality that the Buryats were a minority in their own titular republic and even the head of the republic, Potapov, was not an ethnic Buryat. Given this situation, the decision to invite non-Buryats was likely intended to create an open, inclusive, and diverse atmosphere as opposed to appearing to be pushing a narrow, nationalist agenda.

Documents in the State Archive of the Republic of Buryatia show that the government carefully prepared materials in advance for the congress and planned a schedule of speeches to be made by appointed individuals, a process that was not unusual in the Soviet Union. Government officials did this with the help of Buryat cultural leaders and new organizations such as the Center of Buryat National Culture in Ulan-Ude. However, the government’s actions in the planning of the congress show that it was cautious and that it sought to focus on cultural issues at the meeting such as reviving religions and traditions, as well as finding ways to promote the Buryat language. The government did not make any arrangements to have a large public discussion over what to do about the 1937 break-up of Buryat territory, the 1958 name change, and the demilitarization suggestion made by the BMNP. In Khamutaev’s book on the Buryat national movement published in 2005, he complains that although BMNP members were elected as delegates to the congress, the party was not invited as an official organization to participate in the event (Khamutaev, 2005). This may have been intentional and an attempt at marginalizing the BMNP’s more radical goals. A pamphlet published by the government in advance of the congress for delegates and titled, “The Main Directions for the Revival and Development of Buryat Culture,” did not mention any of the more controversial issues (GARB, f. P-1, op. 1, d. 10,743, ll. 46–58).

The government was probably careful about officially discussing controversial topics for multiple reasons. Redrawing territorial borders, name changes, and demilitarization could have only taken place with approval from central authorities in Moscow. Given that Gorbachev’s government was already ignoring the October 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty, it was not likely that it would have considered these other demands, and, in all probability, would have seen them as dangerous, nationalistic, provocations. In addition, it was also not clear in February 1991 whether or not a large percentage of Buryats supported such demands. In August 1990, Pravda Buriatii, the leading republican newspaper, printed a letter that had been sent to authorities in Moscow and Ulan-Ude from 58 leading members of the Buryat national movement calling for a return to Buryatia’s pre-1937 borders. A later article in Pravda Buriatii explained that many residents in the two okrugs had responded negatively to the letter and argued that a merger with the Buryat republic would be a mistake (Chimitdorzhev, 2004). It is possible that the republican government therefore also did not want to officially discuss this issue at the congress for fear of upsetting okrug delegates.

The congress opened on February 22 with introductory remarks by Potapov, the head of the Buryat ASSR, Sergei
Buldaev, the chairman of the Buryat ASSR Supreme Council, the Khambo Lama, Munko Tsybikov, the leader of the Buddhist church in Siberia, and top authorities of the Chita and Irkutsk regions. During the congress, 62 delegates—government officials and a wide variety of Buryat intellectuals and cultural leaders—gave talks throughout the 3-day period that addressed issues surrounding the history, culture, and present condition of the Buryat people. Many of these speakers concluded that contemporary Buryat culture was in a crisis and declared that measures needed to be taken for its rebirth (Elave, 2000).

Although some in the government had been ignoring the question of the 1937 break-up and the pre-conference planning and materials did not acknowledge it, several members of the congress did raise the issue for consideration. In particular, members of the BMNP discussed the issue with other delegates and pressed for an open conversation. The issue was then raised by several delegates and forced into discussion (GARB, f. P-1, d. 10,743, ll. 78). In particular, a number of the prominent Buryat intellectuals who had signed the letter calling for the reunification of Buryat lands that was published in Pravda Buriatii in August 1990 talked openly about the issue. These included the Mongolian studies scholar, Chimidorzhiev, mentioned at the beginning of this article, and the head of the BMNP, Ochirov, and others. In addition, the Buryat historian, Taras M. Mikhailov, gave a keynote address at the congress that included a condemnation of the 1937 act as unconstitutional. He argued that it had caused serious problems with the consolidation of the Buryat people, and that the reunification of Buryat lands should be explored. However, he also questioned the feasibility of reuniting the Buryat lands given the contemporary economic and political situation (Elave, 2000; Khamutaev, 2005).

Several government leaders then also entered the conversation. Saganov too condemned the 1937 act as unconstitutional and stated in a speech that he hoped that the leading organs of power in the Buryat ASSR and in the Russian Republic “will take the decision to change this oppositional document” because by doing so it “would be an act of political rehabilitation of the rights of the Buryat people” (Khamutaev, 2005, p. 130). Buldaev made similar comments, claiming that the act of breaking up the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR was unconstitutional, and that it destroyed the process of consolidating the Buryats, who came from different regions and spoke different dialects, into one, united Buryat people. The break-up, he explained, had triggered an intensive decline of the Buryat language, culture, and traditions. However, he expressed concerns about reunification stating that,

We believe it is premature at the present time to pose the question about unifying the Buryat ASSR with the two autonomous okrugs. The conditions should be right for unification. At the moment, we should unite our strength for building cultural and linguistic connections and for the rebirth of our native language and traditional culture.

With this, he then assured the congress that the question of the events of 1937, as well as the 1958 name change would be discussed by government bodies in the upcoming months. He then offered more support for the name change stating that,

I think that the question about the return of the republic’s name to Buryat-Mongolia . . . is sufficiently convincing based on the work of scholars and therefore we [the government] will try and come to an agreement with the hope of giving a return to these names. (Khamutaev, 2005, p. 127)

As the discussion continued, delegates of the congress unanimously agreed that the 1937 break-up had been unconstitutional and had left long-lasting negative consequences. However, the path moving forward—to reunify the Buryat lands into a larger republic or not—was not agreed upon. Although a number of delegates from the Buryat ASSR supported reunification, this was not the case with the delegates from the two Buryat autonomous okrugs. Leonid A. Khutanov, a Party official and one of the representatives from the Ust’-Ordinsky Buryat Autonomus Okrug, argued against reunification. He stated that there were strong economic ties between the Ust’-Ordinsky Okrug and the Irkutsk region in which the okrug was located, and that a merger with the Buryat ASSR would put that in jeopardy. He also pointed out that the merger did not have widespread support among his constituents (Tarmakhanov, 2003). He explained that,

During the years of being linked to the Irkut Oblast’ [territorial unit], deep connections have been made . . . economic and cultural. How can we break these connections and how would we be able to maintain them within the republic? No one today knows the answer to this . . . It is difficult to know whether or not unity with the Buryat Republic will be successful . . . The question of uniting the Ust’-Ordinsky Okrug to the republic is premature and a decision at this time is not possible.

The leading official from the Aginskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug, Guro-Darma Tsesdashiev, also criticized the possibility of reunification. He stated, “. . . it is impossible to unite the autonomous territories at this point” and argued that such border changes would create destabilization in the region (Khamutaev, 2005, 129).

In addition to economic concerns, there were also cultural ones about a possible merger. At a Buryat conference in Irkutsk held the previous year, participants expressed fear that unification might bring about the process of a general Buryat assimilation and thus the loss of specific aspects of identity for the western Buryats—those who live west of Lake Baikal. Some of the delegates from the Aginskii
Buryat Autonomous Okrug also expressed concerns about conformity in a larger territorial unit (Khamutaev, 2005). Thus, although many of the delegates at the Congress agreed that the Buryat republican government needed to seriously consider reunification, it was, nevertheless, a complicated and contentious issue.

**Cultural direction at the All-Buryat Congress**

A significant and enduring result of the congress was the foundation of the All-Buryat Association for the Development of Culture (VARK) to coordinate cultural activities among all Buryats of the USSR—not just those in the Buryat ASSR as had been the task of the Center for Buryat National Culture that had been created in Ulan-Ude in the fall of 1990. VARK was also assigned to facilitate exchanges between Buryats and other Mongolian people abroad, and to conduct further research on Buryat traditions, language, culture, and history. In addition, the artist Dashi-Nima Dugarov, who was already running the center in Ulan-Ude, was placed in charge (GARB, f. P-1, d. 10,743, ll. 68–69). The decision for founding such an institution was made before the start of the congress in conversations between government officials such as Potapov and various Buryat intellectuals like the Mongolian studies scholar, Chimitdorzhiev.

At the congress, Saganov emphasized how important it was for Buryat intellectuals and government officials to work together in making VARK and its goals successful. He explained that,

More than anything, scholars and figures of culture contribute to forming historical memory and national consciousness . . . for the future generations so that they may preserve and maintain national traditions and the spirituality of the people from the past. We also should emphasize the huge responsibility of our political leaders for the fate of the nation and its history. All the energy and talent of the Buryat intelligentsia should be directed for furthering the consolidation and spiritual rebirth of the Buryat people. (Khamutaev, 2005, p. 131)

Many discussions were then held at the congress about the path to reviving Buryat culture, how government officials and cultural leaders could facilitate this, and the role that VARK should play.

In particular, delegates at the congress expressed serious concerns about the decline of the Buryat language and what should be done to promote and revive it. As mentioned previously, Buryat language education in schools had been canceled in the 1970s and although there had been attempts to revive it in certain schools in Buryatia, the process had been slow. In addition, the publishing of books and newspapers and the production of broadcast media in the Buryat language had been continually decreasing since the late 1950s (Kuchmurukova, 2002). Congress delegates argued that VARK and other institutions could improve this situation by overseeing such activities as holding a seminar for Buryat language translators, changing laws concerning the Buryat language, organizing intensive Buryat language courses, creating more publications in Buryat, writing an encyclopedia of the Buryat language, and holding meetings among Buryat writers (GARB, f. P-1, d. 10,743, ll. 1–10).

In addition, delegates at the congress discussed how best to promote Buryat art, literature, music, folklore, and scholarly research. Suggestions were made for having VARK and other institutions organize a symposium on traditional Buryat art, create new exhibitions to be held across the Soviet Union, and facilitate the exchange of art exhibits between the republic and the two okrugs, as well as with Mongolian people in Mongolia and China. Delegates also proposed organizing more Buryat musical concerts, cultural festivals, folklore ensembles, and meetings of Buryat composers, artists, writers, and scholars. In promoting Buryat literature, proposals were made for celebrating the births of well-known Buryat writers and offering more help to those who were writing in Buryat. In addition, suggestions were made for aiding scholarly work by promoting it through support for academic journals and by more intensively studying Buryat history, especially topics related to the existence of Buryat autonomy (GARB, f. P-1, d. 10,743, ll. 1–10).

Along with calling upon Buryat intellectuals, political leaders, and new institutions such as VARK to lead a national revival, Saganov also spoke at the conference about the importance of securing a position for Buryatia within the Soviet Union that would protect Buryat culture. He argued that in the 1970s, the rights of Buryats had decreased, and that the Soviet constitution of 1978 did not give specific rights to the Buryats for self-determination. He explained that there were no laws that protected the Buryat language and that this needed to be changed. In addition, he pointed to the problems of the past, where leaders in the Buryat ASSR had been forced to abandon Buryat sovereignty due to absurd accusations of Buryat nationalism and pan-Mongolism. He demanded that this should never be permitted to happen again. Also, he made clear that given this tragic past, it had therefore been an extremely important move by the Buryat ASSR government to declare sovereignty on October 8, 1990. The declaration was a method, Saganov argued, to ensure better rights for the Buryats and for the republic in the future especially with the upcoming referendum and Gorbachev’s ideas about remaking the federation. The republican delegates at the congress largely agreed and many expressed complete support for the declaration of sovereignty (Khamutaev, 2005).

**Buryatia and the Buryats after the All-Buryat Congress**

One of the most positive consequences of the congress was that it brought together Buryats from all over the Soviet Union, as well as from Mongolia and China to
discuss pressing concerns of the Buryat nation and plans for a cultural revival. It allowed for the compiling of many grievances that had built up over numerous years about Soviet policies that had hindered the development of Buryat religions, traditions, and language, as well as had divided the Buryats of Siberia. It gave a public space for many Buryats to openly explore their identity as Mongolian people and as residents of a Russian state that had held power in the region since the 18th century. Buryats—Communist Party officials, intellectuals, cultural leaders, and more—came together to identify, examine, and discuss the mistakes and tragedies of the past and find practical measures for rectifying them.

An especially important result of the congress was the founding of VARK, an institution that is still in existence. Although VARK lacked effective financial resources throughout the 1990s and its influence began to decline in the 2000s, VARK was the first organization of its kind to take practical measures for reviving Buryat culture among all Buryats across the USSR and abroad (Amogolonova, 2008). VARK has worked to implement many of the goals laid out by the congress by coordinating and facilitating cultural activities such as art exhibits and promoting the Buryat language. It has also continued to hold congresses and meetings of Buryat leaders to maintain and push its agenda of cultural revival. In addition, it immediately began to work with the local government after the February 1991 All-Buryat Congress on several important events in the spring and summer of that same year such as a trip to Inner Mongolia to form connections with Buryats living there, a visit from the 14th Dalai Lama, and the holding of activities to celebrate the Buryat epic poem, Geser (GARB, P-1, op. 1, d. 10,743, ll. 85).

Less successful after the congress was the fulfilling of the goals laid out by the BMNP and members of the Buryat national movement about getting a reunification of the pre-1937 borders and returning “Mongolian” to the name of the republic. The BMNP and intellectuals such as Chimitdorzhiev continued to pressure the government on these topics, but their work yielded few results. In April 1991, Chimitdorzhiev reprinted a copy of the 1937 central order from Moscow to divide up the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR in Pravda Buriati and added along with it his criticism of the territorial changes (Chimitdorzhiev, 2004). Although Saganov and Buldaev had promised at the congress to have government bodies identify, examine, and discuss the mistakes and tragedies of the past and find practical measures for rectifying them.

Immediately after the congress, the local government was deeply involved with carrying out the March 17 referendum over preserving the union and it sought to gain a positive vote from republican residents. Local Communist Party officials supported staying in a united state with Russia and they published numerous articles in the local press promoting their case. They also held a conference titled, “Russia Consolidates the Strength of the USSR,” where participants stressed that Buryatia’s future would be best in a union with Russia. Perhaps the Party’s work paid off as around 85%—almost 10% higher than the USSR average—of the residents of the Buryat ASSR voted to preserve the union (GARB, f. P-1, op. 1, d. 10,742, l. 28–29). Although statistical evidence does not provide an ethnic breakdown of this vote, it is clear from the numbers that many Buryats, likely hoping to maintain economic and political stability, voted to stay in the union. Nevertheless, the August coup that occurred 5 months later ultimately brought about the collapse of the USSR and Buryat leaders suddenly faced a whole new set of challenges.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, Moscow acknowledged the name change from the Buryat ASSR to the Republic of Buryatia, which local officials had announced earlier in the October 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty. The Republic of Buryatia then became one of the 89 equal territorial units within the new Russian Federation as laid out in the country’s 1993 constitution. The two autonomous okrugs continued to remain in place outside of the republic until 2008 when the Ust’-Ordinskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug was dissolved and merged into the larger Irkutsk region and the Aginskii Buryat Autonomous Okrug was eliminated and became a part of a new Zabaikal’skii Krai. This development was part of a larger policy of centralization carried out by Vladimir Putin in the early 2000s. The new policy called for merging some of the country’s 89 federal units into larger territorial districts and the result was the dissolution of two of the three ethnic, Buryat territorial units. Although some Buryats protested these events, others supported them citing possibilities for better economic opportunities in larger federal entities (Sweet & Chakars, 2010).

The post-Soviet Buryat republican government continued to be led by Potapov and Saganov throughout the 1990s and it issued an official statement in 1993 that the 1937 act that had reduced the territory of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR had been illegal (Stroganova, 2001). In 1994, the republic wrote a new constitution, but it took no steps to reunify the Buryats of Siberia along the lines of the pre-1937 borders or return “Mongolian” to the republic’s name. Although the BMNP ran for positions in local elections, it received little support from voters and completely disbanded in 2001. Although Saganov passed away in 1999, Potapov won three elections (in 1994, 1998, and 2002) and served as president of the Republic of Buryatia until 2007. In 2004, Putin abolished the right of Russia’s regions to elect their own executive positions and went on to appoint the next two leaders of Buryatia when Potapov finished his last term. Putin first appointed the outsider and non-Buryat, Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, in 2007. Then, in February 2017, he appointed the Buryat Alexei Tsydenov. Since then, elections have been reinstated and Tsydenov won the popular vote in September 2018, as head of the republic.

Local scholars like Khamutaev, Elaev, and E. A. Stroganova, who have written about this period in Buryat
history, argue that the BMNP and the issues of territorial reunification and the name change did not receive widespread popularity because voters were more interested in political and economic stability than what many deemed to be unreachable goals (Elave, 2000; Khamutaev, 2005; Stroganova, 2001). Indeed, as Buryatia’s economy in the 1990s plummeted and it was forced to rely on special subsidies from Moscow, many residents turned to focus on everyday survival in the new economy. Political leaders in Buryatia then continually sought to have good relations with those at the center—first Boris Yeltsin and then Vladimir Putin—as a method for ensuring a reliable economic and political situation. Thus, although the All-Buryat Congress produced a commitment to Buryat cultural revival, it fell short in meeting some of the delegates’ solutions for achieving what they believed would bring about greater Buryat autonomy and stronger identity by reuniting all of the Buryats into one territory and reintroducing the term “Mongolian” to the republic’s name.

Conclusion

The All-Buryat Congresses of 1917 and the All-Buryat Congress of 1991 had many similar goals and outcomes. In both cases, the major concerns of the Buryats revolved around land, language, and preserving religions, traditions, and culture. In addition, the congresses provided assessments and conclusions about past state policies. What was significantly different about these two sets of congresses was that in 1917, the Buryats were largely seeking something completely new: to establish an autonomous region where one had not existed before and to build a political structure that would create institutions and leaders to manage it. The work they carried out during the congresses included creating a sophisticated blueprint of a future government, as well as a leading political organization to carry out their goals (Sablin, 2016).

In 1991, the Buryats already had autonomous regions and a political infrastructure with an entrenched local government that had been in charge for many years. This government then took a leading role in the 1991 All-Buryat congress where it was looking to largely keep the overall political structure in place and only add new methods and institutions to revive and preserve Buryat traditions, religions, language, and culture. What was most radical at that time was the demands made by some, especially the members of the BMNP, for a return to former Soviet policies that they considered to have been positive: the unification of Siberia’s Buryats into one autonomous territory and using the name “Mongolian” along with “Buryat.” Although these proposed changes were certainly meaningful for the Buryat nation in terms of constructing national markers of identity, they were not exactly new.

Ultimately, however, none of the delegates who attended the congresses of 1917 and 1991 could have imagined what came next: a severe collapse of long-standing state economic and political systems to be replaced by others. The changes required reassessing the goals and opportunities that had been laid out in the congresses. Although some aims were still possible such as creating a Buryat territorial unit in 1923 or providing the liberties necessary for a major Buddhist religious revival in the 1990s and early 2000s, others were lost. Nevertheless, these All-Buryat congresses were unique moments of freedom where large numbers of Buryats from diverse regions came together to openly discuss—and sometimes disagree—on issues of autonomy, identity, and the future of the Buryat nation.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. The union republics of Armenia, Georgia, Moldavia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania abstained from the vote (Suny, 1998).
2. In his 2005 book on the Buryat national movement, Khamutaev quotes extensively from transcripts of speeches made at the Congress available in GAR. In this section, I have translated from Russian to English excerpts of several of these quotes.

References


Zaitsev, V. I., & Kharaev, B. V. (1999). *Dinamika izmenenii i vzimodeistviia etnosotsial’noi i demograficheskoi struktur regiona* [The dynamic change and interaction of the ethno-social and demographic structure of the region]. Ulan-Ude: Buriatskii gosudarstvennyi universitet.


**Author biography**

Melissa Chakars is an associate professor of history at Saint Joseph’s University. She is the author of *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia: Transformation in Buryatia* (Central European University Press, 2014) and co-editor of the volume *Modernization, Nation-Building, and Television History* (Routledge, 2015). She has also published numerous articles on the Mongolian people of Russia, focusing on topics such as media, gender, and empire.
Power of the People’s Parties and a post-Soviet Parliament: Regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks of power in contemporary Mongolia

Marissa J Smith
Independent Scholar, Sunnyvale, CA, USA

Abstract
In 1994, the new Orkhon Province was created, transforming the status of the Soviet-established federal municipality Erdenet, a major copper-mining center responsible for much of the country’s export revenues and central to ongoing Mongolian–Russian relations. Rather than representing increased participation in national government for Erdenet residents, many of whom are members of transborder minority ethnicities with ties to remote parts of the country, the formation of the province has been controversial locally, as it has meant the introduction of provincial governors, de facto appointed by the Prime Minister. At the same time, the People’s Parties descending from the single state party of the socialist era have in fact been successful at maintaining their networks across the country, and often fielded successful candidates for seats representing Orkhon. Representatives have included the director of a large local construction firm who also held the post of director of foreign trade within the mining enterprise (2008 to 2012, 2016 to present), the son of the mining enterprise’s former General Director (2012 to present), and a politician long based in Ulaanbaatar but central to the MPRP (2016 to present). The situation demonstrates the tension in Mongolian governance between Ulaanbaatar-based centralization and vertical integration on the one hand (also pursued through attempts to privatize the mining enterprise) and the independence of constituencies integrated with regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks built up through long histories of international imperial entanglements on the other.

Keywords
Elections, ethnicity, infrastructure, political parties, regionalization

Introduction
This article concerns the role of a representative Parliament in integrating local and national levels of governance in contemporary Mongolia. Closely aligned with its neighbor, the Soviet Union, for almost the entirety of the 20th century, the governance of Mongolia has now long been structured into a four-level system of bag (neighborhood), sum (region, formerly coterminous with negdel collectives and state farms), and aimag (province). During the state socialist period, these levels of governance were integrated through single-party control; in the post-1990 period of multi-party elections, new centralizing processes were introduced. Rather than inscribing the form of constituencies and their representation in the Constitution of 1992, these are defined by a frequently, even regularly, changing Election Law. Also established in the Constitution of 1992 (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khuul, n.d.), the institution of the provincial governor (zasag darga), effectively appointed by the Prime Minister, has not been an effective means of central control to reorganize relations between the center and regions of Mongolia. Contributing to this has been that Mongolia’s regions have been long differentiated in terms of powerful cross-border networks constituting specific economic, infrastructural, and ethnic hubs, formed through

Corresponding author:
Marissa J Smith, Independent Scholar, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, USA. Email: marissas23@gmail.com

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).
a long history of what Sablin (2019) has called imperial entanglements. The reorganization of these relations to transform Mongolia’s economy (and international relations) has been a major goal of Mongolia’s Democratic Party and its associated movements since the 1980s. These parties and movements have been consistently contested, however, by the successors of the socialist era Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, the Mongolian People’s Party and the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party,\(^5\) which, since the socialist period have maintained their political organizations throughout the country, including in regions defined by transborder power networks associated with Mongolia’s “second cities.” This situation is amply demonstrated by recent political figures’ biographies and their elections, appointments, and political legitimacy in Erdenet, one of Mongolia’s four cities outside of the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

Although Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were all governed directly under the centralized party-state in the socialist period as “federal municipalities” or “towns under national jurisdiction” (Sanders, 2017) in the 1990s, they were each reincorporated as part of new provinces, Orkhon, Darkhan-Uul, and Govisumber, respectively. This reincorporation instituted the office of provincial governor in these regions, though provinces are not guaranteed the status of constituency or electoral district in the Constitution (Mongol Ulsein Khuluu, n.d.). Each of these towns or cities is a hub of transborder infrastructure, economy, and distinctive ethnic networks established over the course of, at least, the Qing, Tsarist Russian, Mongolian Bogd Khan, and Soviet imperial periods. Choir, formerly a Soviet Army cantonment of 259 buildings (Sanders, 2017, p. 181) was built at the site of a major monastery, along the major route between China, Urag (which became Ulaanbaatar), and the entrepôt of Maimaicheng/Khiakhta, the route on which was built the Trans-Mongolian Railway. Choibalsan, the administrative center for Dornod province, was also the site prior to the socialist period of a prominent monastery and a center of one of the Qing period’s Four Aimag of Khalkha Mongolia (covering, roughly, the territory of the Mongolian People’s Republic and then today’s Mongolia), and associated with transborder Buryat and Barga peoples. A railroad spur was constructed in the socialist period to connect the city, and local coal and uranium mines, to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Erdenet and Darkhan are both located on the Trans-Mongolian Railway in the Selenge region of northern Mongolia and the heart of Lake Baikal’s watershed; this area has also been associated with transborder Buryat groups as well as Chinese working farming allotments (tarialan) granted from the Buddhist ecclesiastical estates as the area formed a key section of the border of the Qing and Russian Tsarist empires (Batsaikhan, 2012, p. 83).

Erdenet and Orkhon province are home to the Erdenet Mining Corporation, responsible for roughly a third of the Mongolian economy in the form of copper ores produced and exported via Soviet-established equipment, infrastructure, and professionalization. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Erdenet was settled as a new city, predominantly by ethnic groups from Mongolia’s border regions to the far east (Buryat), west (Kazakh, Dorvod, Uriankhai, Oold, Darkhad), and south (Khalkha from Govi-Altai) as well as more locally. Today, these groups continue to define themselves in terms of these distinct ethnicities and maintain strong relationships with coethnics across the country, and across the border. Along these relations flow access to necessary valuables associated with the city (khot, gorod)—education, professional jobs, medicine, apartments—as well as with the countryside (khodoo)—pasture, livestock, forest products, and herding as well as other “traditional” knowledges.

Constitutional and legal reforms after the 1990 “Democratic Revolution” sought, at least ostensibly, to move fracture and contestation into the arena of a popularly elected, multi-party Parliament, consolidating national interests. As richly documented by anthropologists working in Mongolia since the 1990s, fears about economic, ethnic, and territorial fragmentation of the nation state after the break with state socialism have defined the period of so-called “transition” (Bille, 2016; Bulag, 1998; Buyandelger, 2013; Pedersen, 2011). On one hand, commentators have long celebrated the participation of rural Mongolians in elections and establishment of myriad political parties. Yet at the same time, there has been a notable persistence of several contesting formations of centralized, vertically integrated governance, wielded by two dominant political parties (and their associated smaller parties and movements) consistently holding power in different regions and social sectors. Adding to the complexity of the situation, these frequently exchange control of the presidency and the Parliament.

The Democratic Party is strongly associated with the Democratic Revolution of 1990–1991, in which young and subaltern members of the party-state ruling elite called for the intensification of Mongolia’s analogues of glasnost and perestroika (il tod and shinechlel), and then the resignation of the government and subsequent multi-party elections. Since the 1990s, many of those involved extended and intensified their networks beyond rather than within Mongolia. However, the Democratic Party has had difficulty challenging the networks of the single-party state inherited and maintained by the Mongolian People’s Party and Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (Ginsburg, 1995), and accordingly the Democratic Party has often worked to sidestep the power of the People’s Parties based in those parties’ continued domination of political organizing in much of the countryside, provincial centers, and socialist-period established enterprises such as Erdenet.

The following sections of the article (1) summarize the existing literature on and trends in Mongolian political reform to illustrate the approach of the Democratic Party and its associated Western-based reformers; (2) contrast the
presumption on the part of Western reformers that Mongolia is unified and homogeneous with a description of Mongolia’s nature as a set of regions with distinct networks of power defined by infrastructure, economy, and ethnicity; (3) argue that this is a condition which drives Mongolian politicians to attempt to unify the country through a flexible Parliamentary Elections Law and the institution of the provincial governor; and (4) provide an extended description of the 2012 Parliamentary election campaigns in Erdenet, which involved an unpopular Democratic Party provincial governor and largely ignored Democratic Party candidates unaligned with regional networks, and successful People’s Party candidates, deeply part of those networks, especially but not limited to those of the mining enterprise.

Constitutional approaches to understanding and evaluating Mongolian politics and governance

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mongolians followed their Eastern European counterparts in embarking upon a “transition” from Soviet-led state socialism. Since then, Mongolia’s political system has frequently been the object of praise, and reform, by American political scientists. According to these narratives, the young Mongolian elite (many of whom have studied in the United States and been members of the Democratic Party) turned against one-party rule and state planning of the economy, forced their elders to step down, and trained at Western universities and with international political organizations to refashion Mongolia’s governing institutions (Addleton, 2013; Ginsburg & Ganzorig 1996; Jargalsaikhan, 2017; Kaplonski, 2004; Rossabi, 2005; Sindelar, 2009; Tsedevdambaa, 2016). As with the postcommunist governments of Eastern Europe, for almost three decades, the focus here has been on the Constitution and constitutional amendments as a means of regulating relations between governing powers (Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996, Munkh-Erdene, 2010) and guaranteeing human rights (Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996). In the 1990s and early 2000s, Western commentators pointed to Mongolia’s “balance of powers” and “divided government” (Fish, 2001, p. 337) between parties in “the postcommunist region’s best developed party system” (Fish, 1999, p. 801) as signs of a not just extant but even exemplary democracy.

In recent years, however, prominent Western-aligned politicians and political theorists have bemoaned frequent changes as features of instability. Prime ministers are frequently replaced, parliamentary majorities often shift, and presidential cabinets shuffle regularly, though cabinet appointments must be agreed upon by both the President and the Prime Minister. The figure “fifteen changes of cabinet, averaging 1.5 per year” is now a regular refrain in laments about democracy in Mongolia (Migeddorj, 2017, Tserendash Tsolmon cited in Bayartsogt, 2018). On the international scene, these conversations have presumed the central control of the Mongolian government operating at a national scale and remained focused on issues like the relation between the President and Parliament in appointing and confirming the cabinet and the Prime Minister (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), whether or not prime ministers and cabinet members may also be members of Parliament (the so-called “double deel” issue) (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), and to what degree parliamentary representation should be majoritarian versus proportional (Migeddorj, 2012). Only very few analysts have focused on how government at the local and provincial levels functions in Mongolia, and the effects on this of constitutional and other legal changes at the beginning of the “transition” from socialism (see especially Badarchyn & Odgaard, 1996).

Although in Western-based discourses, the economic impact of these reforms is about fostering so-called free markets, this involves a centralization of the national economy. Mongolian reformers have concentrated on rearticulating the relationship of Soviet-established enterprises like Erdenet and the Mongolian center away from historically grounded transborder and transregional relationships and toward the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, a priority that often aligns with the privatization programs required by the Western organizations provisioning the Ulaanbaatar-centered political economy.6 However, in contrast to their Western counterparts, these Mongolian reformers are deeply anxious about the unity of the Mongolian nation, and are working in continuity with late Soviet period projects that understand the processing and export of Mongolian products to have been artificially restricted by the Soviet Union and now by Russia. Associated with this is a preoccupation with the consolidation of control over Mongolian resources. Paradoxically, both international and Mongolian actors ignore the physical and social networks creating these resources, and apparently have difficulty in understanding the existing networks and the inability to effectively dismantle or bypass these.

Regionalized Mongolia: powerful infrastructural, economic, and ethnic transborder networks

International advisors and reformers involved in the rewriting of Mongolia’s Constitution and the establishment of its Constitutional Court, in alignment with the idealizations of the Ulaanbaatar-based policymakers they often work with, imagine the country as split between an urban, cosmopolitan, internationally connected capital city (khot), on one hand, and a rural, locally focused, countryside (khodoo) populated mainly by nomadic herders on the other hand. For example, Ginsburg (1995) writes that situated in the grassland steppes between Russia and China, Mongolia has a little over two million people, several hundred thousand of whom are semi-nomadic herders living a largely
intact traditional lifestyle. Most of the remainder are concentrated in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. (p. 460)

and despite collectivization of herding in the 1950s, the nomadic lifestyle of herdsman continued and families lived as individual units in their traditional pastures. There was little threat of grass-roots political organization against communist rule, and therefore little need for repression in the countryside . . . Massive inflows of aid and goods [during the socialist period] meant that the average herdsman enjoyed a far better standard of living than he would have had without them. (p. 462)

American and Western European analysts also tend to believe that Mongolia has a “common ethnicity” and “cohesive national identity” and that ethnic homogeneity is a factor contributing to Mongolia’s “relative success in regards to other nations that transitioned from communism to democracy” (Schmücking & Adiyasuren, 2017).

Among themselves, however, Mongolians gesture to and are often nervous about the range of regionally based international networks of wealth, power, and identity present among them. In a collection that also included a contribution by the then current American ambassador to Mongolia, emphasizing the need for “checks and balances” including Parliament as “a forum in which many Mongolian voices are heard” (Addleton, 2012, p. 38), national security advisor Batchimeg Migeddorj (2012) wrote,

Since our democratic revolution, almost all political elections in Mongolia followed the majoritarian electoral system (sometimes called “first past the post”). Some elected politicians have often chosen cash distribution and other populist actions in their constituency as a way to strengthen their popularity. Unfortunately, such actions, which are reinforced by our existing election system, have fueled “constituency-oriented politics”, diverting politicians away from large-scale national policies, wide-ranging poverty reduction goals, and national economic security and social development aims. For example, fuel crisis [sic] is just one of many significant issues for Mongolia’s economic security. It is alarming that despite obvious risks faced by current Mongolian society, the Parliamentary majority—which is well-aware of these risks—has chosen once again the majoritarian electoral system, which further complicates the situation. (p. 58–59)

Monitoring Twitter commentary as election results were coming in for the presidential election of 2017, I noted that accusations of vote-buying were especially levied against ethnic Kazakhs, who were also labeled as living in “als khaazgar,” or particularly remote sum (analogous to “counties”) in the extreme far west of Mongolia. As to far eastern Mongolia, the Inner Mongolian, Cambridge-trained and affiliated anthropologist Uradyn Bulag (1998) wrote of his 1990–1992 fieldwork that “my decision to go there [Dashbalbar, a majority Buryat sum near the Russian and Chinese borders] caused a sensation. [Ethnic majority] Halh [Khalkha] friends told me that the Buryats there were drunkards and rough; they fought, often using knives” (p. 23).

As details from Bulag’s field trip to Dashbalbar and Dadal indicate, the divide between urban and rural, city and countryside involves more than class-based snobbery on the part of the capital’s intellectual and political elite. He describes intense regional differentiation in Mongolia, characterized not only by the presence of particular ethnic groups, but also particular transborder international ties involving infrastructure and economy as well as ethnic identity. Dashbalbar neighbors the semi-secret uranium mining enterprise Mardai run by Soviet citizens; in 1991, when Bulag visited to attend the summer naadam festival, the mine director and engineers brought two TV sets and sports equipment and after the Soviet miners (also of a mix of ethnicities, including Buryats from the R.S.F.S.R., Delaplance, 2012) left, Dashbalbar residents complained to Bulag (1998) that the abandoned town had been “filled with Mongols from Choibalsan” (fourth largest city in Mongolia, capital of Dornod province)” (p. 23):

The Buryats would like it to remain a Russian town, so they could benefit from exchange relations. Mongol control of the town would mean destruction, they said. In fact, many people from Choibalsan, Dashbalbar, and Bayandung [sic] came to dismantle the houses and take away the logs. (p. 23)8

International border crossing was frequent, and Bulag (1998) wrote that

although politically, Buryats in this region are subject to Choibalsang [sic] and Ulaanbaatar, in kinship and economic terms they are oriented towards Chita and other regions. . . . they were keen to visit Chita and Inner Mongolia and asked me to write them letters of invitation. (p. 24)

Like the regions including Dashbalbar, Dadal, and Mardai, Erdenet and Orkhon constitute a region with distinctive transborder ties consisting of both industrial and transport infrastructure related to the mine and railway as well ethnically coded relations of kinship and identity, differentiating the region from the Khalkha-dominated and defined capital. In addition, Erdenet is a center of integration articulating other Mongolian regions. Since the 1970s many of its residents have migrated from (and regularly visit) regions across Mongolia. Kazakhs, Dorvod, Urianthai, Oold, and Darkhad people came to Erdenet from and regularly return to western Mongolia. Buryats from eastern Mongolia (including Buryats from Dadal) as well as Buryats and Khamnigans from Selenge and Khovsgul provinces within a day’s drive of Erdenet reside there. Khalkha Mongols from the southern Govi-Alai province also comprise a major group in Erdenet. As with Mardai, with which Erdenet was and is still specifically
compared by Ulaanbaatar-based reformers, Erdenet’s trans-border industrial ties are productive for those in the region but often seem extractive vis-à-vis the nation. Erdenet is not only one of Mongolia’s two second cities, the copper-molybdenum mine is one of the largest in the world and was the last Soviet copper mine established, and also lies between Ulaanbaatar and Irkutsk on the Trans-Mongolian Railway—thus the city continues to represent significant strategic interests for Russia as well as for Mongolia.

Bulag (1998) writes of the phenomenon called darga togtokhgu (“leader doesn’t fit”), referring to the political illegitimacy of centrally appointed leaders in these regions (p. 52). In the case of Dadal, this had happened already in the 1980s when a sum leader of the Darkhad ethnicity (based in Khuvsgul province of northern Mongolia, just east of Tuva) was “driven away.” Bulag also writes that “the collapse of power in 1990 suddenly revealed the vulnerability of this central controlling system” whereby local leaders were appointed by the national center. Bulag further relates (citing Byambadorj, 1991) that after the 1990 election in the far-western majority-Kazakh Bayan-Ulgii province Mongol party, sum, and youth organization officials were removed and replaced by Kazakhs, and “cadres” from (central) Ovorkhangai province were removed from (northern) Selenge, (eastern) Dornogovi, and (eastern) Sukhbaatar province.

Representatives from these regions also of course actively pursue integration with the center, though on their own terms. The Constitution (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khul, n.d.) delineates not just the roles and relationships between presidents, prime ministers, and the Constitutional Court (Sanders, 1992), but also, as emphasized by Bulag, was birthed in the context of lengthy debates over the new national emblem, and Bulag (1998) notes that many of the young reformers participating in the Small Khural established to draft the Constitution were Buryat and otherwise non-Khalkha, which effected their legitimacy. Kazakhs insisted on being granted the status of undesten ethnicity rather than yastan ethnicity, claiming a status of equality with rather than as a subgroup of Mongols (Bulag, 1998). The Constitution of 1992, importantly, does not define the form of representation comprising Parliament, leaving this to be defined by the Law on Elections, and also includes a complicated section on the new office of provincial governor. Both of these features may be read as measures torn between imperatives to centralize the country after the abandonment of single-party rule, on one hand, and preserve regionalism and the interests of their powerful transborder infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks on the other.

The 2012 parliamentary elections in Erdenet

In July 1994, the three “federally administered” cities of Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were reorganized into the system of aimag (province), sum (regions), and bag (communities) (Sanders, 2017, p. lx). Orkhon aimag was organized with two sum: Bayan-Undur, comprising the until-then federal municipality Erdenet, centered around a copper-molybdenum mining and mineral processing enterprise established with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, and Jargalant, the territory of the former Ulaan Tolgoi state farm established to supply Erdenet (Konagaya & Chuluun, 2013). Areas of apartment blocks and fenced-in yards with houses and mobile felt ger (khoroolol) were redesignated as bag.

At least since participant observation-based fieldwork I undertook in 2011 and 2012, formation of the province has been controversial among employees of the joint Mongolian–Russian Erdenet Mining Enterprise. The engineers I worked closely with told me that their city had been transformed into a province so that the center would be able to unfairly extract more taxes. Assigning their city (khot) the status of province also activated defenses against being designated part of the rural, undeveloped “countryside” (khodoo) and subject to subordination by a single Mongolian city, Ulaanbaatar. In contrast, Erdenet residents regard their city’s proper status to be that of “avant-garde project of the century.”

However, given how zealously Erdenet residents engaged with Parliamentary elections campaigns, and that incorporation as a province, at least in practice and popular understanding if not explicitly and consistently by the frequently changed Elections Law, guaranteed seats in Parliament, complaints about the reorganization of Erdenet and its immediate environs as a province remained somewhat puzzling to me. A key to this conundrum is that status as a province also places Erdenet under the power of a provincial governor effectively appointed by the Prime Minister. In 2011 and 2012, the provincial governor was particularly unpopular, and I also heard complaints about one of his predecessors. Being of the Democratic Party, he was further aligned with the interests of Ulaanbaatar and the national integration of Erdenet. In contrast to the Democratic Party, it is the People’s Party which, generally speaking, maintains the status quo of Erdenet’s integration with Soviet-cum-Russian infrastructural, industrial, economic, and political networks, and only some Mongolian networks based in Ulaanbaatar.

My coworkers, friends, and acquaintances in Erdenet often complained about the governor of the province. In late 2011, when national news broke that the provincial governor had been beaten up by a legal assistant to the mining enterprise’s general director (Dolzodmaa, 2011), my coworkers recounted to me that the building next to our main workplace (in the city, not at the mine site) had been taken from the mining enterprise after it had been fitted out with a sauna. When I asked other friends and acquaintances in other workplaces of the mining corporation what they thought of the incident, they expressed dissatisfaction with
the state of garbage collection in the city. During the campaign for Parliamentary elections in May, conversation about this governor continued, rather than turning to the candidates that the Democratic Party was fielding for seats in Parliament. A coworker told me that the governor was likely to lose his position, which was granted by the Prime Minister, whose party (the Democratic Party) was likely to lose their majority in Parliament, but this coworker was also following news about an anti-corruption agency investigation into the governor’s involvement with funds that had perhaps not all gone into building a new stadium. Around the same time, construction problems at the building site of a colossal Buddha between the mining factory and the city were also being cited in corruption allegations against a former provincial governor (see Smith, 2019).

Mongolian legislators regularly change legislation to shift the balances of power in favor of their party’s majority. Unlike the United States Constitution, the Mongolian Constitution of 1992 (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khul, n.d.) does not make any definitions of how constituencies should be defined. The Constitution defines the Parliament as comprised of 76 members directly elected by their constituencies, but the definition of constituencies is covered by the Law on The Election of the State Great Khural of Mongolia (2012). The redesignation of Erdenet as a province has had no clear effect on how many representatives the citizens, and the enterprise, might have in the Parliament. The Law on Elections changes regularly preceding elections for Parliament every 4 years. In 2012, while I was conducting fieldwork in Erdenet, two members of Parliament were directly elected by citizens of Orkhon province. In 2016, Orkhon received three of the 26 constituencies. According to Sanders, in the 1992 election, Erdenet and Darkhan each constituted a single constituency (1992, p. 518) and elected two members each to the Parliament (1996, p. 263). Unlike the candidates in the Parliamentary election belonging to the Mongolian People’s Party, those running as Democratic Party members were not part of the major regional network integrated with the Erdenet Mining Corporation. Mongolian People’s Party members who have represented Orkhon province in the Parliament include O. Sodbileg, the son of the first Mongolian General Director of the mining corporation, who presided over the enterprise between 1988 and 1998 (Sanders, 2003, p. 259), and D. Damba-Ochir, a metallurgist who had worked in the mining corporation in a range of roles and whose construction firm regularly completes contracts for large infrastructure projects in Erdenet. Re-elected in 2016, D. Damba-Ochir was previously elected in 2008, and in 2012 was the director of a prominent construction firm in Erdenet, “Ochir Tuv” (Eng. “Ochir Center”) which I was told enjoyed a close relationship with the mining enterprise for contracts, but executed these successfully enough in the form of sidewalks and other urban infrastructure (of the kind that locals complained provincial governors were failing to manage). According to Sanders (2017, p. 210), Damba-Ochir had been the deputy director general of foreign trade for the Erdenet Mining Enterprise, and according to his profile on the official Parliament website (http://parliament.mn/cv/113), graduated from the Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloys, as another metallurgist I knew at Erdenet also had. One of the two members from Erdenet in the 1992–1996 Parliament was J. Delgertsetseg, (Sanders, 1996, p. 55), who had directed the Erdenet carpet factory from 1980 to 1992, and became a member of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party’s Central Committee in 1992. Those running for Parliament to represent Orkhon from the Democratic and other parties (most of which have been born from factions in the Democratic Party) have included industrialists of note, like Kh. Zoljargal, but in industries such as meat-packing that are not necessarily well-integrated with the mining enterprise.

Thus, the integration of Orkhon province and the Erdenet region with the nation state is maintained not via the institution of provincial governor, but rather through structures of the Mongolian People’s Party, successors to the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party of 1924 to 1990 of the single-party, state socialist Mongolian People’s Republic. Political figures important to the region’s own distinctive intranational and international institutions and networks, especially the Erdenet Mining Corporation and associated industrial enterprises as well as the ethnic groups whose members established and were recruited to work in these since the 1970s, are incorporated into these structures at the national level, that is, as members of the Parliament and its Standing Committees (baingiin khoroo). In 2012, the candidate who merited the most discussion (at least in my circles—primarily engineers and economists in their 20s and 30s working for the mining enterprise, some second-generation Erdenet employees and residents, and others originally from a range of province and sum centers) – was O. Sodbileg, the son of the former General Director of the Erdenet Mining Enterprise, Sh. Otgonbileg. Sodbileg’s campaign was obviously lavishly funded, with a hard-cover illustrated pop-up book distributed door to door, a late-model minivan covered with his image and sporting a loudspeaker, and a central campaign office in an apartment rather than a mobile felt and wooden-latticework ger. A friend of mine (neither a regular supporter of the Democratic Party nor the People’s Parties) commented that this was suspicious, a mark of funding from beyond Erdenet, though it seems likely it indicates support from the People’s Party as integrated with networks local to Erdenet as well as Ulaanbaatar and beyond. Sodbileg was careful to establish himself as homegrown while also playing up his cosmopolitanism (studies in Switzerland and at Georgetown), and he portrayed himself in campaign materials as a child at the knee of Otgonbileg. Sodbileg was elected in 2012, and re-elected in 2016.

Although Sodbileg did not explicitly vow to defend the interests of the mining corporation and its employees, the
absence of language about “diversifying the economy” and Mongolia’s “national interests” was striking when compared with that found in the Democratic Party candidates’ campaign materials. In addition to being considerably less elaborate (brochures and a magazine rather than a hardcover book), rather than establishing themselves as associated with the regional infrastructures, Democratic candidates even actively went against these. One Democratic candidate, Zoljargal (who ran again unsuccessfully, as a member of a third party, in 2016), presented himself as a graduate of a Czechoslovakian university and executive of a meat-processing factory, and in a joint campaign magazine asserted that the Erdenet mine was nearly extinct, and presented vague plans for the creation of a new cashmere industry (even though the Erdenet Carpet Factory, privatized and now under the control of major import/export and retailing conglomerate Nomin, already had one of the country’s largest and most successful cashmere processing and manufacturing operations).

Besides O. Sodbileg, L. Tsog ran successfully in 2012, though I heard almost nothing about this candidate. As I found out in the last 2 years, when a scandal over attempts to privatize the Erdenet enterprise erupted in national politics in 2016 on the eve of the parliamentary elections and has continued to boil, L. Tsog, who took a public role in debates over Erdenet privatization issues, has been a major political figure since the late socialist period. After 2010, he joined former President N. Enkhbayar’s new party split from the Mongolian People’s Party, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (Sanders, 2017, p. 828). I did hear, however, of support for N. Enkhbayar and his new party in Erdenet, particularly from a friend whose mother had worked at the Erdenet carpet factory rather than the mining enterprise since the late socialist period. In 2016, another Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party member won a seat from the Erdenet/Orkhon constituency, O. Baasankhuu, based in Ulaanbaatar and with no prior connections to Erdenet that I have been able to find, and whose seat in the 2012–2016 Parliament was granted through proportional representation.

Conclusion

Most recently, anthropologists following Mongolian politics have called the Parliament “conosociational” (Sneath, 2012, p. 155) across party lines, agreeing to varying extents with the concept among Ulaanbaatar-based Mongolian intellectuals of “MANAN,” literally “fog,” a combination of the acronyms for the Mongolian People’s Party (MAN, Mongol Ardiin Nam) and the Democratic Party (AN, Ardchilsan Nam) (Dulam, 2017; Munkherdene, 2018). Although the concept makes sense in terms of negotiating the considerable powers of the President and the Parliament, who must agree to accomplish fundamental tasks including forming the cabinet (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), it does not appear to operate in the “cooptation” of regions, in which the Mongolian People’s Party, and to some extent, its breakaway, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, have been much more successful than the Democratic Party and its associated smaller parties. This reminds one of how in the Russian Federation, a strong single party, United Russia, and regional governors must mutually coopt one another (Golosov & Tkacheva, 2018; Reuter, 2010). Although the Erdenet mine is aging and has long been ignored on international, regional, and national scenes, with infrastructural and economic development in Mongolia continuing to stagnate in the past several years, the city and its railhead have been recently been at the center of major national and continental development projects. These include speculative projects by Russians, Chinese, and Australians purporting to connect Tuva and Khuvsgul to a China–Mongolia–Russia Corridor of the One Belt One Road (OBOR)/Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Erdenet enterprise has also been at the center of several corruption scandals that have dominated Mongolian national politics since 2016 and contributed to major turnovers in the leadership of the long-ruling Democratic Party, whose support is concentrated in Ulaanbaatar and throughout the international Mongolian diaspora. Meanwhile, Erdenet has continued production, and the number of apartment buildings, and new garbage trucks, has increased, as I observed when I visited in summer 2016.

Although during the late socialist period, Erdenet was aligned with government executives including Yu. Tsedenbal himself, in the post-socialist period, the city has been aligned with the People’s Parties, the Mongolian People’s Party and its 2012 breakaway, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, rather than the Democratic Party and its associated parties and movements. Although a major transition in parliamentary politics, the transition to a multi-party system, took place in the early 1990s, this has not been accompanied by an upset of dynamics of transborder regional integration and independence from a national central government long evident in the region’s politics at national and local scales.

The People’s Parties have maintained relations of some degree of mutuality with regional powers that accommodate their interests, not only salvaging or scavenging late-socialist infrastructures but also expanding public infrastructures. The Democratic Party, confident in reforms crafted with American and Western European economists and political scientists, has focused on power in the capital and national abstractions, and pursued unsuccessfully and with limited legitimacy, across national and regional scales, take-overs of regional hubs like the Erdenet mining enterprise that would tear these hubs from the networks, regional, national, and international, that constitute them.
The Parliamentary structure established during the post-state socialist period, with the form of representation defined by an easily and frequently changed Law on Elections rather than a Constitution that must be amended with the cooperation of a Constitutional Court, has proven ineffectual at dismantling these networks. The office of provincial governor established by the Constitution has also been unable to establish itself as a mode of vertical regional administration capable of bypassing regional networks that have usually been able to elect one of their own to Parliament. The Mongolian People’s Party and Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party have maintained their network, which is integrated with ethnic, infrastructural, and transborder networks elaborated as successive entanglements of the Qing, Russian Tsarist, Bogd Khan, and Soviet empires.

Acknowledgements

For helpful and enthusiastic feedback and discussion that enabled the further development of an earlier version of this article, the author thanks the organizers and fellow participants of the workshop “Parliaments and Political Transformations in Europe and Asia: Diversity and Representation in the 20th and 21st Century” held at the University of Heidelberg by the ERC Project “Entangled Parliamentarisms: Constitutional Practices in Russia, Ukraine, China and Mongolia, 1905–2005” in February 2019. Jessica Madison-Piskatá and Kip Grosvenor Hutchins generously listened as I worked to develop the main arguments. Dan Sirbu also provided detailed comments on a near-final draft that helped to clarify key arguments.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article was funded by American Center for Mongolian Studies and Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies.

ORCID iD

Marissa J Smith https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6694-6884

Notes

1. Also known as the State Great Khural or Ulsin Ilkh Khural. This article uses “the Parliament” to refer to this body, as is common practice when discussing it in English, except where other terms are part of official translations of the Constitution and other laws.
2. Analogously, the capital city Ulaanbaatar is further subdivided into khoroo (districts) and duureg (neighborhoods).
3. These English translations of these administrative and territorial units follow that on the website of the Constitutional Court of Mongolia (http://www.conscourt.gov.mn/?page_id=842&lang=en). In the body of the article, these English terms are used, except in the case of sum, as here “region” is being used to describe transnational networks associated with larger territories. Sum is often translated as “county.” Bag is sometimes translated into English as “brigade” or “team,” indicating the overlapping of sum and collective and state farm organization and integration of party–state governance during much of the 20th century.
4. The Law on Elections, which defines parliamentary representation beyond the number of seats and constituencies mandated in the constitution, has changed several times; only in 2012 was representation wholly proportional. See Seeberg and Fish (2017, p. 130) for a summary of changes.
5. In 2011, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party split; former President N. Enkhbayar’s new party kept this name, while the dominating remainder of the party had taken the new name Mongolian People’s Party in November 2010 (Sanders, 2017, p. 285).
7. The original has “sports facilities” (Bulag, 1998, p. 23).
8. Such wooden houses have also been dismantled and moved from this area to the national capital Ulaanbaatar (and back?) in recent years (Elizabeth Fox, personal communication).
9. It is not only the international trade of mineral wealth that is anxiously regarded from the point of view of the national capital, however. Bulag (1998) also points out the continuing presence in the Constitution of language about livestock being “national wealth protected by the State” (p. 60) and how, at least in the early 1990s, the government was anxious to prevent carpets from leaving the country in the luggage of tourists (p. 53).
10. As part of the “transition” from state socialism in 1990, the 1960 Constitution was amended to create a Small Khural of 50 members (Sanders, 1992, p. 510), which did not represent administrative and territorial units; rather “each party received one seat for each 2% of the vote they received in the 1990 election” (Heaton, 1992, p. 50). The Small Khural drafted the 1992 Constitution and disbanded; “the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and the Asia Foundation all offered advice to the drafters” (Rossabi, 2005, p. 53, citing Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996).
11. In a 1992 article, Sanders (p. 507) reports that Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were placed under the administration of the provinces “in which they are situated” (p. 507) (meaning perhaps to which their territories belonged prior to the founding of the cities; in Erdenet’s case, Bulgan); it seems that in fact the measure was never fully carried out.
12. Fieldwork during 2011 and 2012 was conducted under review and approval by the Princeton University IRB, and fieldwork in 2016 was conducted under review and approval by the Foothill-De Anza Community College District IRB.
13. The workgroup I conducted most of my participant observation with was responsible for teaching metallurgy students at the enterprise’s university (incorporated in 1996 as a branch of the national University of Science and Technology) and conducting research with international partners into new metallurgical techniques.
14. In 2015, a draft was submitted in the Parliament calling for a referendum to make several amendments to the Constitution, including one that would redesignate Erdenet and Darkhan as
cities (Byambasuren, 2015; Dierkes, 2015), prompting some on Erdenet-centered social media to voice approval, posting photos of a plaque at the mine site naming Erdenet as a city. #Erdenetbolkh "(Erdenet is a city"") is also now a social media hashtag, and in 2012, the Erdenet Mining Corporation sponsored a hiphop music video with this title (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qmd4ODt438&list=PLBGJD_zHtp2LdDZM7TNDbZt-K1elqFbKAZ&t=0s&index=2).

15. As during the socialist period, each level of administration (aimag, sum, bag) has an elected khural. During the socialist period, these elected a presidium tasked with “directing ‘economic and cultural-political construction,’” for supervising the economic and cooperative organizations, for confirming and implementing the economy plan and local budgets, for ensuring the observance of laws, and for making certain that all citizens were fully involved in the work of the state” (Worden & Savala, 1991, p. 184). The 1992 Constitution, however, created the position of province governor (aimgiin zasgii darga), to be nominated by a directly elected “citizens’ representative’s khural” (iridedin tololoogchiin khural) but confirmed by the Prime Minister (Badarchyn & Odgaard, 1996; Sanders, 2017, p. 463). Badarchyn and Odgaard (1996) give detailed description of how limited the powers of these local governance bodies are. The unpopularity of the provincial governor in this case does not seem connected to his not having been directly elected. His illegitimacy stemmed from his party affiliation associated with and indexing the lack of his and that party’s integration with regional networks and infrastructures.

16. In the 1992 election, all 76 seats were directly elected in 26 multisit constituents; in 1996, 2000, and 2004, there were 76 single-seat constituents; in 2008, there were again 76 seats in 26 multisit constituents (Sanders, 2017, pp. 464–465). See Seeberg and Fish (2017, p. 130) for a summary of changes, including determinations of constitutionality by the Constitutional Court.

References
Byambadorj, T. (1991). Eh oron eheldegtsegtee duusah yosgui [There is no Reason for the End of the Motherland when she was just Born]. Boditiin Solbtsol [Intersection for Thoughts], 7.


**Author biography**

Marissa J Smith has recently taught cultural anthropology at De Anza College in Cupertino, California, and regularly contributes to the blog *Mongolia Focus*. 
Power of the People’s Parties and a post-Soviet Parliament: Regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks of power in contemporary Mongolia

Marissa J Smith
Independent Scholar, Sunnyvale, CA, USA

Abstract
In 1994, the new Orkhon Province was created, transforming the status of the Soviet-established federal municipality Erdenet, a major copper-mining center responsible for much of the country’s export revenues and central to ongoing Mongolian–Russian relations. Rather than representing increased participation in national government for Erdenet residents, many of whom are members of transborder minority ethnicities with ties to remote parts of the country, the formation of the province has been controversial locally, as it has meant the introduction of provincial governors, de facto appointed by the Prime Minister. At the same time, the People’s Parties descending from the single state party of the socialist era have in fact been successful at maintaining their networks across the country, and often fielded successful candidates for seats representing Orkhon. Representatives have included the director of a large local construction firm who also held the post of director of foreign trade within the mining enterprise (2008 to 2012, 2016 to present), the son of the mining enterprise’s former General Director (2012 to present), and a politician long based in Ulaanbaatar but central to the MPRP (2016 to present). The situation demonstrates the tension in Mongolian governance between Ulaanbaatar-based centralization and vertical integration on the one hand (also pursued through attempts to privatize the mining enterprise) and the independence of constituencies integrated with regional infrastructural, economic, and ethnic networks built up through long histories of international imperial entanglements on the other.

Keywords
Elections, ethnicity, infrastructure, political parties, regionalization

Introduction
This article concerns the role of a representative Parliament in integrating local and national levels of governance in contemporary Mongolia. Closely aligned with its neighbor, the Soviet Union, for almost the entirety of the 20th century, the governance of Mongolia has now long been structured into a four-level system of bag (neighborhood), sum (region, formerly coterminous with negdel collectives and state farms), and aimag (province). During the state socialist period, these levels of governance were integrated through single-party control; in the post-1990 period of multi-party elections, new centralizing processes were introduced. Rather than inscribing the form of constituencies and their representation in the Constitution of 1992, these are defined by a frequently, even regularly, changing Election Law. Also established in the Constitution of 1992 (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khulu, n.d.), the institution of the provincial governor (zasag darga), effectively appointed by the Prime Minister, has not been an effective means of central control to reorganize relations between the center and regions of Mongolia. Contributing to this has been that Mongolia’s regions have been long differentiated in terms of powerful cross-border networks constituting specific economic, infrastructural, and ethnic hubs, formed through a
long history of what Sablin (2019) has called imperial entanglements. The reorganization of these relations to transform Mongolia’s economy (and international relations) has been a major goal of Mongolia’s Democratic Party and its associated movements since the 1980s. These parties and movements have been consistently contested, however, by the successors of the socialist era Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, the Mongolian People’s Party and the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, which, since the socialist period have maintained their political organizations throughout the country, including in regions defined by transborder power networks associated with Mongolia’s “second cities.” This situation is amply demonstrated by recent political figures’ biographies and their elections, appointments, and political legitimacy in Erdenet, one of Mongolia’s four cities outside of the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

Although Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were all governed directly under the centralized party-state in the socialist period as “federal municipalities” or “towns under national jurisdiction” (Sanders, 2017) in the 1990s, they were each reincorporated as part of new provinces, Orkhon, Darkhan-Uul, and Govisumber, respectively. This reincorporation instituted the office of provincial governor in these regions, though provinces are not guaranteed the status of constituency or electoral district in the Constitution (Mongol Ulsii Undsen Khuul, n.d.). Each of these towns or cities is a hub of transborder infrastructure, economy, and distinctive ethnic networks established over the course of, at least, the Qing, Tarist Russian, Mongolian Bogd Khan, and Soviet imperial periods. Choir, formerly a Soviet Army cantonment of 259 buildings (Sanders, 2017, p. 181) was built at the site of a major monastery, along the major route between China, Urga (which became Ulaanbaatar), and the entrepôt of Maimaicheng/Khiakhta, the route on which was built the Trans-Mongolian Railway. Choibalsan, the administrative center for Dornod province, was also the site prior to the socialist period of a prominent monastery and a center of one of the Qing period’s Four Aimags of Khalkha Mongolia (covering, roughly, the territory of the Mongolian People’s Republic and then today’s Mongolia), and associated with transborder Buryat and Barga peoples. A railroad spur was constructed in the socialist period to connect the city, and local coal and uranium mines, to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Erdenet and Darkhan are both located on the Trans-Mongolian Railway in the Selenge region of northern Mongolia and the heart of Lake Baikal’s watershed; this area has also been associated with transborder Buryat groups as well as Chinese working farming allotments (tarialan) granted from the Buddhist ecclesiastical estates as the area formed a key section of the border of the Qing and Russian Tsarist empires (Batsaikhan, 2012, p. 83).

Erdenet and Orkhon province are home to the Erdenet Mining Corporation, responsible for roughly a third of the Mongolian economy in the form of copper ores produced and exported via Soviet-established equipment, infrastructure, and professionalization. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Erdenet was settled as a new city, predominantly by ethnic groups from Mongolia’s border regions to the far east (Buryat), west (Kazakh, Dorvod, Uriankhai, Oold, Darkhad), and south (Khalkha from Govi-Altaï) as well as more locally. Today, these groups continue to define themselves in terms of these distinct ethnicities and maintain strong relationships with coethnics across the country, and across the border. Along these relations flow access to necessary valuables associated with the city (khot, gorod)—education, professional jobs, medicine, apartments—as well as with the countryside (khodoo)—pasture, livestock, forest products, and herding as well as other “traditional” knowledges.

Constitutional and legal reforms after the 1990 “Democratic Revolution” sought, at least ostensibly, to move fracture and contestation into the arena of a popularly elected, multi-party Parliament, consolidating national interests. As richly documented by anthropologists working in Mongolia since the 1990s, fears about economic, ethnic, and territorial fragmentation of the nation state after the break with state socialism have defined the period of so-called “transition” (Billé, 2016; Bulag, 1998; Buyandelger, 2013; Pedersen, 2011). On one hand, commentators have long celebrated the participation of rural Mongolians in elections and establishment of myriad political parties. Yet at the same time, there has been a notable persistence of several contesting formations of centralized, vertically integrated governance, wielded by two dominant political parties (and their associated smaller parties and movements) consistently holding power in different regions and social sectors. Adding to the complexity of the situation, these frequently exchange control of the presidency and the Parliament.

The Democratic Party is strongly associated with the Democratic Revolution of 1990–1991, in which young and subaltern members of the party-state ruling elite called for the intensification of Mongolia’s analogues of glasnost and perestroika (if tod and shinechilel), and then the resignation of the government and subsequent multi-party elections. Since the 1990s, many of those involved extended and intensified their networks beyond rather than within Mongolia. However, the Democratic Party has had difficulty challenging the networks of the single-party state inherited and maintained by the Mongolian People’s Party and Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (Ginsburg, 1995), and accordingly the Democratic Party has often worked to sidestep the power of the People’s Parties based in those parties’ continued domination of political organizing in much of the countryside, provincial centers, and socialist-period established enterprises such as Erdenet.

The following sections of the article (1) summarize the existing literature on and trends in Mongolian political reform to illustrate the approach of the Democratic Party and its associated Western-based reformers; (2) contrast the presumption on the part of Western reformers that Mongolia
is unified and homogeneous with a description of Mongolia’s nature as a set of regions with distinct networks of power defined by infrastructure, economy, and ethnicity; (3) argue that this is a condition which drives Mongolian politicians to attempt to unify the country through a flexible Parliamentary Elections Law and the institution of the provincial governor; and (4) provide an extended description of the 2012 Parliamentary election campaigns in Erdenet, which involved an unpopular Democratic Party provincial governor and largely ignored Democratic Party candidates unaligned with regional networks, and successful People’s Party candidates, deeply part of those networks, especially but not limited to those of the mining enterprise.

**Constitutional approaches to understanding and evaluating Mongolian politics and governance**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mongolians followed their Eastern European counterparts in embarking upon a “transition” from Soviet-led state socialism. Since then, Mongolia’s political system has frequently been the object of praise, and reform, by American political scientists. According to these narratives, the young Mongolian elite (many of whom have studied in the United States and been members of the Democratic Party) turned against one-party rule and state planning of the economy, forced their elders to step down, and trained at Western universities and with international political organizations to refashion Mongolia’s governing institutions (Addleton, 2013; Ginsburg & Ganzorig 1996; Jargalsaikhan, 2017; Kaplonski, 2004; Rossabi, 2005; Sindelar, 2009; Tsedevdamba, 2016). As with the postcommunist governments of Eastern Europe, for almost three decades, the focus here has been on the Constitution and constitutional amendments as a means of regulating relations between governing powers (Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996, Munkh-Erdene, 2010) and guaranteeing human rights (Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996). In the 1990s and early 2000s, Western commentators pointed to Mongolia’s “balance of powers” and “divided government” (Fish, 2001, p. 337) between parties in “the postcommunist region’s best developed party system” (Fish, 1999, p. 801) as signs of a not just extant but even exemplary democracy.

In recent years, however, prominent Western-aligned politicians and political theorists have bemoaned frequent changes as features of instability. Prime ministers are frequently replaced, parliamentary majorities often shift, and presidential cabinets shuffle regularly, though cabinet appointments must be agreed upon by both the President and the Prime Minister. The figure “fifteen changes of cabinet, averaging 1.5 per year” is now a regular refrain in laments about democracy in Mongolia (Migeddorj, 2017, Tserendash Tsomolon cited in Bayartsogt, 2018). On the international scene, these conversations have presumed the central control of the Mongolian government operating at a national scale and remained focused on issues like the relation between the President and Parliament in appointing and confirming the cabinet and the Prime Minister (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), whether or not prime ministers and cabinet members may also be members of Parliament (the so-called “double deel” issue) (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), and to what degree parliamentary representation should be majoritarian versus proportional (Migeddorj, 2012). Only very few analysts have focused on how government at the local and provincial levels functions in Mongolia, and the effects on this of constitutional and other legal changes at the beginning of the “transition” from socialism (see especially Badarchyn & Odgaard, 1996).

Although in Western-based discourses, the economic impact of these reforms is about fostering so-called free markets, this involves a centralization of the national economy. Mongolian reformers have concentrated on rearticulating the relationship of Soviet-established enterprises like Erdenet and the Mongolian center away from historically grounded transborder and transregional relationships and toward the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, a priority that often aligns with the privatization programs required by the Western organizations provisioning the Ulaanbaatar-centered political economy. However, in contrast to their Western counterparts, these Mongolian reformers are deeply anxious about the unity of the Mongolian nation, and are working in continuity with late Soviet period projects that understand the processing and export of Mongolian products to have been artificially restricted by the Soviet Union and now by Russia. Associated with this is a preoccupation with the consolidation of control over Mongolian resources. Paradoxically, both international and Mongolian actors ignore the physical and social networks creating these resources, and apparently have difficulty in understanding the existing networks and the inability to effectively dismantle or bypass these.

**Regionalized Mongolia: powerful infrastructural, economic, and ethnic transborder networks**

International advisors and reformers involved in the rewriting of Mongolia’s Constitution and the establishment of its Constitutional Court, in alignment with the idealizations of the Ulaanbaatar-based policymakers they often work with, imagine the country as split between an urban, cosmopolitan, internationally connected capital city (khoriin), on one hand, and a rural, locally focused, countryside (khodoo) populated mainly by nomadic herders on the other hand. For example, Ginsburg (1995) writes that situated in the grassland steppes between Russia and China, Mongolia has a little over two million people, several hundred thousand of whom are semi-nomadic herders living a largely
intact traditional lifestyle. Most of the remainder are concentrated in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. (p. 460)

and
despite collectivization of herding in the 1950s, the nomadic lifestyle of herdsmen continued and families lived as individual units in their traditional pastures. There was little threat of grass-roots political organization against communist rule, and therefore little need for repression in the countryside . . . Massive inflows of aid and goods [during the socialist period] meant that the average herdsman enjoyed a far better standard of living than he would have had without them. (p. 462)

American and Western European analysts also tend to believe that Mongolia has a “common ethnicity” and “cohesive national identity” and that ethnic homogeneity is a factor contributing to Mongolia’s “relative success in regards to other nations that transitioned from communism to democracy” (Schmücking & Adiyasuren, 2017).

Among themselves, however, Mongolians gesture to and are often nervous about the range of regionally based international networks of wealth, power, and identity present among them. In a collection that also included a contribution by the then current American ambassador to Mongolia, emphasizing the need for “checks and balances” including Parliament as “a forum in which many Mongolian voices are heard” (Addleton, 2012, p. 38), national security advisor Batchimeg Migeddorj (2012) wrote,

Since our democratic revolution, almost all political elections in Mongolia followed the majoritarian electoral system (sometimes called “first past the post”). Some elected politicians have often chosen cash distribution and other populist actions in their constituency as a way to strengthen their popularity. Unfortunately, such actions, which are reinforced by our existing election system, have fueled “constituency-oriented politics”, diverting politicians away from large-scale national policies, wide-ranging poverty reduction goals, and national economic security and social development aims. For example, fuel crisis [sic] is just one of many significant issues for Mongolia’s economic security. It is alarming that despite obvious risks faced by current Mongolian society, the Parliamentary majority—which is well-aware of these risks—has chosen once again the majoritarian electoral system, which further complicates the situation. (p. 58–59)

Monitoring Twitter commentary as election results were coming in for the presidential election of 2017, I noted that accusations of vote-buying were especially levied against ethnic Kazakhs, who were also labeled as living in “als khiaagar,” or particularly remote sum (analogous to “counties”) in the extreme far west of Mongolia. As to far eastern Mongolia, the Inner Mongolian, Cambridge-trained and affiliated anthropologist Uradyn Bulag (1998) wrote of his 1990–1992 fieldwork that “my decision to go there [Dashbalbar, a majority Buryat sum near the Russian and Chinese borders] caused a sensation. [Ethnic majority] Halh [Khalkha] friends told me that the Buryats there were drunkards and rough; they fought, often using knives” (p. 23).

As details from Bulag’s field trip to Dashbalbar and Dadal indicate, the divide between urban and rural, city and countryside involves more than class-based snobbery on the part of the capital’s intellectual and political elite. He describes intense regional differentiation in Mongolia, characterized not only by the presence of particular ethnic groups, but also particular transborder international ties involving infrastructure and economy as well as ethnic identity. Dashbalbar neighbors the semi-secret uranium mining enterprise Mardai run by Soviet citizens; in 1991, when Bulag visited to attend the summer naadam festival, the mine director and engineers brought two TV sets and sports equipment and after the Soviet miners (also of a mix of ethnicities, including Buryats from the R.S.F.S.R., Delaplace, 2012) left, Dashbalbar residents complained to Bulag (1998) that the abandoned town had been “filled with Mongols from Choibalsan [fourth largest city in Mongolia, capital of Dornod province]” (p. 23):

The Buryats would like it to remain a Russian town, so they could benefit from exchange relations. Mongol control of the town would mean destruction, they said. In fact, many people from Choibalsan, Dashbalbar, and Bayandung [sic] came to dismantle the houses and take away the logs. (p. 23)8

International border crossing was frequent, and Bulag (1998) wrote that

although politically, Buryats in this region are subject to Choibalsan [sic] and Ulaanbaatar, in kinship and economic terms they are oriented towards Chita and other regions. . . . they were keen to visit Chita and Inner Mongolia and asked me to write them letters of invitation. (p. 24)

Like the regions including Dashbalbar, Dadal, and Mardai, Erdenet and Orkhon constitute a region with distinctive transborder ties consisting of both industrial and transport infrastructure related to the mine and railway as well ethnically coded relations of kinship and identity, differentiating the region from the Khalkha-dominated and defined capital. In addition, Erdenet is a center of integration articulating other Mongolian regions. Since the 1970s many of its residents have migrated from (and regularly visit) regions across Mongolia. Kazakhs, Dorvod, Uriankhai, Oold, and Darkhad people came to Erdenet from and regularly return to western Mongolia. Buryats from eastern Mongolia (including Buryats from Dadal) as well as Buryats and Khmangins from Selenge and Khuvsgul provinces within a day’s drive of Erdenet reside there. Khalkha Mongols from the southern Govi-Altai province also comprise a major group in Erdenet. As with Mardai, with which Erdenet was and is still specifically
The 2012 parliamentary elections in Erdenet

In July 1994, the three “federally administered” cities of Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were reorganized into the system of aimag (province), sum (regions), and bag (communities). Erdenet was organized with two sum: Bayan-Ulund and Erdenet, comprising the until-then federal municipality Erdenet, centered around a copper-molybdenum mining and mineral processing enterprise established with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, and Jargalant, the territory of the former Ulaan Tolgoi state farm established to supply Erdenet. Areas of apartment blocks and fenced-in yards with houses and mobile felt ger (khoroolol) were redesignated as bag.

At least since participant observation-based fieldwork I undertook in 2011 and 2012, formation of the province has been controversial among employees of the joint Mongolian–Russian Erdenet Mining Enterprise. The engineers I worked closely with told me that their city had been transformed into a province so that the center would be able to unfairly extract more taxes. Assigning their city (khot) the status of province also activated defenses against being designated part of the rural, undeveloped “countryside” (khodoor) and subject to subordination by a single Mongolian city, Ulaanbaatar. In contrast, Erdenet residents regard their city’s proper status to be that of “avant-garde project of the century.”

However, given how zealously Erdenet residents engaged with Parliamentary elections campaigns, and that incorporation as a province, at least in practice and popular understanding if not explicitly and consistently by the frequently changed Elections Law, guaranteed seats in Parliament, complaints about the reorganization of Erdenet and its immediate environs as a province remained somewhat puzzling to me. A key to this conundrum is that status as a province also places Erdenet under the power of a provincial governor effectively appointed by the Prime Minister. In 2011 and 2012, the provincial governor was particularly unpopular, and I also heard complaints about one of his predecessors. Being of the Democratic Party, he was further aligned with the interests of Ulaanbaatar and the national integration of Erdenet. In contrast to the Democratic Party, it is the People’s Party which, generally speaking, maintains the status quo of Erdenet’s integration with Soviet-cum-Russian infrastructural, industrial, economic, and political networks, and only some Mongolian networks based in Ulaanbaatar.

My coworkers, friends, and acquaintances in Erdenet often complained about the governor of the province. In late 2011, when national news broke that the provincial governor had been beaten up by a legal assistant to the mining enterprise’s general director (Dolzodmaa, 2011), my coworkers recounted to me that the building next to our main workplace (in the city, not at the mine site) had been taken from the mining enterprise after it had been fitted out with a sauna. When I asked other friends and acquaintances in other workplaces of the mining corporation what they thought of the incident, they expressed dissatisfaction with
the state of garbage collection in the city. During the campaign for Parliamentary elections in May, conversation about this governor continued, rather than turning to the candidates that the Democratic Party was fielding for seats in Parliament. A coworker told me that the governor was likely to lose his position, which was granted by the Prime Minister, whose party (the Democratic Party) was likely to lose their majority in Parliament, but this coworker was also following news about an anti-corruption agency investigation into the governor’s involvement with funds that had perhaps not all gone into building a new stadium. Around the same time, construction problems at the building site of a colossal Buddha between the mining factory and the city were also being cited in corruption allegations against a former provincial governor (see Smith, 2019).

Mongolian legislators regularly change legislation to shift the balances of power in favor of their party’s majority. Unlike the United States Constitution, the Mongolian Constitution of 1992 (Mongol Ulsiin Undsen Khuul, n.d.) does not make any definitions of how constituencies should be defined. The Constitution defines the Parliament as comprised of 76 members directly elected by their constituencies, but the definition of constituencies is covered by the Law on The Election of the State Great Khural of Mongolia (2012). The redesignation of Erdenet as a province has had no clear effect on how many representatives the citizens, and the enterprise, might have in the Parliament. The Law on Elections changes regularly preceding elections for Parliament every 4 years.16 In 2012, while I was conducting fieldwork in Erdenet, two members of Parliament were directly elected by citizens of Orkhon province. In 2016, Orkhon received three of the 26 constituencies. According to Sanders, in the 1992 election, Erdenet and Darkhan each constituted a single constituency (1992, p. 518) and elected two members each to the Parliament (1996, p. 263). Unlike the candidates in the Parliamentary election belonging to the Mongolian People’s Party, those running as Democratic Party members were not part of the major regional network integrated with the Erdenet Mining Corporation. Mongolian People’s Party members who have represented Orkhon province in the Parliament include O. Sodbileg, the son of the former General Director of the mining corporation, who presided over the enterprise between 1988 and 1998 (Sanders, 2003, p. 259), and D. Damba-Ochir, a metallurgist who had worked in the mining corporation in a range of roles and whose construction firm regularly completes contracts for large infrastructure projects in Erdenet. Re-elected in 2016, D. Damba-Ochir was previously elected in 2008, and in 2012 was the director of a prominent construction firm in Erdenet, “Ochir Tuv” (Eng. “Ochir Center”) which I was told enjoyed a close relationship with the mining enterprise for contracts, but executed these successfully enough in the form of sidewalks and other urban infrastructure (of the kind that locals complained provincial governors were failing to manage). According to Sanders (2017, p. 210), Damba-Ochir had been the deputy director general of foreign trade for the Erdenet Mining Enterprise, and according to his profile on the official Parliament website (http://parliament.mn/cv/113), graduated from the Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloys, as another metallurgist I knew at Erdenet also had. One of the two members from Erdenet in the 1992–1996 Parliament was J. Delgertsetseg, (Sanders, 1996, p. 55), who had directed the Erdenet carpet factory from 1980 to 1992, and became a member of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party’s Central Committee in 1992. Those running for Parliament to represent Orkhon from the Democratic and other parties (most of which have been born from factions in the Democratic Party) have included industrialists of note, like Kh. Zoljargal, but in industries such as meat-packing that are not necessarily well-integrated with the mining enterprise.

Thus, the integration of Orkhon province and the Erdenet region with the nation state is maintained not via the institutionalization of provincial governor, but rather through structures of the Mongolian People’s Party, successors to the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party of 1924 to 1990 of the single-party, state socialist Mongolian People’s Republic. Political figures important to the region’s own distinctive intranational and international institutions and networks, especially the Erdenet Mining Corporation and associated industrial enterprises as well as the ethnic groups whose members established and were recruited to work in these since the 1970s, are incorporated into these structures at the national level, that is, as members of the Parliament and its Standing Committees (baingiin khoroo). In 2012, the candidate who merited the most discussion (at least in my circles—primarily engineers and economists in their 20s and 30s working for the mining enterprise, some second-generation Erdenet employees and residents, and others originally from a range of province and sum centers) – was O. Sodbileg, the son of the former General Director of the Erdenet Mining Enterprise, Sh. Otgonbileg. Sodbileg’s campaign was obviously lavishly funded, with a hard-cover illustrated pop-up book distributed door to door, a late-model minivan covered with his image and sporting a loudspeaker, and a central campaign office in an apartment rather than a mobile felt and wooden-latticework ger. A friend of mine (neither a regular supporter of the Democratic Party nor the People’s Parties) commented that this was suspicious, a mark of funding from beyond Erdenet, though it seems likely it indicates support from the People’s Party as integrated with networks local to Erdenet as well as Ulaanbaatar and beyond. Sodbileg was careful to establish himself as homegrown while also playing up his cosmopolitanism (studies in Switzerland and at Georgetown), and he portrayed himself in campaign materials as a child at the knee of Otgonbileg. Sodbileg was elected in 2012, and re-elected in 2016.

Although Sodbileg did not explicitly vow to defend the interests of the mining corporation and its employees, the
absence of language about “diversifying the economy” and Mongolia’s “national interests” was striking when compared with that found in the Democratic Party candidates’ campaign materials. In addition to being considerably less elaborate (brochures and a magazine rather than a hardcover book), rather than establishing themselves as associated with the regional infrastructures, Democratic candidates even actively went against these. One Democratic candidate, Zoljargal (who ran again unsuccessfully, as a member of a third party, in 2016), presented himself as a graduate of a Czechoslovakian university and executive of a meat-processing factory, and in a joint campaign magazine asserted that the Erdenet mine was nearly extinct, and presented vague plans for the creation of a new cashmere industry (even though the Erdenet Carpet Factory, privatized and now under the control of major import/export and retailing conglomerate Nomin, already had one of the country’s largest and most successful cashmere processing and manufacturing operations).

Besides O. Sod bileg, L. Tsog ran successfully in 2012, though I heard almost nothing about this candidate. As I found out in the last 2 years, when a scandal over attempts to privatize the Erdenet enterprise erupted in national politics in 2016 on the eve of the parliamentary elections and has continued to boil, L. Tsog, who took a public role in debates over Erdenet privatization issues, has been a major political figure since the late socialist period. After 2010, he joined former President N. Enkhbayar’s new party split from the Mongolian People’s Party, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (Sanders, 2017, p. 828). I did hear, however, of support for N. Enkhbayar and his new party in Erdenet, particularly from a friend whose mother had worked at the Erdenet carpet factory rather than the mining enterprise since the late socialist period. In 2016, another Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party member won a seat from the Erdenet/Orkhon constituency, O. Baasankhuluu, based in Ulaanbaatar and with no prior connections to Erdenet that I have been able to find, and whose seat in the 2012–2016 Parliament was granted through proportional representation.

**Conclusion**

Most recently, anthropologists following Mongolian politics have called the Parliament “consociational” (Sneath, 2012, p. 155) across party lines, agreeing to varying extents with the concept among Ulaanbaatar-based Mongolian intellectuals of “MANAN,” literally “fog,” a combination of the acronyms for the Mongolian People’s Party (MAN, Mongol Ardiin Nam) and the Democratic Party (AN, Ardciltsan Nam) (Dulam, 2017; Munkhargedene, 2018). Although the concept makes sense in terms of negotiating the considerable powers of the President and the Parliament, who must agree to accomplish fundamental tasks including forming the cabinet (Munkh-Erdene, 2010), it does not appear to operate in the “cooptation” of regions, in which the Mongolian People’s Party, and to some extent, its breakaway, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, have been much more successful than the Democratic Party and its associated smaller parties. This reminds one of how in the Russian Federation, a strong single party, United Russia, and regional governors must mutually coopt one another (Golosov & Tkacheva, 2018; Reuter, 2010). Although the Erdenet mine is aging and has long been ignored on international, regional, and national scenes, with infrastructural and economic development in Mongolia continuing to stagnate in the past several years, the city and its railhead have been recently been at the center of major national and continental development projects. These include speculative projects by Russians, Chinese, and Australians purporting to connect Tuva and Khuvsgul to a China–Mongolia–Russia Corridor of the One Belt One Road (OBOR)/Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Erdenet enterprise has also been at the center of several corruption scandals that have dominated Mongolian national politics since 2016 and contributed to major turnovers in the leadership of the long-ruling Democratic Party, whose support is concentrated in Ulaanbaatar and throughout the international Mongolian diaspora. Meanwhile, Erdenet has continued production, and the number of apartment buildings, and new garbage trucks, has increased, as I observed when I visited in summer 2016.

Although during the late socialist period, Erdenet was aligned with government executives including Yu. Tsendenbal himself, in the post-socialist period, the city has been aligned with the People’s Parties, the Mongolian People’s Party and its 2012 breakaway, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, rather than the Democratic Party and its associated parties and movements. Although a major transition in parliamentary politics, the transition to a multi-party system, took place in the early 1990s, this has not been accompanied by an upset of dynamics of transborder regional integration and independence from a national central government long evident in the region’s politics at national and local scales.

The People’s Parties have maintained relations of some degree of mutuality with regional powers that accommodate their interests, not only salvaging or scavenging late-socialist infrastructures but also expanding public infrastructures. The Democratic Party, confident in reforms crafted with American and Western European economists and political scientists, has focused on power in the capital and national abstractions, and pursued unsuccessfully and with limited legitimacy, across national and regional scales, take-overs of regional hubs like the Erdenet mining enterprise that would tear these hubs from the networks, regional, national, and international, that constitute them.
The Parliamentary structure established during the post-state socialist period, with the form of representation defined by an easily and frequently changed Law on Elections rather than a Constitution that must be amended with the cooperation of a Constitutional Court, has proven ineffectual at dismantling these networks. The office of provincial governor established by the Constitution has also been unable to establish itself as a mode of vertical regional administration capable of bypassing regional networks that have usually been able to elect one of their own to Parliament. The Mongolian People’s Party and Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party have maintained their network, which is integrated with ethnic, infrastructural, and transborder networks elaborated as successive entanglements of the Qing, Russian Tsarist, Bogd Khaan, and Soviet empires.

**Acknowledgements**

For helpful and enthusiastic feedback and discussion that enabled the further development of an earlier version of this article, the author thanks the organizers and fellow participants of the workshop “Parliaments and Political Transformations in Europe and Asia: Diversity and Representation in the 20th and 21st Century” held at the University of Heidelberg by the ERC Project “Entangled Parliamentarisms: Constitutional Practices in Russia, Ukraine, China and Mongolia, 1905–2005” in February 2019. Jessica Madison-Piskatá and Kip Grosvenor Hutchins generously listened as I worked to develop the main arguments. Dan Sirbu also provided detailed comments on a near-final draft that helped to clarify key arguments.

**Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article was funded by American Center for Mongolian Studies and Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies.

**ORCID iD**

Marissa J Smith [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6694-6884](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6694-6884)

**Notes**

1. Also known as the State Great Khural or Ulsiin Ikh Khural. This article uses “the Parliament” to refer to this body, as is common practice when discussing it in English, except where other terms are part of official translations of the Constitution and other laws.
2. Analogously, the capital city Ulaanbaatar is further subdivided into khoroo (districts) and duureg (neighborhoods).
3. These English translations of these administrative and territorial units follow that on the website of the Constitutional Court of Mongolia [http://www.conscourt.gov.mn/?page_id=842&lang=en](http://www.conscourt.gov.mn/?page_id=842&lang=en). In the body of the article, these English terms are used, except in the case of sum, as here “region” is being used to describe transnational networks associated with larger territories. Sum is often translated as “county.” Bag is sometimes translated into English as “brigade” or “team,” indicating the overlapping of sum and collective and state farm organization and integration of party–state governance during much of the 20th century.
4. The Law on Elections, which defines parliamentary representation beyond the number of seats and constituencies mandated in the constitution, has changed several times; only in 2012 was representation wholly proportional. See Seeberg and Fish (2017, p. 130) for a summary of changes.
5. In 2011, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party split; former President N. Enkhbayar’s new party kept this name, while the dominating remainder of the party had taken the new name Mongolian People’s Party in November 2010 (Sanders, 2017, p. 285).
7. The original has “sports facilities” (Bulag, 1998, p. 23).
8. Such wooden houses have also been dismantled and moved from this area to the national capital Ulaanbaatar (and back?) in recent years (Elizabeth Fox, personal communication).
9. It is not only the international trade of mineral wealth that is anxiously regarded from the point of view of the national capital, however. Bulag (1998) also points out the continuing presence in the Constitution of language about livestock being “national wealth protected by the State” (p. 60) and how, at least in the early 1990s, the government was anxious to prevent carpets from leaving the country in the luggage of tourists (p. 53).
10. As part of the “transition” from state socialism in 1990, the 1960 Constitution was amended to create a Small Khural of 50 members (Sanders, 1992, p. 510), which did not represent administrative and territorial units; rather “each party received one seat for each 2% of the vote they received in the 1990 election” (Heaton, 1992, p. 50). The Small Khural drafted the 1992 Constitution and disbanded; “the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and the Asia Foundation all offered advice to the drafters” (Rossabi, 2005, p. 53, citing Ginsburg & Ganzorig, 1996).
11. In a 1992 article, Sanders (p. 507) reports that Erdenet, Darkhan, and Choir were placed under the administration of the provinces “in which they are situated” (p. 507) (meaning perhaps to which their territories belonged prior to the founding of the cities; in Erdenet’s case, Bulgan); it seems that in fact the measure was never fully carried out.
12. Fieldwork during 2011 and 2012 was conducted under review and approval by the Princeton University IRB, and fieldwork in 2016 was conducted under review and approval by the Foothill-De Anza Community College District IRB.
13. The workgroup I conducted most of my participant observation with was responsible for teaching metallurgy students at the enterprise’s university (incorporated in 1996 as a branch of the national University of Science and Technology) and conducting research with international partners into new metallurgical techniques.
14. In 2015, a draft was submitted in the Parliament calling for a referendum to make several amendments to the Constitution, including one that would redesignate Erdenet and Darkhan as...
15. As during the socialist period, each level of administration (aimag, sum, bag) has an elected khural. During the socialist period, these elected a presidium tasked with “directing ‘economic and cultural-political construction,’” for supervising the economic and cooperative organizations, for confirming and implementing the economy plan and local budgets, for ensuring the observance of laws, and for making certain that all citizens were fully involved in the work of the state” (Worden & Savala, 1991, p. 184). The 1992 Constitution, however, created the position of province governor (aimagin zasgii darga) to be nominated by a directly elected “citizens’ representative’s khural” (irdedini tololoogiin khural) but confirmed by the Prime Minister (Badarchyn & Odgaard, 1996; Sanders, 2017, p. 463). Badarchyn and Odgaard (1996) give detailed description of how limited the powers of these local governance bodies are. The unpopularity of the provincial governor in this case does not seem connected to his not having been directly elected. His illegitimacy stemmed from his party affiliation associated with and indexing the lack of his and that party’s integration with regional networks and infrastructures.

16. In the 1992 election, all 76 seats were directly elected in 26 multisit constituencies; in 1996, 2000, and 2004, there were 76 single-seat constituencies; in 2008, there were again 76 seats in 26 multisit constituencies (Sanders, 2017, pp. 464–465). See Seeberg and Fish (2017, p. 130) for a summary of changes, including determinations of constitutionality by the Constitutional Court.

References


Byambadorj, T. (1991). Eh oron ehelegtesgeree dusahs yosgii [There is no Reason for the End of the Motherland when she was just Born]. Boditiin Sobitsol [Intersection for Thoughts], 7.


**Author biography**

Marissa J Smith has recently taught cultural anthropology at De Anza College in Cupertino, California, and regularly contributes to the blog *Mongolia Focus*.
Corrigendum


This article by Marissa J Smith which appears in Volume 11 Issue 2 (2020) is a part of the Special Issue entitled “Parliamentary Formations and Diversities in (Post-) Imperial Eurasia” published in Volume 11 Issue 1 (2020):

https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/ensa/11/1