



The book describes the search for a useful past by the inhabitants of post-socialist Inner Asia. Treating history as a policy directed towards the past, the author analyses its use at the state, local community and family level. Great attention has been given to the practical forms through which the past functions beyond traditional historiography and historical policy, and beyond the institutions reproducing it: schools, museums, universities. The rich ethnographic material reveals bottom-up and non-extractual practices related to the visual, bodily, material and ritual dimensions of the use of the past. The reader can therefore discover why Siberian Buddhists see Putin as a woman, why Altai shamans battle with archaeologists and why the spirits of the victims of communism in Mongolia demand to be remembered. The anthropological perspective utilised in the book to explain the social processes taking place in Siberia, Mongolia or the Chinese periphery can also be used to understand the reality that surrounds the reader.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought an end to the state/party's monopoly on the historical narrative. Other regimes of historicity than the Soviet "monological historical explanation" came to the fore. The state partially lost its influence and control over collective perceptions of the past and over commemorative regimes. Public space opened up to alternative representations of the past. At the same time, the Marxist paradigm of historical research collapsed, in which history was treated as a fully objective science that reveals, by means of dialectic materialism, the mechanisms and development of socio-economic formations. The Soviet ideas of progress and universalism gave way to ethnic and national particularities. General disillusionment with the modernist Soviet project resulted in a nostalgic turnabout towards an idealised past and "tribalism", which Zygmunt Bauman calls "retrotopia". The Soviet communal apartment described by Yuri Slezkine was privatized according to what would previously have seemed purely formal ethnonational criteria.

The new state entities, the diverse nature of social relations and social identities all required stabilisation by basing them on a set of images and symbols defining the position of the group, its character, origin, common fate and destiny. The new mythical order proved to be highly beneficial in redefining ethnic and national boundaries in the post-socialist world. In a situation of an unclear and uncertain future, new group identities began to anchor themselves in the past. In an era of systemic transformation, collective visions of the past were easier to shape and control than those of the future, which were extremely difficult to predict and imagine. The past and the historiography describing it were pulled into new ethnic and national mythologies. The redefined ethno-nations and communities in East Asia cannot radically dissociate themselves from the Soviet past, as it was during the Soviet period that they established themselves as collective political entities. Commemorative rituals, such as Victory Day, celebrate the joint participation and blood sacrifice made by the "multi-ethnic Soviet nation". Such commemorations prevent minorities from being excluded from the community of remembrance, and thus the retrospective placing of minorities outside the framework of the Soviet nation. Evoking the Tuvan Altai Buryat heroes who gave their lives in the Great Patriotic War provides a moral right for commemorating their descendants to participate, not only in

the common past, but also sanction their equal, subjective position in Russia today. Recovering ties with tradition and building identity through historical narrative are therefore processes accompanied by attempts to simultaneously reintegrate the Soviet experience. The multidimensional hybrid of traditionalism and Soviet heritage leaves a postmodern stern on most local political and ethno-cultural projects. The social processes in question are in harmony with the internal transformations of academic historiography, within which, with the spread of subaltern studies and memory studies, there has been a shift from the idea of historical truth towards that of social justice.

Myths and histories that are essential to ethno-national communities constituted (and still constitute) a narrative based on concrete historical events, in which historical facts were intermingled with imaginary and fictional elements. Harnessing history to an ethno-national mythical order proved to be a useful tool enabling the elite to mobilize the group efficiently. This nationalistic, utilitarian dimension of history is described well in the literature. However, it is relatively rare for such analyses to go beneath the level of the nation state. It is even rarer for us to find works focusing on local, everyday and extra-curricular mythopraxis using the past to give new meaning to past events and thus to challenge and overcome the existing social order. The described mythopraxis often operate outside the field of conventional historiography and are therefore ignored as insignificant curiosity. As I have tried to demonstrate, by means of mythopraxis, local communities construct their identity and agency, and try to establish relationships with the state, other groups and institutions.

This work is the result of comprehensive research into the use of the past in post-socialist Inner Asia. The case studies selected here were classified into three categories: institutional level, community level and relative group level. In actual fact, though these levels intersect, they also have distinctive features. At the institutional level, we observe the high level of a formalised approach to the past and a focus on historical discourse, whereas at the local community level, the past is used more performatively using local, non-historical cultural practices. At the relative and community level, social tensions and conflicts become apparent, which undermine the vision of a uniform historical narrative promoted at the national and institutional level. The discourses generated by the state and the institutions that it established to manage the past are deconstructed and selectively incorporated into local practices of appropriating space, of building prestige, political struggles, of coping with the trauma of repression, etc. Capturing the mechanisms of the use of the past at the three levels stated above, as well as examining the relations between these levels, constitutes an attempt to go beyond the purely textual analysis of historical discourses.

In most of the cases mentioned in the text, tensions and conflicts between the discursive and practical level can be observed, which result in subversion and the appropriation of top-down imposed forms, symbols and narrations. I have named this phenomenon 'a historical infrapolicy', although the forms of using the past applied there go beyond the modernist framework of history and historiography. Historical infrapolicy becomes an important political tool for minority groups, which do not have their own nation state and, consequently, are unable to form their own, full-fledged historical policy. Instead, these groups are subjected to historical narratives emanating from the majority centre. Numerous Siberian groups are such a situation: Tuvans, Altai, Khakas and Buryats. Independent Mongolia creates an independent historical policy harking back to the Mongol Empire. The identities of the two main political parties, democratic and post-communist, are shaped by their different attitudes towards the communist era. In a situation where for years both parties have focused almost identically on the control and redistribution of income from natural resources, the dispute over the assessment of the communist heritage is the last mechanism of differentiation

– the mainstay of party identity. Party and state historical narratives and politics of remembrance are also subverted there by the practices of local communities. Historical infrapolitics plays out on many levels.

The level of institutional-state use of the past is examined through the prism of cultural heritage, nationalism and Russian presidents' practice of deification. A characteristic feature of the region is the ubiquitous need to establish multi-dimensional ties with the past, ties that were largely cut by rapid Soviet modernization. The concept of cultural heritage is used for this purpose, but the local uses of this concept often differ from the standards generated by UNESCO and Western nation states. Various forms of bottom-up heritage-building and its embodiment serve to undermine the prerogatives and authority of traditional past management institutions: academic archaeology, history and museum institutions. Local communities mobilize politically through opposition to these institutions and attempts to regain control over their own past.

The example of the diverse and partially conflicting concepts of the Mongol nation has proved that nationalism cannot simply be considered as an ideology imposed on the masses by political elites. The cultural hegemony of the elites is really not so obvious, and the borders of the national community are often subject to shifting and rupture. This is due in part to post-dependence and the colonial history of the region. In Mongolia, the borders of a national group are not only constructed in defiance of significant "foreigners" (the Russians and Chinese), but above all, in relation to the ambiguous groups living in the border territories of China and Russia: Tuvans, Altai, Buryats and Inner Mongols. Attempts to archaize the nation, to project the twentieth-century national community onto the past, result as often in the strengthening of group bonds as they do in an increase in the aforementioned ambivalence.

An attempt to transpose historical political institutions onto contemporary state structures should be seen as an attempt to establish patron-teacher relations between the Buryat chambo-lama and the Russian president. The identification of Medvedev and then Putin with the feminine aspect of enlightenment – the White Tara – is a mythopractical approach that attempts to impose obligations on the Russian presidents to the Buryats as an ethno-confessional group and to the Traditional Sangha of Russia as an institution representing that group's interests. By according the president the title of Buddhist goddess, the chambo-lama expresses full subordination but expects protection in return.

The level of communal use of the past is examined based on the issues of privatization, borderlands, diaspora, the autochthonization of the landscape and acquiring the right to the city. In Mongolia, references to archaic institutions in contemporary legal and political practice have become a tool for resisting the free market transformation. During the dispute over reforms, the issue of land privatisation became a key problem. Its opponents, referring to the law established by the ruler of the Huns, managed to limit the pasture privatization process. The strategic essentialism exercised by radical Mongolian conservatives has safeguarded, at least in part, the interests of the nomadic part of society.

Using the example of the Buryat diaspora in China the process of producing a "living tradition" is demonstrated. In this process, the state border was used as something of a time vehicle. By transforming the diaspora into a "living fossil", the post-socialist Buryat elite made an attempt to reconstitute pre-revolution Buryat culture, thus certifying their neo-traditionalist rhetoric and reintegrating the scenic ethnic culture with a vibrant cultural message.

At the same time, the Buryat capital is engaged in the process of autochthonization. This consists in the transformation of the post-socialist urban space into places rooted in history, replenished

with new, ethnic meanings. With the end of the idea of the city as a centre of industrialisation and socialist progress, Ulan-Ude has become an area for negotiating collective identity. The autochthonization of the city is connected with the mass migration of indigenous people from rural areas. The transformation of this former colonial city and the one-time center of Soviet industrialization takes place by rebuilding the historical framework of the city. Through a series of grassroots initiatives, which have won plaudits from the municipal authorities, the process of transforming Ulan-Ude into the ancient Hun capital began, and the Buryats themselves into descendants of the Huns – heirs to the Hun legacy.

The use of the past on the kinship level has been discussed using the example of reconstructed tribal traditions, the reappearing ghosts of the victims of communist repression and family biography. Compatriots' organisations established since the 1990s often refer not only to the concept of a small homeland, but also appeal to historical tribal identity, to be more precise, to the tribes and administrative families introduced in the 19th century by the tsarist administration. Initially perceived as cultural associations, compatriots' organisations, as well as larger neo-tribal organisations, they are beginning to play an increasingly important political role.

Complex genealogical traditions are associated with the cult of ancestors, but sometimes died the wrong death become dangerous. During the political transformation, the inhabitants of Mongolia's eastern province began to be haunted by the spirits of ancestors murdered in the 1930s. Repressed ancestors started to return as evil spirits devoid of personality and memory. The neglected spirits of the older ancestors also began to display their anger. Thanks to the shamans, with the help of autobiographical stories told by ghosts, the process of reconstructing the history of communist repression commenced. Reconciliation and commemoration of the victims of repression is completely different at the level of the local community and at the state level. Political parties and institutions of remembrance are engaged in identifying the culprits and describing the historical process. However, inhabitants of the Eastern Aymak focus on salvaging family history and identifying forgotten ancestors so that they can transform the evil spirits which haunt them into the caring spirits of their ancestors.

Ancestors and genealogy lie at the centre of the literary form of managing the past – family history. The chronicle encompassing seven generations of interlinked lineages restores the group's historical continuity that was broken in Soviet times. Biography and family history become instruments for building social prestige and at the same time are elements of the cult of ancestors – depositaries of the life force of a kinship group.

The category of “use of the past” reveals the deeper logic of seemingly illogical historical references: the pronouncement of Putin as a Buddhist goddess, Ulan-Ude as the ancient capital of the Huns, and the swan as a call to the ancestors for political upheaval. Adopting an anthropological perspective and ethnographic research methods, the focus is on social phenomena and practices usually sidelined from historical reflections. Statements about the past which traditional historians would previously have deemed absurd, stupid or incompetent were considered. However, this is not a matter of secondary rationalization of the irrational and accidental. It is a matter of interpreting acts, acts of speech and texts in their proper socio-cultural context. An in-depth analysis is only possible if we do not limit ourselves to the textual dimension of the phenomena in question, but also refer to their practical and performative aspects.

The examples analysed revealed a whole spectrum of non-historical (unrelated with historiography) and post-secular techniques of forging connections with the past: shamanic trances, ghostly speeches, embodied characters from the past, returning to the community of Buddhist depositary

treasures, dreams, myths, biographies, historical films and theatre performances. The forms of use of the past in Inner Asia presented provide a convenient starting point for a broader debate on integrating anthropological and historical knowledge into local use of the past. Academic texts constituting a reconstruction of the past or a model of traditional culture are commonly used to reproduce that culture. The prestige of objective knowledge that surrounds academic research is appropriated and used instrumentally in current social practices. Scientific knowledge is used in parallel with non-scientific representations of the past, the latter often being reconstructed on the basis of anthropological monographs. Historical knowledge in the region is intertwined with myth, ritual and imaginary visions, all the more so, because the postmodern critique of historiography has stripped it of the feature of objective science about the past. Historiography has become merely a slightly privileged form of talking about the past. The past can be established both by means of the shaman (after all, it is through him that ghostly witnesses can say “how things really were”) and the historian, who tries to reconstruct it thanks to a researcher’s skills, and procedures of collecting and processing sources. The dramatic disparity between traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge celebrated in Soviet culture has thus partially disappeared.

The post-socialist societies in Inner Asia are not “peoples without history”. On the contrary, these are societies where the hypertrophy of historicity can be observed, where a significant proportion of political action cannot occur without appealing to collective representations of the past and historical awareness. The crisis of the idea of progression seems to induce individuals and whole societies to root their identity in the past. Western, academic historicity has not completely displaced different forms of contact with the past, but creates new, heterogeneous forms. We can speak of a hybrid regime of historicity in which the hierarchies and boundaries between the modernist regime of historicity generated by historians and state institutions (museums, textbooks, schools) and the local, indigenous regime of historicity operating in different temporal horizons and using its own narrative forms, which allow for different subjects of historicity and its own logic of history, have been violated.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*