

CORE STRENGTH WITHIN MONGOL DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

Archaeological evidence places early Stone Age human habitation in the southern Gobi between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago¹. While they were nomadic hunter-gatherers it is believed that they migrated to southern Asia, Australia, and America through Beringia 50,000 BP. This prehistoric migration played a major role in fundamental dispersion of world population.

As human migration was an essential part of human evolution in prehistoric era the historical mass dispersions in Middle Age and Modern times brought a significant influence on political and socioeconomic progress throughout the world and the latter has been studied under the Theory of Diaspora. This article attempts to analyze Mongol Diaspora and its characteristics.

The Middle Age-Mongol Diaspora started by the time of the Great Mongol Empire was expanding from present-day Poland in the west to Korea in the east and from Siberia in the north to the Gulf of Oman and Vietnam in the south. Mongols were scattered throughout the territory of the Great Empire, but the disproportionately small number of Mongol conquerors compared with the masses of subject peoples and the change in Mongol cultural patterns along with influence of foreign religions caused them to fell prey to alien cultures after the decline of the Empire. As a result, modern days Hazara communities in northeastern Afghanistan and a small group of Mohol/Mohgul in India, Daur, Dongxiang (Santa), Monguor or Chagaan Monggol, Yunnan Mongols, Sichuan Mongols, Sogwo Arig, Yugur and Bonan people in China are considered as descendants of Mongol soldiers, who obeyed their Khaan's order to safeguard the conquered area and waited in exceptional loyalty. Eventually, they intermarried with the local population. In the stretch of 800 years they had lost their language and heritage and assimilated into the mass culture, but awareness of their ancient history and Chinghis Khaan's legacy through oral tradition helped them to keep ethnical identity as Mongols.

Ts. Sanchir, head of NGO "Diaspora Mongols", stated: "First I traveled to Dongxiang or White Mongols, who were left behind due to Chinggis Khaan's last conquest in 1227, and never forgot an elderly White Mongol greeted us saying "We have been waiting for you for 800 years". Since then we study and make enquiries into the Mongols residing in hundreds of towns of about 40 different countries".

Today, the following dispersion has been marked as a Mongol diaspora in today's world map:

In Iran there are 500 thousand people of nomadic culture living in felt dwellings. Also in provinces called Seven Sisters of the northern part of India there are several million people of

¹ http://www.mongabay.com/history/mongolia/mongolia-origins_of_the_mongols_early_development,_ca_220_bc-ad_1206.html

Mongol race, who wear mongolian deel and have mongolian tradition of wrestling, horse racing and drying meat in strips, even though they do not speak Mongolian.² But no data is collected.

Mohgul (Mohol) is the ethnic and linguistic remnants of the Mongol hordes, who at one time dominated all of Central Asia and subjugated large parts of India under what is called the Moghul Empire. The total number is unknown.

Hazaras are a Persian-speaking people who mainly live in central Afghanistan, the population is 2.930.000. More than 650,000 Hazara may be found living in neighbouring Pakistan and an estimated one million in Iran. The word Hazara most likely derives from the Persian word for “Thousand” (Persian: هزار - hazār). It may be the translation of the Mongol word “minga” (or minggan), a military unit of 1000 soldiers of Gengis Khan’s Army.³ It is common that many hazara people have a family name Chengezi, and today hazara communities are facing violent extremism.

Aimaqs are found throughout the West Central highlands of Afghanistan, immediately to the north of Herat, and in the Khorasan Province of Iran. The word "Aymāq" is a Mongolian word for “Province”. Aimaq and Taimuri (Teymur) are most mongoloid of the Aimaq and they live in gers, whereas other Aimaqs live in traditional Afghan black tents.⁴ Population of Aimaq in Iran is 186.700, Aimaq in Afganistan is 800.000,⁵ and of Teymur in Afganistan is 120.000 and Teymur in Iran is 37.300.⁶

The Daur are believed to be descended from people who fled the Jurchens' destruction of the Khitan state in the 12th century, who is about 132.400, but only 94.000 Daur speak Mongolian, and they live in the northernmost part of Inner Mongolia.

About 100.000 Dongxiang live in Gansu Province near the southwestern part of Inner Mongolia, 290.000 or so Monguor (Tsagaan Mongol) live on the south slopes of the Qilian Mountains to the west of the Donxiang, 8.000 Bonan live to the west of the Dongxiang, and 37. 000 Sogwo Arig and 30.000 Sichuan Mongols live in Tibetan plateau.

The Monguor people live in the Qinghai and Gansu provinces and speak the Monguor language, which belongs to the family of Mongolic languages but has been heavily influenced by both local Chinese and Tibetan dialects. While Buddhist monks are common in most villages, Taoist priests and shamans serve the whole area. The Taoist priests take charge of diverse functions that

² Ts.Sanchir “The white Mongols said on greeting ‘We have been waiting for you 800years’”, MIAT inflight magazine 2014/01

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazara_people

⁴ <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-External/Hazara%20Baluchistan.pdf>

⁵ http://www.nativeplanet.org/indigenous/ethnicdiversity/asia/afghanistan/indigenous_data_afghanistan_aimaq.shtml

⁶ http://kcm.co.kr/bethany_eng/p_code1/379.html

include weddings, funerals, and looking after the shrines, whereas the shaman's primary function is to serve as a trance medium during the Nadun celebration and sometimes illness management.

The Sogwo Arig (or Sog Mongols) claim to be descendants of Mongolian Yuan Dynasty rulers of Hunan province. The name "Sogwo" derives from Tibetan word "Sogbo" meaning "Mongol". French traveller Vicomte d'Ollone met with them in 1906 and the Sogwo Arig lord signed a letter with the title of "King of Hunan." The Sogwo Arig Mongol lords held their royal title until 1950s. They are nomads who live in Mongolian style ger. They adopted Tibetan language and now adhere to a Tibetan form of Buddhism with shamanistic and animistic traditions.

Approximately 30,000 Mongols live in the southern part of Sichuan Province in south-west China. Joseph Rock was the first recorded foreigner to visit the Sichuan Mongols in 1924. He described the town of Youngning as ‘the seat of three chiefs whose ancestors were Mongols, elevated to power by Kublai Khan in the 13th century’. Rock adds, ‘When the great Mongol Emperor marched through the territory about Youngning, AD 1253, he left one of his relatives to rule the Hlihin tribesmen.’ Before Communist rule, the Mongol king acted as a warlord over the whole region. ‘When the Communists took over, they deposed him, not killing him so as not to make him a martyr in the people’s eyes.’ The Sichuan Mongols' main religion is Tibetan Buddhism.

Khatso people, commonly known as the “Mongols in Yunnan”, mainly distributed in Tonghai County, Yunnan Province of Southwestern China. They are the descendants of the Yuan army, during the era of the Mongol Empire. They speak Khatso language, one of Tibeto-Burman languages, and their religion is Buddhism.

The Dongxiang live in Gansu and Qinghai Provinces, and they are closely related to the Mongolians. Scholars speculate that their identity as an independent ethnic group arose through contact with Central Asians, due to whom the Dongxiang converted to Sunni Islam in the 13th century. One possible origin is that they are descendants of Mongolian troops posted in the Hezhou area by Genghis Khan (1162-1227 AD) during his journey westward, while another possibility is that they could be a mixture of many peoples including Mongolian, Han, and Tibetan groups. The Dongxiang speak the Dongxiang language, a member of the Mongolic family. They also have a rich tradition of oral literature, and use the Arabic alphabet.

The Bonan were originally Mongol troops sent to their present location on the edge of Chinese territory to act as watch guards against the fierce Tibetans. In 1862 religious friction between Muslim Bonan and those who had embraced Tibetan Buddhism caused the two groups to split. These religious disputes and a quarrel over water rights caused the Muslim Bonan to move east to their present location in Gansu. The Bonan speak a Mongol language, altered from their original Mongol tongue by 700 years of isolation.

The Mongolic speaking Yugur (yellow yugur, or Shar Yogor) mainly live in the eastern part of Gansu Province, and in Dàhé and Kānglè Districts, in the centre of the County. Eastern Yugur

seems to be most closely related to Monguor, Baoan and Dongxiang and these four languages are referred to as the Southern Mongolic languages.⁷

Above mentioned Mongol ethnic minorities have been dispersed throughout the history of the Great Mongol Empire and eventually lost their language, disconnected from the homeland, got assimilated into local culture and religion, only they did not forget their roots.

Next stage of Mongol Diaspora, the late Middle Age Diaspora, took place during the turbulent period of civil war between Oirad and Khalkh, and the invasions of Manchu and Russia to Mongolia in 14th - 19th centuries as the Southern Mongols, Mongols in Tibetan Plateau, Kalmyks, Tuvans and Buryats were occupied by Russia and Manchu, later by China.

By the time the Manchus invaded Mongolia, the princes of northern Mongolia appealed to the Russians for protection. A Russian protectorate was established over the Buryat Mongols in order to save them from the Manchu invader. In 1923 the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created. But in 1937 the dreams of Mongolian autonomy collapsed during the Stalinist purges, while the Buryat-Mongol Republic was stripped of about half of its land, including the west shore of Lake Baikal, Olkhon Island, Ust-Orda, and Aga. In Buryatia itself Stalin brought in large numbers of Russian settlers in order to dilute the Mongolian majority. Mongolian script was banned and all writing in the Mongolian language was only allowed in the Russian Cyrillic script. In 1970 the teaching of Mongolian in Buryat schools was abolished as unnecessary. After the fall of Communism in 1990 Buryat intellectuals participated in the revival of Mongolian culture and were further emboldened to follow Mongolia's example in their own country.⁸

In 1608 and 1609 Oyrats gave oath of allegiance to the Russian Czar. Later on this part of Oyrats named by Russian Kalmyks after the Turkic speaking neighbors settled in the territory circumscribed by the rivers Emba, Yaik (Ural) and Volga. In the second half of 17th century they formed the Kalmyk Khanate in the Lower Volga and laid foundation for the new Mongolian speaking ethnic group, Kalmyks. In 1771 the oppression of czarist administration forced the larger part of Kalmyks (approximately 170 thousands men) to migrate to the original territories. The Kalmyk Khanate ceased its existence. In 1920 it was transformed into the Kalmyk Autonomous Region. In 1935 the Kalmyk Autonomous Region was reorganized into the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In December 1943 the Kalmyk people were unjustly deported to Siberia. The Kalmyk Autonomous Republic was abolished. The justice was restored only in 1957 and the Kalmyks returned to the homeland. First it was the Kalmyk Autonomous Region that in 1959 was transformed into the Autonomous Republic.⁹

⁷ Wikipedia

⁸ http://www.tengerism.org/Buryat_History.html

⁹ History of Kalmykia, <http://www.kalm.ru/en/hist.html>

The historic region of Tannu Uriankhai, of which **Tuva** is a part, was controlled by the Mongols from 1207 to 1758, when it was brought under Manchu rule (Qing Dynasty until 1911). Following the Russian Revolution of 1917 which ended the imperial autocracy, most of Tuva was occupied by Aleksandr Kolchak's "White" Russian troops; the southwestern part was occupied by Chinese troops and the southern part by Mongol troops led by Khatanbaatar Magsarjav. On August 14, 1921 the Bolsheviks established a Tuvan People's Republic, which existed as an independent state from 1921 until it was absorbed by the Soviet Union in 1944. In 1930 the pro-Soviet region discarded the state's Tibetan-Mongol script in favor of a Latin alphabet, and in 1943 Cyrillic script replaced the Latin. Under the leadership of Party Secretary Toka, ethnic Russians were granted full citizenship rights and Buddhist and Mongol influences on the Tuvan state and society were systematically reduced. By the time of its annexation by the USSR in 1944 until 1990 the Tuvan Autonomous Oblast rather reluctantly underwent modernization and social mobilization, Soviet style. It is now Tuva Republic within Russian Federation.¹⁰

The Uriankhai people were annexed by the Oirat Zunghars in the 16th century. After the fall of the Zunghar Khanate in the 18th century, the Uriankhai were subjugated by the Qing Dynasty; and their one part, Altayans, was called by the Qing court as Altan Nuur Uriyangkhai. They have had skills in metalworking dating back to the 2nd millennium BC. The Altay came into contact with Russians in the 18th century. In the tsarist period, the Altay were known as oirat or oyrot (this name means oirat and would later be carried on for the Oyrot Autonomous Oblast).

Also the Sart Kalmyks of Kyrgyzstan are descendants of the Zunghar Khanate, who live in Issyk Kul Province, Kyrgyzstan. Their population is estimated to be c. 12,000. They used to speak in a dialect of the Oirat language, but now completely switched to the Kyrgyz language. Sart Kalmyks make 1,5% of the population of the province and 0,1% of the Kyrgyzstan population.

In Russia, the largest Mongolic ethnic groups are the Buryats of 461.410, and other ethnic groups of Kalmyks of 183.400 and Tuvas 366.000, Altyas 74.238 of 2010 census.

Originally the southern part of Mongolia, **Inner Mongolia** was settled chiefly by the Tumet and Chahar tribes. The Manchus annexed Inner Mongolia in 1635 and under Manchu rule Southern Mongolia became known as Inner Mongolia. Until 1911, Inner Mongolia was only under nominal Chinese rule; however, Chinese settlers in the region soon forced the Mongol tribes into the steppe and arid parts of the region. After the Revolution of 1911, Inner Mongolia became an integral part of the Chinese Republic. The population of ethnic Mongols in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, which was declared in 1947, is 4.000.000.¹¹ The decline of Mongol language began in the 30s due to the lesser chances of going to a good university and getting a good job for students who learned Mongolian than those with Chinese language.

¹⁰ Tuva: Russia's Tibet or the Next Lithuania? Ronald McMullen

¹¹ The Mongols at China's edge Uradyn Erden Bulag

The Upper Mongols or Deed mongol, also known as the Kōke Nuur Mongols are the Mongol people of Oirat and Khalkha origin who settled around the Qinghai Lake of Upper Mongolia in 16th and 17th centuries and adopted Tibetan dress and jewelry despite still using Mongolian ger and script.

The Mongols of Xinjiang form a minority, principally in the northern part of the region and Mongols are 194,500 in 2010. They are primarily descendants of the surviving Torghuts and Khoshuts who returned from Kalmykia, and of the Chakhar stationed there as garrison soldiers in 18th century. There is several thousand **Muslim Alaša** or Alasha Mongols.

Mongols who lived along the Ejine River in Ejine Banner of Alxa League descended from Ravjir, a grandson of Torghut Ayuka Khan from the Volga River, and they settled there in 1753. Now **Ejine Torghuts** are 5000.¹²

Gūshi Khan's 4th son Ayush was opposed to the Khan's brother Baibagas. Ayush's eldest son is Batur Erkh Jonon Khoroli. After the battle between Galdan Boshigt Khan and Ochirtu Sechen Khan, Batur Erkh Jonon Khoroli moved to Tsaidam with his 10,000 households. The 5th Dalai Lama wanted land for them from the Qing government, thus in 1686, the Emperor permitted them to reside in Alasha. In 1697, **Alasha Mongols** were administered in 'khoshuu' and 'sum' units. Alasha Ooluts are approximately 35.000 in Alxa Left and Right Banners of Alxa League.¹³

There are 515 Mongols in Taiwan, who fled during the Chinese Civil War in 50s, from Inner Mongolia. China has 3 Autonomous Prefectures and 8 Mongolian Autonomous Counties besides Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

Today, even under Autonomous governance these ethnic diversities are facing the fate of losing ethnic identities and assimilation into the mass culture under the cultural imperialism and dominating economic policies. Most Mongol ethnic groups and tribes are the least developed and disadvantaged compared to the people of their host countries and they all suffer from varying degree of discrimination, inequality and oppression.

Scholars have distinguished between different kinds of diaspora, based on its causes such as imperialism, colonization, trade or labor migrations, or by the kind of social coherence within the diaspora community and its ties to the ancestral lands. One of the first scholars to establish the main criteria of the classical theory is William Safran, who in his short article “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” describes a number of groups and classifies them according to the following points: Traumatic dispersal, longing for and belonging to an ancestral homeland, collective knowledge of the ethnic identity, alienation from the host society and the wish to return to the lost places of the ancestors.

¹² Wikipedia

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alasha_dialect

The early stages of Mongol Diaspora were the results of war and political interests, therefore diaspora communities of that period had had a lack of connection, communication and personal relationship with the homeland, and retention of collective memory is faded over the centuries passed.

The important part of the theoretical framework of study should be the time frame and historical time line of dispersal. Time is the influential factor for ethnic minority's change whether it is adaptation, assimilation to or alienation from mass culture. The Middle Age Mongol Diaspora have had a greater change within community over 800 year time than the second stage diaspora. Taken account of both a cause and time passed, it can be stated that a collective memory of homeland, carried from a generation to a generation by myths and legends, blurred into an imaginary place. Historical timeline also has to be taken into consideration as it associates with social and industrial developments such as machine age, information age, space age etc., which in turn has a major impact on diaspora communities' shift.

The potential of keeping their culture and language alive is also directly affected by external factors of political and economic policy of host countries, acceptance in a wider society, whether it is open or closed, size of indigenous population and autonomous status. Certain internal factors facilitate the survival and inner strength of a diaspora community such as language, ethnic heritage, ethnic value, self-identity and sense of belonging.

The sense of being minority to a host country, being victimized from suppressed freedom, discrimination and cultural imperialism initiate the awareness of self- identity and desire for being a part of native land as in “theory of the Diaspora-homeland relationship, seen from the perspective of the so called “Solar System”, where the Diaspora is viewed as a “periphery” connected and belonging to one “center”, namely the homeland”.¹⁴

The third stage of Mongol Diaspora started in early 90's, and today approximately 216.000 Mongols are residing in about 80 different countries. This is significant as for the total population of Mongolia is 3 million.

During communist regime in the Independent Mongol State the national heritage and Chinghis Khan's study were forbidden, and traditional Mongol scripture was abolished, thus public knowledge about true history was shallow except some oral tradition passed by a generation to generation. After the social revolution in Mongolia, where democracy prevailed in 90's, Mongolians started migrating out to foreign lands by seeking the better opportunities and financial advances, which is a new wave of Mongol diaspora of a distinct category compared to the previous stages. It is more likely that after being restricted from free movement in the period of communism they were thirsty to discover the world and curious about other cultures, and basically nomadic spirit, the essence of nomadic civilization triggered the burst of migration.

¹⁴ Anna Harutyunyan “Challenging the Theory of Diaspora from the Field”, 2012

Awakening from the long suppressed dictatorship Mongolians became enthusiastic about discovering historical and spiritual heritage from their ancestors, renewing old classic scripture and carrying out vast research in history as well as searching Mongol ethnic communities all over the world in attempt to revive and strengthen the ties between dispersed ethnic groups. In the wave of cultural awareness the voice echoed to all corners of world territory and stirred up the hidden instincts of people with Mongolic origins.

The third stage is characterized as a labor migration with its distinctiveness that associated with voluntary nature, and consequently, close familial ties to the homeland. However, in this late stage the new generation emerged in host countries in the last two decades has shown an alarming tendency of losing their own language and culture faster than previous stages. This reveals how fragile a language is, without proper soil to grow it does not stay alive long, especially in fast social integration and cultural diffusion in today's society. Language is the foundation of ethnic identity and cultural capitals. If cultural assimilation occurs at this rate through language loss in modern days it is only astonishing to see the survival of the diaspora communities of early stages.

What makes them to stay Mongols among mass population of host countries and to fight through struggles and conflicts for centuries is deep-rooted pride and reverence to Chinghis Khaan and their unwavering claims of being the descendants of Chinghis Khaan's clan. That is the core strength for keeping their ethnic identity and culture alive.

Resilient character, most endurable survival instinct, faith in their ancestral spirits, worship of Chinghis Khaan and Tengrism, the primary belief system in Mongol nomadic civilization, are all serve as internal strength for Mongol Diaspora. This is an unorthodox concept for the Diaspora study and left outside of the frame of the classic theory.

Nomadic civilization, which is unacceptable and impenetrable for Western judgment so that they refuse to see it as civilization only by comparing it to mass-gathered settlement society, consists of nomadic philosophy, structure, unique mentality and content sense with simplicity.

Today, Mongol communities acknowledge the raising consciousness of Mongol identity, and promoting solidarity in saving small tribes of nomadic culture from wipe out of dominating political and socioeconomic forces and reviving ethnic value within communities and preserving heritage of nomadic civilization.

Conclusion

Mongol Diaspora can be divided into three stages as Middle Age, Late Middle Age and Post Modern Era Diasporas because time of dispersion have had a significant influence over Diaspora communities' change while historical periods play varying degree of force on cultural diffusion within Diaspora communities.

