

# Relations Between China and Mongolia: Cultural and Educational Dimensions

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**Abstract**—This article is devoted to analyzing cultural and educational dimensions of the relations between the People's Republic of China and the Mongolian People's Republic. Both countries are interested in developing political and economic cooperation, but such cooperation is inseparable from cultural and educational relations development. The development of cultural and educational ties contributes to the improvement of mutual understanding between nations and creates the basis for the formation of strong bilateral relations. China and Mongolia carry out active educational cooperation, cultural exchanges, which contribute to the further development of relations in the cultural and educational spheres, as well as in the fields of economics and politics.

**Keywords**—China; Mongolia; cultural cooperation; educational cooperation; bilateral relations; tourism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Relations between China and Mongolia have a rich centuries-old history and a common historical past. From the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th century, Mongolia was a part of the Qing Empire. During three centuries of joint history, active interpenetration of cultures took place.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations on October 16, 1949, China and Mongolia have been passing an uneasy path from close rapprochement on the basis of communist ideology, then mutual rejection to multifaceted cooperation in political, economic, cultural and other fields.

Mongolia and China are neighboring countries, they have a long land border of 4,700 km. The prolonged silence in the interstate dialogue was broken in the late 1980s. In 1986, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of China Liu Shuqing visited Mongolia. The visit resulted in signing of a consular convention and a long-term trade agreement for a period of 5

years. In 1987, parliamentary ties were resumed, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia received an official invitation to visit Beijing.

In the late 1990s, the political and economic relations between China and Mongolia reached a high level. The intensification of relations at the highest level promoted the stable trade growth between the two countries.

Currently, relations between the two countries are developing in the framework of international norms and generally accepted rules. China is the largest trade partner of Mongolia and the main source of foreign investment [1].

At the same time, relations in the political and economic spheres are inseparable from cultural and educational relations development. The development of cultural and educational ties contributes to the improvement of mutual understanding between nations and creates the basis for the formation of strong bilateral relations. In this regard, this article will consider the cultural and educational dimensions of Sino-Mongolian relations.

## II. PREREQUISITES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BILATERAL COOPERATION

Mongolia has a large territory, exceeding the territories of Germany, France and Spain taken together, a small population of 3 million people and rich natural resources. China, with its huge population, increasing military, political and economic potential and the acute shortage of natural resources which are necessary to ensure such growth, is interested in developing mutually beneficial cooperation with Mongolia based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence [2]. Mongolia is also interested in developing relations with China, because China is the main importer of Mongolian goods. In addition, taking into account the

geopolitical position of Mongolia, located between two large countries – Russia and China, Mongolian government seeks to the development of good-neighborly relations with both states. The Mongolian vector is one of the most important in China’s foreign policy.

The current period of Sino-Mongolian bilateral relations is characterized by the fact that the two states have embarked on the path of developing a comprehensive strategic partnership. In 2014, during Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Mongolia, the Declaration on the development of comprehensive strategic relations was signed [3].

The development of bilateral relations between China and Mongolia is based on a number of objective reasons:

- geographical proximity of countries;
- growing consumer market of China and the rapid growth of the Chinese economy;
- the complementary nature of the neighboring territories – the mineral-rich regions of Mongolia and the industrial regions of China;
- Chinese policy aimed at supporting domestic business in Mongolia through the provision of tax incentives and loans;
- The factor of ethnocultural commonality between the population of China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and the Mongolian People’s Republic, which is a kind of “bridge” for the interchange between Mongolia and China [4].

It is also very important that Mongolia observes the policy of “one China”, supports the position of the Chinese side on the issues related to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang.

### III. ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION OF CHINA AND MONGOLIA AS A FACTOR OF THE TWO COUNTRIES’ RAPPROCHEMENT

Mongolia is a mono-ethnic state. 94% of Mongolia’s population is Mongols. There is a small number of Chinese in Mongolia – approximately 0,33%.

There is about 5813 947 Mongols in China (according to the 2000 census), which is more than 2 times higher than the population of Mongolia itself. The Mongols live in compact communities in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and in several other areas.

53% of the Mongolian population profess Buddhism in its Tibetan form. In China, Buddhism is practiced by 15% of the population, mainly Tibetans. In this regard, religion should be a unifying factor for the two states, but the issue of Tibet is very sensitive for China.

In 2016, Dalai Lama XIV visited Mongolia, this caused discontent of the Chinese government. However, the Foreign Minister of Mongolia stated: “The visit of Dalai Lama at the invitation of the Gandantegchenlin monastery had a negative impact on our relations, as a result of whom there was a misunderstanding. The government regrets this. We believe

Dalai Lama will no longer visit Mongolia while the current government is in power” [5]. This statement indicates a high level of relations, as well as the fact that Mongolia seeks to avoid misunderstandings in relations with China.

However, the ethnic and religious composition of China and Mongolia has points of intersection, which can help improve cultural exchange between the two countries.

### IV. CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND MONGOLIA

The fifth President of Mongolia Ts. Elbegdorj during his two terms of office (2009–2013 and 2013–2017) repeatedly visited China, the first time in May 2010 with a state visit at the invitation of Chinese President Hu Jintao. Then President Ts. Elbegdorj held talks with Hu Jintao and other leaders of China, visited Jilin Province and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, took part in the opening of the Mongolian Culture Days in China, in a business meeting between Mongolian and Chinese entrepreneurs. During the visit, the Chinese side announced providing Mongolia with grants of 50 million yuan. The intergovernmental Agreement on the mutual establishment of cultural centers and the Plan of Cultural Exchange between Mongolia and China for 2010-2013 were signed.

In 2000-2015 cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science, health, sports, tourism was maintained at all levels. During these years, intergovernmental and interdepartmental bilateral documents were signed and implemented, such as: Agreement on the mutual opening of cultural centers; Plan of cultural exchange between Mongolia and China for 2010-2013 (2010); The Agreement on the Prevention of the Illegal Movement of Cultural Heritage Objects Across the Border, the Illegal Excavation of Cultural Monuments, and the Prevention of Loss of Cultural Monuments due to Theft (2011); Plan for cooperation in science and technology in 2006–2010; Agreement on cooperation in the field of science and technology in 2011-2015.

On September 4-8, 2018, Culture and Tourism Days called “Feel China” were held in the capital of Mongolia. The organizers of this event were the Press Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, the Chinese Embassy in Mongolia, the people’s government of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Mongolian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the Consulate General of Mongolia in Hohhot and the Chinese Cultural Center in Ulan Bator.

The purpose of Culture Days is to promote consensus in the relations between China and Mongolia in the humanitarian sphere, the idea of the first meeting of the Chinese-Mongolian joint commission on humanitarian exchanges, humanitarian exchanges between the two countries peoples, and to strengthen mutual understanding and friendship between the peoples of China and Mongolia.

There was also a number of events as part of Culture and Tourism Days held by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, such as: an exhibition-fair of books, performances

by Chinese and Mongolian artists, Chinese films, free medical examinations by Mongolian doctors, tasting of Chinese dishes and friendly matches of national teams of China and Mongolia in basketball [6].

#### V. EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

China is open to international cooperation in the field of education. The PRC can provide any country with educational services. China recognizes the WTO member countries' right to provide educational services in other countries by creating and expanding commercial structures; the possibility of a long stay in the territory of the WTO member countries' persons providing educational services there. At the same time, the PRC refuses to provide certain interstate educational services, fearing a violation of the country' educational autonomy, possible negative impact on the management and monitoring system of educational institutions. Innovations in Chinese and Mongolian educational space are stepping up the process of finding ways to modernize the education system, and also actualize the need for studying international experience in creating a multi-level education system (bachelor, master's degree) in the context of creating cultural and educational space [7].

Chinese government provides Mongolian students with grants for getting higher education in Chinese universities. In 2018, China allocated 258 grants to Mongolian students. Scholarship programs of the Chinese government give Mongolian students a chance to get a higher education in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs. Grants for studying in China cover students' expenses for studying and living in a dormitory and provide an opportunity to receive monthly scholarships from 2 to 3 thousand yuan [8].

#### VI. CHINA'S "THE BELT AND ROAD" INITIATIVE IS ONE OF THE DIRECTIONS OF CULTURAL RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN CHINA AND MONGOLIA

Speaking with a keynote speech on September 7, 2013 at the Nazarbayev University in Astana, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the idea of creating the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (丝绸之路经济带) [9]. In October 2013, at the APEC summit in Indonesia the Chinese leader announced the creation of another project – "The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (21 世纪海上丝绸之路). These two large-scale projects became the basis of the "the Belt and Road" initiative (一带一路). This initiative covers 65 countries, which account for about 32% of world GDP, 39% of world merchandise trade and 63% of the world's population [10].

In June 2017, at the opening of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Mongolian Prime Minister Jargaltulgyn Erdenebat stated that Mongolia closely align its long-term development program with the implementation of "One Belt, One Road" initiative working together with Russia and China [11]. Earlier, in May 2017, during the forum dedicated to the consideration of "One Belt, One Road" initiative the sides discussed issues of interconnected development and approved a program to create economic corridors between Russia, Mongolia and China.

Within the framework of trade and economic cooperation, the possibility of interfacing the Mongolian project "Steppe Road" and the Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road" was discussed. China supports the expansion of cooperation between Mongolia and such financial organizations as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund, in order to finance major infrastructure projects. The parties agreed to explore the possibility of creation of trade and economic cooperation zone near Zamyn-Uud and Erlian and preparing for signing a free trade agreement.

The Chinese interpretation of the new stage of "One Belt, One Road" initiative development was explained in Xi Jinping's speech at a forum in Beijing on May 14, 2017. He provided the report on the work done in four years since the initiative was launched, and also represented the concept of "five connections". This concept covers such areas as political decisions, infrastructure, trade, finance, humanitarian cooperation. The main expression of this concept is "the interconnection of people's hearts" [12].

At the forum, Xi Jinping stated that, starting from 2013, the countries participating in the initiative promoted the "spirit of the Silk Road", expanded cooperation in science, education, culture and health care, supported exchanges between nations, created a solid foundation for "One Belt, One Road" initiative, strengthened its social base. He said that the Chinese government annually allocated 10 000 scholarships to relevant countries, local governments also established specialized scholarships for the Silk Road countries. The authorities of the PRC encouraged the holding of international cultural and educational exchanges, years of culture and tourism, arts and cinema festivals, conferences and dialogues of think tanks. All this made humanitarian cooperation diverse. The Chinese leader concluded that "during the exchanges the distance between the hearts became closer".

Cultural exchanges between dozens of peoples, who live along the lines of the impressive transport route, are also one of the main components of the Chinese initiative. No economic cooperation can be absolutely free without taking into account the cultural, ethnic, national characteristics of those peoples who are included in the overall economic work: starting with the linguistic aspect, understandable language, which is the essential basis of any business plan, and ending with mutual spiritual enrichment which is the natural result of joint activities.

The Chinese initiative could be combined with at least one aspect of the Mongolian strategic development program, known as the "Steppe Road". According to this program launched in 2014, it is planned to build modern high-speed roads and railways that will cross the entire territory of Mongolia from the borders with China to the borders with Russia. The "Steppe Road" program is designed to develop the potential of the Mongolian economy through cross-border transportation.

China and Mongolia have recently reached an agreement on synchronizing "One Belt, One Road" and "Steppe Road" initiatives, as well as enhancing relations between states to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership. Together

with Russia, these countries are implementing more than 30 projects, mainly focusing on the modernization of transport and communications infrastructure. The Mongolian corridor will become an additional alternative to the two existing routes – through the western part of the PRC to Central Asia and through the city of Manzhouli in Chinese Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to Russia.

It is supposed to open two free trade zones along the economic corridor between China, Mongolia and Russia. The first one will be opened on the Sino-Mongolian border at the “Gashuun Sukhait” border crossing and will help increase exports and serve the Mongolian coal deposit Tavan-Tolgoi. The second free trade zone will be opened on the Mongolian-Russian border near the village of Altanbulag. According to the plans, it will contribute to the ecotourism development [13].

## VII. TOURISM

Currently, tourism in Mongolia is developing at an especially fast pace, the number of foreign tourists and travelers coming to the country is growing from year to year. The structure of the inbound tourist flow is characterized by a significant predominance of tourists from neighboring countries – China (48%) and Russia (18%). Mongolia is a unique country for tourism. It is located in the center of the continent, removed from the capital centers of neighboring states (Russia, China, Kazakhstan) for thousands of kilometers, it is characterized by a severe sharply continental climate and the absence of seaside resorts. Mongolia’s attractiveness for tourists is determined by its natural and cultural uniqueness. At the same time, the development of tourism in Mongolia takes place in close relationship with China and Russia. The historical, cultural and natural community of the contiguous regions of these countries defines wide opportunities for the development of cross-border tourism [14].

Mongolia is seeking to attract more Chinese tourists in order to support the growth of the economy, which is dependent on mining.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Thus, modern Mongolian-Chinese relations are characterized by convergence in the whole spectrum of political, socio-economic, cultural, regional interaction. The Chinese side has initiated a deep exchange of views on the further development of Chinese-Mongolian friendship and cooperation and a wide range of international and regional policy issues. At present, China is the largest trading partner and investor in Mongolia [15], and therefore Mongolia is interested in developing relations with China. At the same time, China also seeks to develop relations with Mongolia because this country possesses rich natural resources, which are necessary for the rapidly developing Chinese economy. The development of bilateral relations contributes to the strengthening of cultural and educational relations between the two countries. This is related to the fact that the peoples of the two countries are directly involved in the implementation of bilateral cooperation in economic,

political, social areas. Without considering the cultural, ethnic, national characteristics of these peoples, cooperation is not possible. Therefore, China and Mongolia carry out active educational cooperation, cultural exchanges, hold Culture days, which contributes to further development of relations in the cultural and educational spheres, as well as in the fields of economics and politics.

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