Does Everyone Want Democracy?

Insights from Mongolia

Paula L.W. Sabloff

PAULA L.W. SABLOFF

Does EVERYONE Want DEMOCRACY?

INSIGHTS FROM MONGOLIA

Left Coast Press Inc.
WALNUT CREEK
CALIFORNIA

Left Coast Press, Inc.
1630 North Main Street, #400
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
http://www.LCoastPress.com

ISBN 978-1-59874-565-8 hardcover
ISBN 978-1-59874-567-2 institutional eBook
ISBN 978-1-61132-719-9 consumer eBook

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Sabloff, Paula L. W.
Does everyone want democracy? : insights from Mongolia / Paula L.W. Sabloff.
pages ; cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-59874-565-8 (hardback : alkaline paper) —
ISBN 978-1-59874-567-2 (institutional ebook) — ISBN 978-1-61132-719-9 (consumer ebook)
1. Democracy—Mongolia—Public opinion. 2. Political culture—Mongolia—21st century. 3. Mongols—Attitudes. 4. Mongolia—Politics and government—1992–
I. Title.
DS798.84.S235 2013
320.95173—dc23

2012049078

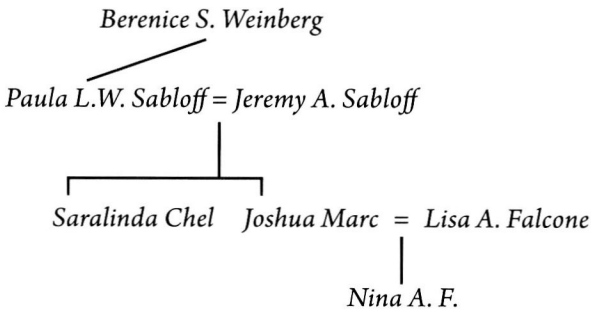
Printed in the United States of America

∞ ™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992.

Cover design by Jane Burton

Does Everyone Want Democracy?

This book is dedicated to my living lines (so far):



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

1.1 Interviewing young herders in Tuv Aimag. 3
1.2 Organization of a person's thinking about the past. 11
1.3 An anthropological connectionist-theory model of a person's decision-making process. 13
1.4 Khovd from Khovd River. 15
1.5 Ulaanbaatar. 16
1.6 Researchers. 18
2.1 Topography of Mongolia. 24
2.2 A young herder with his cattle. 25
2.3 Prince Namsrai and his wife, Ikh Khuree. 31
2.4 Mongol serf beating wool into felt. 33
2.5 The Jibzundamba Khutugtu, religious leader of all Mongolia. 36
2.6 Naimachin Street and Ikh Khuree (Urga), early twentieth century. 38
2.7 Women and girls collecting dung for fuel, Bayanhongor Aimag. 40
2.8 Confiscating property from a wealthy house. 46
2.9 Choibalsan, the "Little Stalin" of Mongolia. 50
2.10 Hunger strike at the foot of Sukhbaatar's statue, Ulaanbaatar. 59
3.1 Zanaa Jurmed , CEDAW-Watch. 65
3.2 Bag governors in a UNDP training program, Mandalgov. 68
4.1 Naranjargal Khashkhuu of Globe International. 94
4.2 Shaman performing a curing ceremony at Mother Rock. 95
4.3 Lama collecting money to rebuild a Buddhist statue, Gandan Monastery. 96
4.4 A Kazakh family in their ger. 97
4.5 An *ovoo* draped in silk ceremonial scarves. 99
4.6 Burmaa Radnaa, Women for Social Progress. 103
5.1 My first apartment building. 109
5.2 Milking cows during socialism and in democracy. 111
5.3 Dachas outside of Ulaanbaatar. 116
5.4 New shops in Ulaanbaatar. 118
5.5 High school students in Darkhan. 126
6.1 Government House. 138
7.1 A young couple coming to cast their ballots. 171

7.2 Showing citizenship booklets and voting, Erdene Sum. 173
7.3 S. Idshinnorov, Director of the National Museum of Mongolian History. 180
8.1 A revised anthropological connectionist-theory model of a person's decision-making process. 201

TABLES

2.1 1918 census of males in the four eastern aimags, by class 42
3.1 Mentions of human rights attributes, 1998 and 2003 69
3.2 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning human rights attributes, 1998 and 2003 71
3.3 Mentions of human rights subdomains, 1998 and 2003 73
3.4 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning subdomains of human rights, 1998 and 2003 78
3.5 Mentions of deeply held values associated with human rights , 1998 and 2003 82
3.6 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding the association of deeply held values with human rights, 1998 and 2003 84
4.1 Mentions of political freedom attributes, 1998 and 2003 87
4.2 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning attributes of political freedom, 1998 and 2003 89
4.3 Mentions of major subdomains of political freedom, 1998 and 2003 91
4.4 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning major subdomains of political freedom, 1998 and 2003 100
4.5 Mentions of underlying values associated with political freedom , 1998 and 2003 101
4.6 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning the association of underlying values with political freedoms, 1998 and 2003 105
5.1 Mentions of some subdomains of economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 114
5.2 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning people's mention of some subdomains of economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 122
5.3 Mention of other subdomains of economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 123

5.4 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning people's mention of other subdomains of economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 125
5.5 Mention of deeply held values associated with economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 128
5.6 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning the association of certain deeply held values with economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 134
6.1 Mentions of the main attributes of a democratic government, 1998 and 2003 140
6.2 Significant differences within demographic categories in three attributes of a democratic government, 1998 and 2003 145
6.3 Mentions of a democratic government's major responsibilities toward citizens, 1998 and 2003 147
6.4 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning a democratic government's major responsibilities toward citizens, 1998 and 2003 153
6.5 Government attributes related to support of citizens' transition to the market economy, 1998 and 2003 156
6.6 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding government support of citizens' transition to the market economy, 1998 and 2003 162
6.7 Mentions of deeply held values associated with a democratic government's responsibilities toward citizens, 1998 and 2003 163
6.8 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding people's underlying values when discussing government responsibilities, 1998 and 2003 166
7.1 Mentions of citizens' participation in governance, 1998 and 2003 169
7.2 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning participation in elections, 1998 and 2003 177
7.3 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning civil society and access to information, 1998 and 2003 184
7.4 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning citizens' political activity, 1998 and 2003 187
7.5 Mentions of citizens' duties associated with deeply held values, 1998 and 2003 189
7.6 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding the perception of citizens' participation in governance and their deeply held values, 1998 and 2003 190

8.1 Deeply held values mentioned by number and percent of interviewees, 1998 and 2003 193
A.1 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning major human rights attributes, 1998 and 2003 208
A.2 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning subdomains of human rights, 1998 and 2003 210
A.3 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding the association of deeply held values with human rights, 1998 and 2003 212
A.4 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning attributes of political freedom, 1998 and 2003 214
A.5 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning major subdomains of political freedom, 1998 and 2003 216
A.6 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning the association of underlying values with political freedom, 1998 and 2003 218
A.7 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning people's mention of some subdomains of economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 220
A.8 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning people's mention of other subdomains of economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 222
A.9 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning the association certain deeply held values with economic freedom, 1998 and 2003 224
A.10 Significant differences within demographic categories in three attributes of a democratic government, 1998 and 2003 226
A.11 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning a democratic government's major responsibilities toward citizens, 1998 and 2003 228
A.12 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding democratic government support of citizens' transition to the market economy, 1998 and 2003 230
A.13 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding people's underlying values when discussing government responsibilities, 1998 and 2003 232
A.14 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning participation in elections, 1998 and 2003 234
A.15 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning civil society and access to information, 1998 and 2003 236

A.16 Significant differences within demographic categories concerning citizens' political activity, 1998 and 2003 238
A.17 Significant differences within demographic categories regarding deeply held values and the perception of citizens' participation in governance, 1998 and 2003 240

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have often advised my students to research topics that satisfy their own emotional needs and interests. In the name of honesty, I feel it only right to share why I have researched democracy in Mongolia. I came to this research after spending years fulfilling a particular psychological need. Although I was not conscious of it when I started, looking back I realize that all of my anthropological writing was about how the little guy—the underdog or the youngest child—achieved some level of self-determination partly by influencing the decisions of the person in charge. My parents and sister had all been oldest children and therefore had little sympathy for my lowly family position as the baby. As a result, I often felt powerless. This deep-seated concern translated into research on patron-client relations (clientelism)—specifically, the ways that clients influence their patrons' decisions. This theme framed my work from Tehuacan and Cozumel in Mexico to New Mexico, Pennsylvania and finally Mongolia.

It only took me until 50 to stop researching the powerlessness of little people and turn to another topic. In 1996 I was working on a short research project to see if I could conduct fieldwork in Mongolia. At that time I met Dr. Mekei, Vice-Rector of the National University of Mongolia. He suggested, "Why don't you come back and do more research in Mongolia? You could study democracy here. It would be most interesting for an American to do." I immediately knew he was right.

The second Soviet-style socialist nation in the world, Mongolia had discarded the communist regime in 1990 and socialism soon after. In 1992, the people ratified a new constitution based on democracy and capitalism. Ever since then, the country has struggled to meet the expectations of the new constitution in everyday life, and it was a topic of great interest to Mongolians.

Mongolian democratization was also of great interest to me, for it really symbolized the next step in my psychological path: a post-Soviet country struggling to institutionalize democracy was really moving from dependency to self-determination. Thus, the study of Mongolian democratization would, in fact, be the logical next step for me. Besides, I was angered by a chance remark made to me while I was exploring the possibility of conducting the research. Someone I interviewed said that anyone over 50 would not understand democracy and would just have to be carried by the rest of society. As I was turning 50 at the time and felt I still had the capacity to learn new things, I wanted to find out which one of us was right. Other comments piqued my curiosity. People said that men and women do not think differently

about democracy, yet US pollsters had said that women were responsible for electing Bill Clinton, who was president when I started this work. And some Mongolian academics said that only the educated, the intelligentsia, would understand the principles of democracy. So I decided to study changing democratic ideas in Mongolia partly because I felt that curiosity combined with irritation would be a great motivator for good research.

There is another reason why I wanted to work in Mongolia: I love the people. Professor Richard (Rich) Scaglion, a friend and colleague at the University of Pittsburgh, once told my students that they should work where they like the people, the music and the food. I finally found a place where I loved the first two and tolerated the third.

Mongolians—at least the Mongolians whom I met—are the kind of people I like to be around. They are forthright, telling me what they are thinking on almost any topic. They are solicitous of foreigners. In fact, there are several I have trusted with my life, something I would not do in the United States (well, I can take care of myself in the United States). They have a strong sense of family and community. And they like to laugh. Whenever family, friends or coworkers get together, they join in the conversation until they are laughing together. I think this is a great way to bond.

Their music? Mongolians have a fabulous tradition of throat singing, or two-tone singing. They also have a large repertoire of short songs and long songs, or ballads. They sing as if they were singing against the wind. Their voices are straightforward and honest, like their conversation. When I started researching in Ulaanbaatar, young people were just forming pop-music bands. They combined the Mongolian traditions with Western (including Japan and Korea) phrasing. I think they are neat, and I'm still playing my *Saraa* CD.

To finish Rich's criteria for happy fieldwork, I need to tell you that Mongolian food comes not from the Chinese cuisine but from the nomadic and Russian traditions. They prefer three-year-old mutton and goat rather than lamb or kid. They boil it with rice or potatoes, onions and other vegetables. They also throw a handful of salt into the pot, which practically turned me into a vegetarian while there. Their favorite part of any animal—sheep, goat or cow—is the fat, and they cut the meat to maximize the number of chunks of pure fat. I used to hand off the fatty pieces to any man sitting next to me; I always found him grateful whether he was a teacher or a herder. While this diet is fine for herders who are active all day long, it is heart-attack food for sedentary workers like Mongolian office workers or me. Still, the food was safe because it was boiled. Luckily, there were many foreign restaurants in

Ulaanbaatar where I mostly ate: Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Mexican, French and German, too. So I could tolerate eating in Mongolia. Since Mongolia met Rich's criteria for a good fieldwork site for me, I decided to work there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My initial thanks go to the funding agencies and individuals who supported the fieldwork and write-up for this book. The 1998 research was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (SBR-9806345, see Sabloff 1999) with additional support from Annette Merle-Smith and Robert and Lois Baylis. The 1999 and 2003 field seasons were funded by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and Annette Merle-Smith. The School for Advanced Research kindly provided a summer of analysis through an Ethel-Jane Westfeldt Bunting Fellowship in 2004.

I also wish to thank Mongolian friends and colleagues, especially the research teams: Drs. Baasandorj, Byambadorj, Nyamdavaa, Nyamdorj and Nyamsuren along with students Byersuren and Gantsooj in Khovd; and Drs. Bumaa, Nansalmaa and Olziesekhan along with Ayush, Chinzorig, Enkhtuya, Mongolkhatan,Tsetsegjargal, Tsetseglen and Uyunga in Ulaanbaatar. I could not have accomplished the project without the special organizational and intellectual help of Dr. G. Nyamdavaa Gendenjaviin and Ms. Magsarjav Tsetseglen in 1998. Not only are they wonderful colleagues but they have also become friends. Drs. B. Batchuluun, Regsuren Baterdene and Nyamsuren, Eliot and William Bikales provided extra intellectual stimulation and support. And of course I want to give special thanks to Dr. Bumaa Dashdendeviin of the National Museum of Mongolian History. We started as colleagues and continue as friends, corresponding frequently and helping each other when possible. You will see her name frequently in this book, as she guided me through knowledge and joy of Mongolia. Her constant intellectual support made me confident that the facts in this book are correct.

I never thought this book would take so long to write. It means that I have so many people to thank in the United States. In my University of Pennsylvania years, the following people were kind enough to listen to me and read sections of the book: Drs. Fran Barg, Samuel Freeman, Gautham Ghosh, Maris Gillette, Brian Hackman,Walda Metcalf, Catherine Newling, Brian Spooner and Steve Pinker. Ana Maria Gomez Lopez was always ready to read another draft and comment. At the Santa Fe Institute where I have

finally found academic heaven, I have received support from Drs. Christopher Wood, Erica Jen and Paul Hooper as well as Mr. Ramamoorthi Bhaskar and countless others.

My deep love, appreciation and thanks go, of course, to my life partner and pal, Dr. Jeremy (Jerry) Sabloff. Together we have created a stimulating, supportive ride through life together. We have also created two fascinating, wonderful, moral and caring children, Saralinda (Lindi) Sabloff and Joshua Sabloff, which is just what I had hoped they would be. I dedicate this book to Jerry, our children along with their partners and offspring (not the dogs this time) and to my mother, Berenice S. Weinberg, who continues to be an inspiration as she approaches her 100th birthday. Keep exercising! Keep moving!

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations viii

Preface and Acknowledgments xiii

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction 1

CHAPTER TWO
Democracy Means Independence and Freedom 23

CHAPTER THREE
Democracy Means Human Rights 61

CHAPTER FOUR
Democracy Brings Political Freedom 86

CHAPTER FIVE
Democracy Brings Economic Freedom 107

CHAPTER SIX
A Democratic Government Is Responsible to Its Citizens 136

CHAPTER SEVEN
Citizens' Rights or Civic Duty:
Citizens' Relationship to Democratic Governance 168

CHAPTER EIGHT
Conclusion: Shared Experiences, Shared Ideas 191

Appendix 206

Endnotes 242

References 246

Index 258

About the Author 266

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Do all people desire democracy? Does everyone consider it a universal good? Like many Americans, I assumed that everyone would want to live in a democracy. The World Values Survey brochure states that "Desire for freedom and democracy is a universal human aspiration" (Inglehart, Pura nen, Welzel et al. 2012:8). However, Global Barometer, a network of research organizations that conduct attitude surveys on all continents, finds that only a little more than half of adults interviewed between 2001 and 2006 prefer democracy (Bratton 2009: Table 5). Political scientists started studying the relationship between politics, culture and attitudes in the 1920s, although Pye (1991) credits Aristotle, Plato, Montesquieu and other philosophers with linking political systems to people's values and attitudes. But it was not until anthropologists began integrating anthropology with the new field of psychology that political scientists began to see the relevance of individuals' beliefs, attitudes and values to the study of political systems. Following Gabriel Almond's 1950s study using surveys and interviews to learn people's political attitudes, similar studies burgeoned (ibid.).

These and other surveys are interesting and helpful, but they need to be enriched by case studies that provide in-depth, contextual analyses of people's opinions. We need to find out how everyday people living in democratic and other governments actually talk about democracy rather than squeeze them into boxes devised by Western surveyors. And we need to place their responses in ecological, cultural, historical and circumstantial context. Only then can we learn what people want and why they want it. This book is such a case study.

My impression from years of anthropological research in Mongolia is that once democracy is institutionalized, people no longer consider it a goal or an end in itself. Instead, they see it as a means to an end. They believe that democracy will better enable them to align their deeply held values and personal goals with the lifestyle they desire than other forms of government, particularly communism. Some want democracy to gain freedom from oppression or government control of their lives (see Lukin 2000:195 for the same attitudes expressed by Russians). Some want it for self-determination.

Others believe it will help them and their nation attain dignity. And still others consider it the best way to help them meet family obligations or succeed in the global economy.

Democracy, in other words, is more than a form of government; it is a way of life. Its principles influence how wealth is distributed, where and how people live and what their futures might be. How people define democracy and prioritize its attributes depends on what they think democracy will do for them.

How do I know this? I learned it from the Mongolians, who highly value democracy. Mongolia was the first country to follow Russia into socialism (also called communism) in the 1920s. We might think that Mongolians know little about democracy, as they were completely surrounded by other socialist countries—it was the only Soviet country to suffer this fate. Or we might suppose that they became comfortable living under socialism and would not want to change. Yet Mongolia was one of the earliest Soviet Bloc countries to protest Communist Party control. And in January 1992, its citizens were the seventh of the 28 Newly Independent States (NIS) to ratify a democratic, capitalist constitution.

When I started researching Mongolians' changing ideas on democracy, I thought this would make an interesting case study of how people raised under communist ideology were thinking about democracy. With National Science Foundation support, Mongolian research assistants and I asked a range of voting-age people to name the characteristics of a democratic country (see Figure 1.1). I expected them to mention broad democratic principles such as multiparty elections, a government system of checks and balances, or transparency. This is what my American students had done in class exercises. Instead, I was struck by how personal the Mongolians' answers were. People said that democracy was changing their lives. It brought them free speech, which boosts their personal dignity because now their opinions matter. It gave them valued rights and freedoms that let them—rather than their government—determine how they would live, for they are no longer assigned to education programs or jobs that they do not like.

But they were also appalled by the rising crime rate resulting from the breakdown of strict government control experienced during communism. The collapse of authority forced them to rethink their social relations and frustrated their attempts to succeed in the new market economy. Some people even said that human nature was changing under democracy. They were dismayed that Mongolians are turning from cooperative, caring beings who want the whole society to share a decent standard of living to people