

Vouchers for Teacher Education (Non)Reform in Mongolia: Transitional, Postsocialist, or Antisocialist Explanations?

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In 1998, the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education, and Culture (MOSTEC) of Mongolia introduced vouchers for its in-service training of teachers. The initiative was publicly announced as a fundamental reform that would replace the Soviet-based system of training and herald a new age of democracy, free-market economy, personal freedom, and individual rights. MOSTEC claimed it would promote "lifelong learning," "decentralize" the system, break the "state monopoly," cater to the "individual needs" of teachers, advance "choice" among teachers, and "enhance the quality" of teacher training by permitting "competition" from other training institutions. The reform further sought to demonstrate that Mongolia was not falling behind "international standards" in educational reform.

As with educational reforms worldwide, large rifts yawned between what was initially announced in public, subsequently enacted on paper, and eventually implemented in practice. In practice, the vouchers have ultimately been used as (unevenly distributed) registration forms. Contrary to what was initially announced, there has been no sign of a supply and demand-driven training reform. It is hardly news that a reform may play out differently at the levels of "policy talk," policy enactment, and implementation.¹ But the policy analysis presented here seeks to go beyond mere description of these apparent differences by revealing the meanings and expectations that various actors attached to the reform. The study of voucher-based teacher education reform is especially intriguing because it is a case of an imported concept (public choice) that was subsequently locally adapted or "Mongolized."

Why was the original voucher idea, one that had been celebrated in public, diluted when it came to policy action? And why did it eventually evaporate once it was implemented? The simplest explanation for these kinds

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¹ Drawing from David Tyack and Larry Cuban's (1995) categorization, I distinguish between the levels of "policy talk," "policy action" (policy enactment), and "policy implementation," while discussing the Mongolian voucher model. David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering towards Utopia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); see also Larry Cuban, "How Schools Change Reform," *Teachers College Record* 99, no. 3 (1998): 453–77.

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of discrepancies would be technocratic ones: ambiguity of policy guidelines and poor management. The remedy would be to improve the design of policy, to outline the implementation procedure in more detail, and to establish accountabilities. It would be naive to assume that this remedy has not been attempted. At various stages of the implementation process, the Ministry of Education solicited suggestions from Mongolian and international education experts on how to improve the voucher system. Clearly, the Ministry of Education was by no means short of advice on how to improve the system.² However, many of the suggestions, being technocratic, did not sufficiently acknowledge the discrepancies in Mongolian teacher education. I argue in this study that the discrepancies between policy talk, enactment, and implementation emerged for specific reasons and need to be understood as processes of local reinterpretation and adaptation.

This study deals with the first 6 years of the voucher-based teacher education reform and investigates how an imported reform idea has altered at each subsequent policy level. Clearly, lumping all developments of the past decade together and labeling them simply as “transitional” is of limited value. This analysis therefore transcends interpretive frameworks of “transitionology,” illuminating the case study of vouchers in Mongolia against the socioeconomic backdrop in Mongolia and other postsocialist countries. By examining the features of the Mongolization process, I propose a larger comparative framework. This framework moves beyond the postsocialist transformation period (1990–2004) and additionally includes a comparison with the previous socialist system of in-service teacher education. Based on such a larger contextual framework, a complex account of the Mongolian voucher model emerges. The second major section of this article identifies several political, economic, and social developments of the past decade that had a bearing on educational reform, particularly on in-service teacher education reform. Based on these contextual analyses, I disentangle the broad concept of “transition” and replace it with more specific terms that intend to capture the variety of policy responses in the past decade: as I will explain in the last section, a few of the policy responses are antisocialist. Several qualify as transitional. But many are reminiscent of the socialist past.

² For example, Theodor Sander and Ya. Narmandakh presented (with funding from the German Academic Exchange Service) suggestions on how to improve Mongolian in-service teacher education. Theodor Sander and Ya. Narmandakh, *In-service Teacher Education: Report to the ADB* (Ulaanbaatar: MOS-TEC, 1998). Ya. Narmandakh compiled a report, funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), on the Mongolian system, comparing it to in-service teacher education models in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, and Scotland. Ya. Narmandakh, *Bolovsrolын салбарын хөгжлийн тосол; дээд боловсролын чанарыг сайжруулах; хамтын ажиллагааг бэхжүүлэх: Багш нарын мөргөжил дээшлүүлэх* (Education sector cooperation project, enhancing the quality of higher education and improvement of cooperation: Professional development of teachers) (Ulaanbaatar: ADB, 1999).

The Voucher-Based Reform in Mongolia

Unlike several other education reforms in the 1990s, notably decentralization of governance and finance in education,³ the voucher reform was not externally imposed but constitutes a fascinating case of a voluntary reform importation. It was a case in which international organizations did not exert direct pressure on the Ministry of Education of Mongolia to reerect the dilapidated in-service training system in line with experiences from elsewhere. Instead, they directly "imported" in-service training programs for teachers, using their own international trainers, materials, and funds. The Ministry of Education, in turn, channeled its loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) into the training of administrators, school principals, and assistant principals in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar.⁴ This targeting of administration officials left the field of teacher in-service training wide open for regional education authorities in the cities and the provinces and for international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There are three prominent international NGOs involved in teacher in-service training in Mongolia: the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), the Soros Foundation/Mongolian Foundation for Open Society (MFOS), and the Save the Children Fund U.K. Prior to the voucher reform, these NGOs had established a division of labor among themselves that targeted different groups of educators. Accordingly, DANIDA focused on primary school teachers, science teachers, and math teachers. The Save the Children Fund U.K. targeted preschool teachers. MFOS focused on teachers in the humanities and social sciences. The donor-run in-service training system for teachers and the state-run system for school administrators operated in tandem. The international NGOs hoped that the state-run system would eventually incorporate a few of the prominent features of the donor-run system such as school-based training, practice orientation, and interactive training methods.

Toward the end of the 1990s, when these international NGOs redoubled their reform efforts, NGOs actively sought ways to sustain their previous efforts in in-service teacher training. The MFOS, one of the largest donors in education in the late 1990s, discovered only in 2000 that a voucher-based system had already been in place for the past 2 years. At that time the majority of Mongolian experts in education knew of the ministry's intention to introduce voucher-based reform. But only a few were certain that it had indeed been

³ Gita Steiner-Khamisi and Ines Stolpe, "De- and Recentralization Reform in Mongolia: Tracing the Swing of the Pendulum," *Comparative Education* 41, no. 1 (2004): 29–53.

⁴ In Mongolia, the assistant principals used to be referred to as "head teachers"; since 2003, they tend to be labeled "school managers." Assistant principals oversee the various departments of grade 1–10 schools (e.g., primary school department, foreign language department, math and science department, etc.) and are in charge of advising the teachers in their department. See Seth Spaulding, T. Boldukh, D. Munkjargal, and O. Otgonjargal, *Improvement of Educational Management and Supervision for Graduate Preparation Programs in Educational Administration: Report to the ADB* (Ulaanbaatar: MOSTEC, 1999).

implemented. For MFOS and other international NGOs, it became a high priority to confirm whether they could integrate their in-service training programs in the voucher-based system, certify their trainers with the Ministry of Education, and pay the trainers through vouchers.

A Methodological Note

It was against this background, and in the context of the "School 2001" project of MFOS in particular, that I conducted the study on vouchers. As the largest in-service teacher training program of Mongolia, "School 2001" established school-based and regional in-service training in 72 schools in Mongolia from 1998 to 2001. As mentioned before, NGOs had a vested interest in making the voucher-based reform work. It would have sustained their initiatives, and their certified trainers would have been reimbursed by state-issued vouchers rather than by their own funds. Using the large sample of 72 partner schools of the "School 2001" project, I explored how the voucher-based reform was implemented in practice.

This sample is not representative of all schools. Each of these 72 schools saw itself as part of a reform movement and strongly advocated for any kind of in-service teacher training reform in Mongolia, with or without vouchers. This means that the respondents were perhaps more opinionated with regard to their visions and needs for in-service training reform than teachers and principals from other schools might have been. The findings presented here draw from the qualitative data that we gained from numerous school visits and interviews with teachers (both individual interviews and focus group interviews), principals, and administrators in Ulaanbaatar and seven provinces during the period 1998–2004.⁵ We also interviewed subject matter "methodologists" who are formally in charge of in-service training at the province level. In Ulaanbaatar, we spoke with all senior staff in charge of in-service training at the Ministry of Education, the State Pedagogical University, and the Mongol National University. Statistical evidence on in-service training (type of training, number of participants, content of training, and qualification of trainers) is available for the period 1998–2001 but not included in this article.⁶

This article presents thick descriptions of the voucher-based system. The system was perceived differently by each of the three main professional groups involved in the reform: government officials, school administrators, and regular teachers. In conducting the interviews, I wanted to account for situated knowledge in these different professional groups in order to understand the

⁵ The category "administrators" included governors, directors of the social policy units, and directors of the Education and Culture Centers at the province level. The visits and interviews covered schools in the following provinces: Arkhangai, Bayanhongor, Tuv, Dondgobi, Omnigobi, Hovd, Bayanulgi, and Dornod.

⁶ The statistical material on in-service training is presented in the annual evaluation reports of the "School 2001" project, available at the Mongolian Education Alliance.

specific reasons why a group was supporting or opposing the voucher-based reform. Thus, the selection of quotes represents prototypical statements that a majority of group members made when they spoke about the voucher-based training reform.

From 1998 through 2004, I took on conflicting roles as adviser, evaluator, and researcher. More often than not, I was a participant rather than an observer in Mongolian teacher education reform and an “involved researcher” who neither was nor wanted to become detached from what was going on in Mongolian education reform.⁷ This high level of personal involvement in the object of study is both an asset and a liability. As an evaluator of two teacher education reform projects,⁸ each lasting 3 years, I was marked as an “expert” in teacher education reform. This status led government officials and NGOs to ask me for advice on how to make the voucher-based system work. Whereas my professional roles in Mongolia have varied over time, my interest in understanding the politics and economics of education policy borrowing in Mongolia (e.g., standards-based education reform, decentralization policies, vouchers, etc.) has remained consistent.

The research questions for the voucher study evolved over time. They began simply, questioning whether vouchers were actually used in practice. Later, my research developed into a series of follow-up questions regarding the features of the Mongolian model of vouchers. From 2001 onward, the research focused on the reasons why the voucher system failed in Mongolia.

Policy Talk about Vouchers

In Mongolian, the word “voucher” (*erkhiin bichig*) is a composite term that describes a document that provides an individual with specific rights.⁹ The concept of vouchers was not new in Mongolia. Red and blue vouchers had been in circulation during the first wave of privatization, when shares of state companies, livestock, cars, trucks, and agricultural equipment were distributed to individuals. Starting in 1991, vouchers were used to inscribe property rights and evoked associations with a market economy.¹⁰ In education, the

⁷ For “involved researcher,” see Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment* (New York: Blackwell, 1987).

⁸ “School 2001” lasted from 1998 to 2001 and focused on in-service training at school and regional levels. “Teacher 2005” (2002–5) emphasized preservice teacher education reform, on the one hand, and strengthening of educational research capacity at MA and PhD levels, on the other. Both projects were funded by MFOS. The first was implemented by MFOS, whereas the second was implemented by the State Pedagogical University (in 2003 renamed Mongolian National University of Education) in its central campus in Ulaanbaatar and its regional branches in Hovd, Bayanulgi, Arkhangai, and Dornod.

⁹ *Erkh* means “right”; *bichig* means “document.”

¹⁰ The first two privatization laws (July and October 1991) introduced the term *erkhiin bichig* (unabbreviated: *khorongo oruultayn erkhiin bichig*) to describe the red and blue vouchers. In colloquial language, however, the red and blue privatization vouchers were referred to as *tasalbar* or *talom* and not, as in the case of teacher education vouchers, as *erkhiin bichig* or *vautsher*. Similarly, the vouchers or food stamps during the food rationalization period of the economic crisis in the early 1990s were termed differently (*cart*, or card). A more detailed description of the privatization laws has been provided by Susanne Schmid, *Mongolia in Transition: The Impact of Privatization on Rural Life* (Saarbrücken: Bielefelder Studien für Entwicklungssoziologie, 1995).

label—frequently referred to in English (*vautsher*) and written in Cyrillic—raised all sorts of grandiose expectations. Shortly after the introduction of the voucher system, a rumor circulated that the Ministry of Education planned on expanding vouchers and choice from teacher in-service training to general education by distributing vouchers to parents. In informal settings, skeptical bystanders raised their eyebrows, daring to question whether choice could ever successfully resonate in Mongolia, given that in the provinces the average distance between schools is 45 miles.¹¹ A memorable conversation from that time was a discussion between two Mongolian education experts who questioned whether choice would benefit or harm the Mongolian way of life, that is, the nomadic lifestyle of herders. Many experts saw the government's enthusiasm for vouchers as the early morning mist that would eventually reveal the government's plan to completely revamp Mongolia's educational system along American expectations.

The fears were not entirely unfounded. The government did entertain the idea of introducing school choice. In 1997, policy makers commissioned a study to examine whether the introduction of vouchers would curb public expenditures for education while preserving access to schools in rural areas and enhancing the quality of education in all schools of the country. S. Lhagve, author of the study *Internal Market in Education*, set out "to identify the specific problems which may be caused by [the] introduction of a financing system in education based on 'public choice' theory, particularly [the] 'voucher system' concept."¹² Reflecting on the educational reforms during the early transformation period (1991–97), Lhagve showed several "problems which were brought from the [socialist] past and contradict with an emerging market system."¹³ He stated that the first reform step in transforming the centrally planned economy into a free market economy had already been taken, albeit with mixed outcomes. Education was decentralized, at least on paper. Lhagve's study intended to answer whether the second step was desirable: the move from a state-planned to a "public choice"—driven education reform in the form of school vouchers. He provided a detailed account of all that went wrong in educational reform during the early structural adjustment period. The study developed a series of grim scenarios of what could happen if vouchers were to be introduced: an acceleration of rural-urban migration leading to a decline in class sizes or even a "closing effect" in rural schools and resulting in overcrowded school classes in urban

¹¹ This figure is based on the school map of Dornogobi Province (school year 2000–2001), which is an average-size province with 12 districts (*soms*) in southeast Mongolia. The capital of the province hosts four schools, and the remaining 15 schools are located in the 12 districts. The closest distance to the next school is 14.6 miles and the farthest is 73.3 miles.

¹² S. Lhagve, *Final Report on "Internal Market in Education": Think Tank Facility Project MON/07/131* (Ulaanbaatar: Ministry of Finance of Mongolia and UN Development Program (UNDP) Field Office in Mongolia, 1997), 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

and semiurban areas, bribery and corruption in well-performing urban and semiurban schools, and so forth.¹⁴ Lhagve's forceful warning against the introduction of school vouchers was well taken by the government. Nevertheless, the underlying idea of "public choice" in education as a necessary next step toward creating a real free market economy has remained a recurring theme in education. The idea that the learner is given the choice to select the school, the subject, and the teacher holds great appeal and is still closely associated with school vouchers.¹⁵

In March 1998, four months after Lhagve's final report was released, the introduction of a voucher-based reform was announced. Schools were exempt, but in-service teacher education was targeted. As the policy started to take shape, speculations about the far-reaching effects of the voucher system on both the education system and the Mongolian way of life began to fade. It became clear that the reform was far more modest than announced.

The Enactment of the Voucher Policy

There are two government decrees that specifically deal with the voucher-based reform. The policy of March 24, 1998, was signed by the minister of finance and the minister of education. The national program of June 5, 2001, was signed by the prime minister and the minister of education.¹⁶ All political parties in power expressed their commitment to the voucher-based reform. The coalition government of the Democratic Union initiated the 1998 reform, and the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) government, re-elected in a landslide victory in 2000, confirmed the decree issued under the previous government, adding only a few administrative details in the 2001 decree. In 2003, the MPRP-led Ministry of Education invited governmental and nongovernmental institutions to apply as providers of in-service training. However, international NGOs have hesitated to apply and have their trainers certified and closely monitored by the Ministry of Education.

Finally, in the election year 2004 the Ministry of Education secured a great deal of public support by proclaiming the extension of the school curriculum from 10 to 11 years. Although, the voucher-based policy remained in effect, the actual budget was entirely absorbed for the state-run in-service training on the new, extended curriculum. Principals, assistant principals,

¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵ For example, N. Begz, renowned educational researcher, presents the introduction of choice and school vouchers as a global movement that has spread in other countries. N. Begz, "Globalchlalyn ueiin Mongol ulsyn bolovсроlyn khogjliin onol, argazuin undsen asundluud" (Theoretical and methodological issues of educational development in Mongolia in an era of globalization), *Bolovсроl Sudlal* 1, no. 1 (2001): 25–29.

¹⁶ Mongolia National Government, *Joint Decree of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education of Mongolia, Number 62/125, Date: March 24, 1998* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolia National Government, 1998); and Mongolia National Government, *National Program for Pre-service and In-service Training of Primary and Secondary Education Teachers, Appendix 1 to the Government Decree Number 120, Date: June 5, 2001* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolia National Government, 2001).

and only a select group of regular teachers benefited from these state-run courses. The great masses of regular teachers had to choose a different route to their professional development: they paid for their in-service training. Starting in 2004, the 23 public and private colleges and universities offering preservice teacher education programs have discovered that the regular teacher is willing to pay fees for in-service training provided that the courses are credit-bearing and have, in the medium or long term, an impact on the teacher's salary. Teachers have flocked to courses that make them eligible to gain additional income by teaching after-school classes and/or to earn a certificate or a master's degree through the accumulation of credits that by default moves them up the salary scheme. Most likely, this creeping privatization of in-service training was neither planned nor expected. Rather, privatization reflects the lack of state-issued vouchers, on the one hand, and the need of colleges and university to generate additional income, on the other.

The first voucher decree (March 1998) meticulously outlines the procedures for the management, distribution, and accounting of vouchers in the "voucher-based in-service training system for teachers and administrators." The policy distinguishes between "three types of training": workshops at central level and regional level and a formal process of "independent learning" (based on a list of reading and teaching resources submitted by the teacher). Each year the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance determine the number of vouchers for the coming year and specify how many are to be used for each of the three types of training. The policy document also stipulates that the Education and Culture Centers (hereafter ECC; education administration units in the provinces and in the cities) hand out the vouchers directly to the trainees.¹⁷

The previous in-service training system was directly offered by the state-run in-service training agency, the School of Education Development. Under the new program, a wider range of state institutions were given permission to offer in-service training, provided that they had "received special permission or accreditation from the Ministry of Education."¹⁸ Opening up in-service training to different providers acknowledged, for the first time in the history of Mongolian in-service teacher education, that teachers have individual needs and interests and should therefore decide which courses and resources are most suitable for their work. As the following excerpt illustrates, the 1998 decree was steeped in the language of "choice": "Teachers who receive vouch-

¹⁷ Mongolia National Government, *Joint Decree 1998*, citations from secs. 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.

¹⁸ In the same year, an amendment to the Education and Higher Education Laws was passed that listed teacher training as one of the new responsibilities of universities. These 1998 "Directions of Reforms in the Education Sector for 1997–2005" are described by Malcolm Innes-Brown, "Democracy, Education, and Reform in Mongolia: Transition to a New Order," in *Education and Political Transition: Themes and Experiences in East Asia*, ed. Mark Bray and Wing-On Lee (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, 2001), 77–99. Citation from Mongolia National Government, *Joint Decree 1998*, sec. 2.2.

ers will read the announcements of the training organizations and then select the organization based on their own interests. The Independent Learner, in turn, will produce a list of teaching resources that he/she wishes to purchase. He/she submits this list to the Education and Culture Center within one month of enrollment as an Independent Learner.”¹⁹

The second voucher decree of 2001 preserved the core idea of choice. It further promoted an institutional linkage between preservice and in-service teacher training, advocated an additional type of training (school-based in-service training), and encouraged the participation of both international NGOs and the public sector as training providers. Even more explicit than in the first decree of 1998, the second decree of 2001 underscored the important role of teacher education reform for raising the quality of education in Mongolia. The decree started out by stating that “the development of Mongolian society necessitates a deepening of educational reform in Mongolia to enhance the quality of education, to adjust education to the needs and interests of the citizens, to improve the content and the teaching methods used in pre-service teacher training, and to build an effective system of in-service training.”²⁰ Unlike experiences in other countries, where the introduction of vouchers had been used to revamp the structure and provision of education, the Mongolian voucher experiment was not designed to trigger a fundamental reform.

The introduction of vouchers has not led to soaring public expenditures for teacher education. To the contrary, the Mongolian reform was based on very limited financial resources and reflected the general cutbacks that the education sector had experienced throughout the 1990s. What it did was reinforce, on paper, the practices that had gradually developed in the past decade: short in-service teacher education programs at the central level (in Ulaanbaatar) and regional levels (in the provinces). Additionally, it preserved the provision of independent learning that already existed in socialist times. By adjusting the value of the vouchers to the “type of training” and “location of the school,” it further institutionalized the inequality between the (expensive) central and the (cheap) regional training that had evolved in the past few years.

Even though the two voucher decrees did not ignite a revolution of sorts in Mongolian teacher in-service education, it is imprudent to address only the incremental changes that the “nonreform” had institutionalized. When we abandon the transformation period as our time frame for comparison and replace it with a larger framework that includes teacher in-service education during the socialist period (1969–90), we achieve a more comprehensive analysis of what had been added and omitted in the voucher-based

¹⁹ Mongolia National Government, *Joint Decree 1998*, sec. 2.5.

²⁰ Mongolia National Government, *National Program 2001*, sec. 1, point 1.

reform. Such a long-term perspective elucidates how fundamental the changes in the 1990s were.

The Mongolian system of in-service teacher education, established in 1969, was similar to the one in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.²¹ A prominent feature of the socialist system was “lifelong learning,” which included the right of each teacher and administrator to attend centrally organized teacher education sessions every 5 years. In Mongolia, these 4-week sessions were organized by the ministry-affiliated School of Education Development (established subsequently as a department in the State Pedagogical University) and were held in Ulaanbaatar.²² Approximately half of the training time was allocated for methodological and subject-specific topics, and the other half was dedicated to the core principles of Marxist-Leninist theory, legal foundations, educational planning, and health education.

A major change in the 1990s, reinforced by the two voucher decrees, was the abolishment of those teacher education sessions in Ulaanbaatar that had enabled teachers and administrators from the provinces to be periodically in the capital. To replace these centrally planned sessions, teachers and principals had a wide array of “decentralized” programs available, including short training programs at both regional and school levels. Moreover, the long-held socialist practice of independent learning was maintained but with much fewer resources: until the mid-1980s, sufficient funds were made available to equip the schools and provincial centers with libraries that were conducive to independent research and learning by teachers and principals.

In practice, postsocialist voucher reform has employed the same concepts that were utilized during socialist times. Postsocialist discourse has simply inverted the meaning of in-service education. In opposition to the socialist “lifelong learning” concept, which made it mandatory for teachers to attend a relatively extensive teacher education program at least every 5 years, the Mongolian adoption of UNESCO’s Lifelong Learning agenda as “uninterrupted education” (*tasraltgui bolovsrol*) encouraged teachers and administrators to attend shorter in-service training sessions annually, most of which were offered only in the provinces. The explanation for dropping the mandatory 4-week courses and replacing them with optional, truncated 2- or 3-day workshops was unconvincing to many. But policy makers claimed that Mongolia was undergoing massive social changes and that it was therefore necessary that the teachers and administrators attend annual workshops.

Mongolian vouchers have very little in common with voucher models in

²¹ Peter Sachsenmeier, *Reformkonzeptionen der Lehrerbildung in der Sowjetunion* (Teacher education reform concepts in the Soviet Union) (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz, 1978).

²² The sessions for preschool and primary school teachers were also offered in the regional branches of the State Pedagogical University: first in Arkhangai and later also in Dornod and Bayanulgi. See R. Sandshaasüren and I. Shernosseck, *Das Bildungswesen der Mongolischen Volksrepublik. Beiträge zur Pädagogik, Band 22* (The educational system in the Mongolian People’s Republic) (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener, 1981).

other countries.²³ Many would agree that replacing registration forms by vouchers does not typically qualify as voucher-based reform. In Mongolia, the policy talk on decentralization meant, at the level of policy enactment, that the new in-service training policy also provided options to attend workshops outside the “center” (Ulaanbaatar). “Breaking the state monopoly” alluded to the regulations of 1998, wherein three types of state institutions (universities, colleges, and research organizations) rather than one (School of Education Development) were permitted to offer teacher training. “Choice” and “individual choice” were newly introduced terminologies to denote that teachers had to identify their subject matter on the voucher so that they could be invited to subject-specific workshops rather than general workshops. In other words, the vouchers were treated as registration forms for tightly monitored workshops offered by three types of state institutions. The voucher reform in Mongolia is an example of discursive borrowing at the level of policy talk but with little consequence for policy action.

Voucher Implementation

When the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance formulated the voucher-based system on paper, they downplayed the original concept of individual choice, encouragement of private sector involvement, and diversity of courses. Subsequently, when the staff in the Ministry of Education and the provincial education authorities in the ECC were charged with implementing the voucher system, the original concept was disregarded. By the time the voucher idea actually reached teachers, it completely lost the flavor of a market orientation. At the policy implementation level, the voucher-based system was transformed in a brief period of time into a nepotistic system that benefited ECC directors, methodologists, and school administration, leaving the masses of teachers untrained.

Vouchers were a public issue between 1998 and 2002, but only senior administrators were familiar with the content of the voucher decrees. Our interviewees had a great interest in talking to us about the reform and hoped they would learn more about the idea of choice and the logistics of the voucher-based system. These educators and administrators expressed different reasons for dismissing the current system as dysfunctional. In the following sections, their experiences with the voucher-based reform are presented separately for each professional group.

Teachers.—“Which vouchers?” was a common reaction among teachers. Not one of the teachers and only a few of the assistant principals interviewed

²³ For an international comparative study of vouchers, see Martin Carnoy and Patrick J. McEwan, “Privatization through Vouchers in Developing Countries: The Cases of Chile and Colombia,” in *Privatizing Education: Can the Market Place Deliver Choice, Efficiency, Equity, and Social Cohesion?* ed. Henry M. Levin (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 151–77. The following study by McEwan presents several controversies that have accompanied large-scale voucher programs: Patrick J. McEwan, “The Potential Impact of Large-Scale Voucher Programs,” *Review of Educational Research* 7, no. 2 (2000): 103–49.

over a period of 6 years ever held a voucher in their hands. They had heard of vouchers but thought these were not supposed to be distributed to regular teachers. Junior teachers tended to believe that the vouchers had to be spent on the training of principals, assistant principals, and methodologists. They were given the impression that vouchers were intended to train trainers, especially methodologists, who, in turn, would then return to the provinces to train teachers. Several senior teachers attended such workshops and complained about both the lecture style and the abstract nature of the content. One informant claimed that “all they are teaching is about core principles. First it was about communist core principles, and today it is about international ideas of how society functions, and what role education should have.” Senior teachers wished that they had the old system in place: “It was clearly regulated that we have *a right* to upgrade our qualifications all 5 years. These workshops were held in Ulaanbaatar and we could count on being invited to attend them. Now, they say that this system is better, because they can update us annually on recent developments in education. In reality, however, this means that we have to attend short meetings with teaching methodologists in the province and are excluded from those workshops in Ulaanbaatar that are moderated by real experts.” During a group interview with 29 teachers from the provinces conducted in April 2002, 25 of them reported that none of the teachers from their 29 schools attended in-service training offered by the state. Only a few teachers who were on good terms with the principal or with the provincial education authorities received vouchers. These teachers, however, were forced by their principal to use the vouchers for independent learning. In doing so, they purchased teaching material that would benefit the entire school rather than the individual teacher.

Methodologists.—The methodologists, who—according to teachers—had been the main beneficiaries of the voucher system, had surprisingly similar complaints. Most of them found the training, moderated by staff from the Ministry of Education or by university professors with little or no teaching practice, equally abstract and intangible. Informants said, “How are we supposed to replicate what we learned in Ulaanbaatar in our provinces? The teachers will think that we attended the workshops only because they were held in the capital.”

School Principals.—The principals and the education authorities in the provinces, in turn, emphasized the bureaucratic inefficiencies of the voucher system. “We are supposed to receive the list of workshops that are being offered in March and submit the list of trainees in May. Year after year, however, the ECC director has received neither the vouchers nor the program until much later in the year.” In their opinion, they are trying to be as impartial as possible when nominating teachers to attend workshops in Ulaanbaatar, but they are limited in their attempts, given the fact that “there simply aren’t enough vouchers to send all teachers for workshops to Ulaanbaatar.”

Government Officials.—Surprisingly, mid-career and senior staff at the Ministry of Education expressed concerns about the feasibility of the voucher system as well. “We cannot afford it,” “the nominal value of each voucher is too small, and thus too unattractive for trainers,” and “it requires a lot of coordination” were the most common reasons for their dissatisfaction. Annually, the Ministry of Education is supposed to receive 160 million *togrogs* (approximately \$160,000) from the Ministry of Finance in vouchers for in-service training. According to an official overseeing the coordination of the voucher system: “Either the Ministry of Education does not receive that amount from the Ministry of Finance, or some of that money disappears by the time it reaches the provinces, or the principals are not using up all the vouchers that they are given. For whatever reason, by the end of the fiscal year—and this happened 2 years in a row—only 100 million *togrogs* had been spent on in-service training of teachers and administrators.”

The Postsocialist Condition in Mongolia

Technocratic explanations for the discrepancies between policy talk, enactment, and implementation, widespread as they are, are commonly viewed as inapplicable for “countries in transition.” These countries are often characterized by their high degree of (transitional) chaos. Accordingly, any additional explanations for why something did not work, including technocratic ones, are viewed as obsolete. According to transitologists, discrepancies constitute the rule rather than the exception in Mongolia and the other 27 newly constituted postsocialist countries. What if, after a decade or so, such discrepancies persist? In another study of the Mongolian voucher system, I refute the chaos thesis by examining how each of the implementation agencies reinvented the voucher system idiosyncratically in ways that helped them to address their own challenges.²⁴ In that other study, David Phillips’s theory of cross-national policy attraction helped explain why the imported voucher policy resonated so strongly with Mongolian policy makers.²⁵

Several features of the Mongolian voucher model should be interpreted as postsocialist rather than transitional. By offering such a proposition, I argue that the preference for specific reform strategies under postsocialism requires a careful examination of socialist reform priorities that have either been

²⁴ Gita Steiner-Khamisi, “Innovation durch Bildung nach internationalen Standards?” (Innovation modeled after international standards?), in *Innovation durch Bildung*, ed. Ingrid Gogolin and Rudolph Trippelt (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2003), 141–62. The Ministry of Finance curbed government spending for education; the Ministry of Education reduced its state apparatus; the Education and Culture Centers (education authorities in the provinces) trained their methodologists, who no longer had access to other types of training; and the methodologists, ultimately, succeeded in reestablishing their authority as educational experts. Ironically, the only ones that did not directly benefit from the voucher system were the ones for whom the voucher system was initially developed—teachers.

²⁵ David Phillips, “Toward a Theory of Policy Attraction in Education,” in *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*, ed. Gita Steiner-Khamisi (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 54–67.

abandoned or lost or have endured to the present. This methodological approach to making the “dissolved other” visible requires that research on the politics of policy borrowing in Mongolia be situated in a comparative framework that spans over a longer time period. It calls for a framework that first identifies discursive continuities, ruptures, and shifts in educational policy during the transformation period of the 1990s. Then it compares them with developments during the preceding socialist period.

Shift from Human to Physical Capital

Several researchers note that the governments in Mongolia and other postsocialist countries have shifted their emphasis from human to physical capital.²⁶ In 2000, most external assistance funds in Mongolia were disbursed for infrastructure (37 percent) and economic reform (23.8 percent); only 15.5 percent was used for the social sector (education, social insurance, and health). In addition, approximately 30 percent has been used for international technical assistance.²⁷ This assistance benefits international consultants and senior ministerial staff. As a result of these new priorities, the Ministry of Education has been placed under tremendous pressure to pursue three structural adjustment strategies: to reduce public expenditures, to attract international financial assistance, and to create incentives for public sector involvement in education.

First, within a decade, public expenditures for education as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) were cut by approximately one-half, dropping from 11.5 percent (in 1989) to 5.5 percent (in 1999), corresponding to a general pattern of sizable decrease also found in other postsocialist countries.²⁸

Second, solidarity with political allies abroad has a long-standing tradition in Mongolia. More than other socialist countries, Mongolia depended heavily on “internationalist” (socialist) external assistance to finance its education system. The collapse of the Soviet Union (1989) was particularly felt in Mongolia, when internationalist assistance to Mongolia (1962–91) dissolved and a new coalition of international external assistance was formed in February

²⁶ Brandon A. Kohrt, Daniel J. Hruschka, Holbrook E. Kohrt, Nova L. Panebianco, and G. Tsagaanhuu, “Distribution of Distress in Post-socialist Mongolia: A Cultural Epidemiology of *Yadargaa*,” *Social Science and Medicine* 58 (2004): 471–85; K. Griffin, “Social Policy in Kazakhstan during the Economic Transition,” *International Journal of Social Economics* 26, nos. 1, 2, 3 (1999): 134–57.

²⁷ World Bank, *Mongolia Country Assistance Evaluation* (Washington, DC: World Bank, Operations Evaluation Department, 2001).

²⁸ The figures vary by 1 percent, depending on the sources used. I relied on the following three sources: MOSTEC, *Mongolia Education Sector Strategy, 2000–2005* (Ulaanbaatar: MOSTEC, 2000), 9; World Bank, *Public Expenditure and Financial Management Review* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001), 128; UNDP, *Common Country Assessment for Mongolia* (Ulaanbaatar: UNDP, 2000), 39. According to the Innocenti Research Centre, the real public spending on education dropped in Russia by one-third and in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan by three-quarters or more. Innocenti Research Centre, *After the Fall: The Human Impact of Ten Years of Transition* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 1999), 7.

1991.²⁹ The withdrawal of assistance from both the Soviet Union and the “socialist fraternal countries,” and the suspension of trade on January 1, 1991, with these countries (accounting for over 90 percent of Mongolia’s exports), led to a major economic decline. According to Peter Boone, the fiscal impact was “by far greater than those experienced by other countries during the Great Depression” and matched the economic hardship experienced in European countries and Japan as a result of wartime destruction.³⁰ Within a period of only 2 years, the USSR reduced financial assistance to Mongolia by an amount equal to 46 percent of Mongolia’s GDP. In 1989, internationalist assistance amounted to 53 percent, and in 1991 it dropped to 7 percent of the GDP.³¹ The international financial assistance partially replaced the previous internationalist assistance from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) at the level of 17.15 percent of the GDP in 2000.³²

Finally, private sector involvement in education has been most significant in higher education, though since 2000 the private sector has started to expand into preschool and general education. The establishment of private colleges and universities accounts for the exponential growth of institutions in higher education, comprising in the academic year 2000–2001 a total of 172 private and public colleges and universities.³³ Accordingly, government spending on higher education as a proportion of the education budget increased by 50 percent between 1996 and 2000.³⁴ The Ministry of Education curbed public expenditures for the tertiary education sector by imposing tuition fees for public colleges and universities and restricting government funds to cover heating, electricity, water expenses, and the use of land and buildings. In 2000, the average tuition fee for public and private colleges and universities was \$300, which amounts to three-quarters of the average per capita GDP (\$403). Only 60 percent of incoming students at public univer-

²⁹ Mongolia was admitted in February 1991 to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the ADB. For more information, see Ts. Batbayar, “Foreign Policy and Domestic Reform in Mongolia,” *Central Asian Survey* 22, no. 1 (2003): 45–59. A brief account of ADB’s involvement in Mongolia’s education sector reform can be found in the following article: John C. Weidman, “Developing the Mongolia Education Sector Strategy, 2000–2005: Reflections of a Consultant for the Asian Development Bank,” *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 3, no. 2 (2002), <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/cice>.

³⁰ Peter Boone, “Grassroots Macroeconomic Reform in Mongolia,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 18 (1994): 329–56, 330.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 331–32. Note that different methods are used to assess the reduction of external assistance as a percentage of the GDP in the early 1990s. See, e.g., the (much lower) figures provided by UNDP, *Human Development Report—Mongolia 2000* (Ulaanbaatar: UNDP, 2000).

³² Ines Stolpe examined the impact that the shift from internationalist to international external assistance to Mongolia has had on education reforms in the 1990s, in particular in the area of rural school development and school dormitories. Ines Stolpe, “Erschaffung eines Drittweltlandes: Nomadenbildung in der Mongolei” (The creation of a third world country: Education of nomads in Mongolia), *Tertium Comparationis* 9, no. 2 (2003): 162–77.

³³ Gita Steiner-Khamisi and Anh Nguyen, *Seasonal and Permanent Migration in Mongolia: A Preliminary Assessment of Access and Quality of Education* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001), 8.

³⁴ World Bank, *Mongolia Public Expenditure and Financial Management Review* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2002), 130.

sities and 10 percent at private universities were supported by a government loan.³⁵ Tuition therefore generated financial hardship for families of adolescent children. Nevertheless, higher education reform was proof that tertiary schools could operate as a business, and that Mongolians were prepared to pay for education.

The Mongolian voucher model can be seen as a half-baked, private sector involvement model that was designed to mitigate the financial burden in the education sector. As with the privatization of higher education in Mongolia, the idea was to generate a market of in-service training providers who would find additional funds from international organizations, local businesses, universities, or schools and create a multitude of supplementary incentives (credits, certificates, and degrees) to attract their own customers. The hope was that in the wake of the voucher model, private providers would blossom, as they did in the higher education sector, lightening the household budget of the Ministry of Education. However, the voucher reform was not only ill conceived in light of international developments (vouchers tend to burden rather than lighten a state budget) but also lacked a thorough analysis of the financial situation of teachers and schools. As a result, the Ministry of Education was only able to save money via two approaches at its discretion: shutting down the state institution that was in charge of in-service training (School of Education Development) and keeping the nominal value of the vouchers low.

Shift from Access to Quality

The right to employment, affordable housing, and free social services such as health care and education was a signpost of socialist governments. In Mongolia, compulsory education for 8–12 year olds was introduced in the school year 1955–56 and strictly enforced in the following decades. The greatest expansion of the educational system occurred in the 1970s, when the government received funds from CMEA not only to establish new schools but to expand the school dormitory system as well.³⁶ Prior to receiving internationalist assistance, the government depended on the philanthropy of “volunteers” (parents and communities) to finance the school dormitories that accommodated children from herder families.³⁷ Universal access to education for a population that has traditionally been both dispersed and mobile (nomadic herders) was celebrated as a great accomplishment of socialism. The revolution of 1921, for example, was falsely credited for greater enroll-

³⁵ Innes-Brown, “Democracy, Education, and Reform in Mongolia,” 91.

³⁶ According to Sandshaasüren and Shernosseck (*Das Bildungswesen*), 180 schools and 161 dormitories were built between 1970 and 1977.

³⁷ Uta Schönc, *Die Entwicklung des Volksbildungswesens in der Mongolischen Volksrepublik, 1921–1971: Ein Beitrag zur Analyse der Grundprobleme der Kultur- und Bildungsrevolution in Asien* (The development of the education system in the Mongolian People's Republic, 1921–1971: A contribution to the analysis of the fundamental problems related to the cultural and educational revolution) (dissertation, Humboldt University, Berlin/Germany, 1973).

ments in the 1920s, and adult literacy rates were periodically inflated in the 1950s and early 1960s.³⁸ Until 1990, the beginning of the transformation process, the education sector relied on a nationwide system of dormitories and ensured free access to education for children of herder families who lived in remote rural areas. Throughout the 1980s, until the beginning of the political and economic transformation, the gross enrollment ratio for 8–15 year olds was 97 percent.³⁹

The voucher idea of the late 1990s sailed under the postsocialist flag of quality improvement and at the same time distanced itself from the socialist idea of equal access. Dismissing the monopoly of state institutions over education first in higher education and then in teacher in-service training by allowing multiple providers to compete for customers by improving the quality of their “product” became a marker of education reform in the postsocialist era. Additionally, the voucher-based reform abolished the socialist conception of a universal right and obligation to in-service training, replacing it instead with a cascade model wherein methodologists were first trained as trainers by recognized experts in the capital and then required to teach a shortened version of what they had learned to teachers in the countryside.

Shift from Urbanism to Urbanization

Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath distinguish between “urbanism” and “urbanization” to characterize developments in postsocialist Inner Asia.⁴⁰ Whereas urbanization reflects the strong concentration of a population in a particular location, urbanism indicates easy access to both a social infrastructure and essential goods. During socialist times, the majority of Mongolian villages had access to electricity and safe water and had an infrastructure—a school, a post office, a health post, a library, and a cultural center—similar to any city district. Additionally, they could rely on a well-functioning air transportation system to connect them to the province center and the capital. These features of urbanism existed wherever there were residents working in animal husbandry collectives (*negdel*) or in state agricultural cooperatives (*sangiin aj achui*). As state institutions, the *negdels* and the *sangiin aj achui*

³⁸ In his sympathetic account of developments in Mongolia, William Mandel reports the following government statistic: “In 1926 there were 10,060 persons who could read and write . . . , and this represented considerable progress during the preceding five years.” Schöne, however, reports that by the end of the 1920s only about 1,000 children were enrolled in state schools, as opposed to almost 18,955 attending monastic education. A similar distortion of historical facts applies to adult literacy figures: at the end of the First Five-Year Plan (1948–52) the achievement of universal literacy was prematurely proclaimed and celebrated. The proclamation was revoked 10 years later, when the socialist government embarked on two “revolutionary culture campaigns” (1960–61 and 1962–63) to eradicate illiteracy, alcoholism, epidemics, and vandalism. William Mandel, “Outer Mongolia’s Five-Year Plan,” *Far Eastern Survey* (June 15, 1949), 140–44, 143; Schöne, *Die Entwicklung des Volksbildungswesens*, 25.

³⁹ See MOSTEC, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and World Bank, *Mongolian National Report on Education for All Assessment—2000* (Ulaanbaatar: MOSTEC, 2000).

⁴⁰ Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, *The End of Nomadism? Society, State, and the Environment of Inner Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 180ff.

overlapped with the administrative units for rural districts (*soms*) and smaller settlements (*bags*) and thereby functioned as an organizational structure that generated and sustained the urban infrastructure in rural areas.

The privatization of livestock and agricultural land began in September 1991. After the first year of privatization, only 57 of the 255 *negdels* survived in the form of newly established cooperatives; 40 were completely disbanded, and the remaining 158 *negdels* generated 320 privately owned companies.⁴¹ Along with the decollectivization of *negdels* and *sangiin aj achui*, the organizational structure for providing an income and maintaining an infrastructure in rural areas gradually dissolved. Subsequently, the large fleet of airplanes serving the 21 province centers and several district centers ceased operation. The lack of spare parts for the aging fleet and the high fuel prices left the residents in rural areas cut off from essential goods and services that, starting in the early 1990s, were available only in province centers and in cities. The lack of income, the growing isolation, and the overall inequality of living standards between rural and urban areas forced farmers and herders to leave the countryside. They migrated first to the province centers, then to the central provinces of Mongolia, and finally to the capital. The 2000 census report drew considerable attention to the massive urbanization process of the 1990s.⁴² For most migrants leaving the countryside in the early and mid-1990s, "Ulaanbaatar was at the end of the road."⁴³ This migration led to a population explosion in the capital, where between one-third (according to the 2000 census) and one-half (based on estimates that include nonregistered residents) of Mongolia's total population of 2.4 million reside. The growing inequality between rural and urban life, marked by the loss of urbanism in rural areas (or the contemporary ruralism of villages), created problems with retaining experienced teachers in rural schools and attracting new generations of teachers to work in rural areas.

Independent learning, one of the options for in-service training carried over from the socialist system, took on a new meaning. As mentioned earlier, vouchers became an instrument for rebuilding the (quasi-urban) infrastructure in village schools that had dissolved during the postsocialist period. According to the Ministry of Education, less than 1 percent (0.9 percent) from the total school budget is spent on teaching material and stationery.⁴⁴ Access to books, journals, and newspapers became a major problem for the

⁴¹ Georges Korsun and Peter Murrell, "Politics and Economics of Mongolia's Privatization Program," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 5 (1995): 472–86.

⁴² Mongolia National Statistical Office, *2000 Population and Housing Census: The Main Results* (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistical Office in cooperation with the UN Population Fund, UN Statistics Division, and Australia-Mongolia Development Cooperation Program, 2001).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁴ Figures from the Economic, Monitoring, and Assessment Department of the Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, in Steiner-Khamsi and Nguyen, *Seasonal and Permanent Migration in Mongolia*, 50.

rural population. The Mongolian Book Survey Report identified a significant decline in book production per resident, from 3.5 copies in 1989 to 1.2 books in 2000. In 1989, there were a total of 418 public libraries and more than 600 newspaper distribution points. District-level schools often hosted the library and the local museum, making them accessible to the entire community. Not only did schools in the postsocialist period lose their previous community functions; they also lacked the funds to continue purchasing teaching material and subscribing to education journals. In 2000, there were a mere 181 public libraries and no national distribution system for newspapers in place.⁴⁵

Shift from Institutions to Networks

A growing body of literature considers the emerging informal economy in postsocialist societies and the everyday economy of residents who have experienced a decade of decollectivization, new transnational economic alliances, new political pressures, and widening social inequalities.⁴⁶ Of special interest for this study are anthropological examinations of popular reactions to the emergence of bribery, fraud, and corruption in the absence of clear legislation and institutional accountability.⁴⁷ In Mongolia, for example, it is now more common to resort to social networks than to state institutions for assistance. State institutions have lost authority for a variety of reasons. In election years, more than 9 percent of all civil servants in Mongolia are replaced along party lines.⁴⁸ The high turnover rate in state institutions reveals a long-standing system of political patronage and contributes to the public's general assessment that state officials are neither trustworthy nor accountable for their actions.

For his analysis of social reciprocity and obligation in Mongolia, David Sneath conducted two studies dealing with "gifting" (giving gifts), bribes, and corruption. These studies drew from a government-sponsored survey on corruption, which includes responses from 1,500 Mongolians, and from his own explorative study based on interviews with 140 residents of Ulaanbaatar and

⁴⁵ Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, Mongolian Foundation for Open Society, and UNESCO, *Mongolian Book Survey* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian Foundation for Open Society/Soros Foundation, 2001), 51.

⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that the informal economy during socialist times has not become an object of study. In his comparative analysis of informal economy activities in the 15 Soviet republics, Byung-Yeon Kim found that the average Soviet household expenditure in the informal economy (as a share of total household expenditure) was 23 percent in the period 1969–90. Byung-Yeon Kim, "Informal Economy Activities of Soviet Households: Size and Dynamics," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 31 (2003): 532–51.

⁴⁷ See Christopher M. Hann, ed., *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002); Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economics after Socialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Ruth Mandel and Caroline Humphrey, *Markets and Moralities. Ethnographies of Postsocialism* (Oxford: Berg, 2002). See, in particular, David Sneath's chapter "Mongolia in the 'Age of the Market': Pastoral Land-Use and the Development Discourse," in Mandel and Humphrey, *Markets and Moralities*, 191–210.

⁴⁸ World Bank, *Mongolia Public Expenditure and Financial Management Review*, iv.

a rural district in Arkhangai.⁴⁹ The majority of the respondents from the survey (70.2 percent) found corruption widespread in the 1990s, and only very few (7.2 percent) considered it a feature of the previous socialist era. Of interest are the two most frequent responses given for the widespread corruption during the 1990s: “officials . . . not sufficiently bound by their duties” and “the dishonest privatization of property.”⁵⁰ It is a prominent sentiment in Mongolia that one needs to engage in all kinds of gifting practices, ranging from honorific expressions of gratitude to illegitimate practices of bribe, so as to get things done. The informants in Sneath’s own study listed the following six areas as ones where incentives for gifting (*shovgor*) exist:⁵¹ to secure a place for a daughter or son at a university, receive the necessary grade on an exam, get a job, complete official documents or papers, get a bank loan, and facilitate a business transaction.

Sneath’s ethnographic account of monetized social interactions in Mongolia is very precise and includes a description of what Mongolians consider nebulous areas in monetized social interactions. What counts in this gray area as an acceptable expression of gratitude and gift giving and what qualifies morally as an unacceptable practice of reciprocity and bribery are matters of great complexity and subject to social change. To illustrate his point, Sneath comments on a newspaper article with the headline “Give Doctors and Teachers Bribes! Why Not?” The author of the article makes a case for differentiating between the recipients of a bribe. If the recipients are respectable individuals to whom one is socially indebted, such as doctors who save lives or teachers who “taught us our professions,” then a bribe is morally justified. This applies especially to these two professional groups, who are not only part of traditionally respected occupations but who also earn low salaries.⁵² In another study, focusing specifically on one province in eastern Mongolia (Dornod Province), S. Tumendelger, Ines Stolpe, and I made similar observations.⁵³ We found that the provincial education authorities were very sympathetic of teachers who earn additional income by teaching extra classes, tutoring students individually, and receiving gifts from parents. The provincial education authorities neither sanctioned these practices nor tacitly tolerated

⁴⁹ David Sneath, “Reciprocity and Notions of Corruption in Contemporary Mongolia,” *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 85–99. Sneath’s study was conducted in cooperation with the Sociological Research Center of the Mongolian Institute of Administration and Management Development (IAMD).

⁵⁰ Sneath, “Mongolia in the ‘Age of the Market,’” 86.

⁵¹ *Shovgor* means “conical” or “tapered,” and the term, according to Sneath, emerged in the socialist period, when it was used as a euphemism for giving vodka by referring to the shape of the bottle. Ibid., 87.

⁵² Citation from the article “Emch bagsh hoyort avilga og. Yaadag yum be?” (Give doctors and teachers bribes! Why not?) published in *Odriin Sonin*, December 19, 2001, and quoted in Sneath, “Mongolia in the ‘Age of the Market,’” 96.

⁵³ Gita Steiner-Khamsi, S. Tumendelger, and Ines Stolpe, “Bolovsrolын Tuluukh Nuudel” (School-related migration), *Shine Tol’* 45, no. 4 (2003): 82–112.

them in the form of a "suspended punishment";⁵⁴ in fact, they were eager to regulate them. Such regulations specified which teachers were allowed to earn an additional income, ensuring that parents invested only in those teachers that the education authorities deemed qualified.

Voucher reform in Mongolia can certainly be interpreted as a case of mismanagement or fraud. However, the (non)reform may also imply general feelings of distrust toward superiors. As discussed in the earlier section of this article, teachers also have misgivings about the voucher distribution practices of principals. In an environment where the right of every teacher to in-service training is made available to only a select few, it naturally becomes an object of great speculation as to which teachers have been selected. In light of scarce resources and in the absence of clear selection criteria, most principals in this study resorted to their own social networks and registered those teachers who either were relatives or friends or were senior teachers who could reciprocate the gift of being sent to Ulaanbaatar.

Conclusions

Arguably, any study that investigates a recent education reform in Mongolia must consider that Mongolian society, and with it the education sector, experienced a major transformation in the 1990s. It appears easier to describe some of the features of this transformation process than to label them. The term "transitional" is still most frequently used. "Capitalist" is strikingly absent from publications. "Postsocialist" is emerging in the literature. I would propose a fourth that deserves more attention: "antisocialist."

Christian Giordano and Dobrinka Kostova, perhaps a bit too cynically, note that the "orphans of transitology" have moved on to study the phase of "democratic consolidation" in countries that have undergone a process of political and economic transformation.⁵⁵ Furthermore, studies on "transition" have been widely criticized for pursuing a teleological model of transformation with fixed points of departure (the end of socialism) and arrival (the beginning of capitalism). Between the beginning and final stages, there is presumably a phase of transition in which individuals and institutions carry over legacies from the socialist past, thereby undermining the new emerging social order. What comes across as chaos is supposedly only "transitional" or temporary. After a series of corrective measures (e.g., civil society building, democratization) and with generational change, law and order under a new

⁵⁴ Alena Ledeneva coined the term "suspended punishment" for describing the unwritten rules in the Soviet Union that residents made frequent use of for exercising a degree of freedom in their daily lives. Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also Johan Rasanayagam, "Market, State and Community in Uzbekistan: Reworking the Concept of the Informal Economy" (working paper, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany, 2003).

⁵⁵ Christian Giordano and Dobrinka Kostova, "The Social Production of Mistrust," in Hann, *Post-socialism*, 74–91, 74.

capitalist system eventually will emerge. In comparative education, the linearity of the transition argument has been sharply criticized by Robert Cowen.⁵⁶

For students of Mongolian history and socialism, it is striking how much the transition argument parallels the developmental stages of Marxist-Leninism—much to the chagrin of transitologists. Marxist-Leninist theoreticians and statesmen were also very selective when labeling countries “socialist.” Many countries, including Mongolia, had to complete successfully a phase of transition, in which they had to purge their society from all legacies of their feudal past, before entering the stage of socialism.⁵⁷ According to Marxist-Leninist history, this “revolutionary democratic phase” lasted in Mongolia from 1921 to 1940. This phase of transition from feudalism to socialism coincided with the Stalinist period of violent purges, brutal persecutions, and failed attempts at collectivization. The government of the Mongolian People’s Republic eliminated “elements” that were “counter-revolutionary” or feudal, including lamas and intellectuals. The transition period lasted 19 years. Marxist-Leninist theory suggested that it would be only in 1940, after almost two decades of “antifeudal” struggle and a series of collectivization attempts, that the country was prepared to enter the socialist stage. The planned economy began with the First Five-Year Plan in 1947. The collectivization of livestock and agricultural land was successfully carried through in the mid-1950s and completed by 1959.⁵⁸ Mongolia was finally accepted into CMEA in 1962.

The case of Mongolia’s first transition period (1921–40) allows us to reflect on its second, which commenced in 1990. Several scholars note how socialist practices from the past have endured in the postsocialist present, manifesting themselves in “the more straightforward infra-structural legacies such as the administrative-bureaucratic legacy, and the more elusive political

⁵⁶ Robert Cowen, “Late Modernity and the Rules of Chaos: An Initial Note on Transitologies and Rims,” in *Learning from Comparing: New Directions in Comparative Educational Research*, ed. Robin Alexander, Patricia Broadfoot, and David Phillips (Oxford: Symposium, 1999), 73–88.

⁵⁷ The belief in a period of “socialist transformation” or “socialist transition” also prevailed in other socialist countries and was in some cases differentiated by region. In the People’s Republic of China, e.g., Central China embarked on the collectivization campaign during the First Five-Year Plan (1953–57), whereas Xinjian and Inner Mongolia completed the socialist reconstruction only by 1959. Owing to the rebellions against the Chinese government in Tibet, Mao postponed the “democratic reform” in Tibet to the Third Five-Year Plan (1963–67), and collectivization in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) began a decade later than in China. The “transition” period in Central China lasted, according to Chinese historical accounts, 4 years in Xinjian, 10 years in Inner Mongolia, and 14 years in TAR. See Catriona Bass, *Education in Tibet: Policy and Practice since 1950* (London: Zed, 1998), 29ff.

⁵⁸ As mentioned above, earlier attempts at collectivization failed. Peter Boone, “Grassroots Macroeconomic Reform,” 334, provides a few figures on the successful collectivization campaigns between 1955 and 1960: “In the early 1950s, 85 percent of livestock was privately owned, but as of 1960 only 22 percent was privately owned. The cooperatives [of herders] were gradually consolidated, and the average number of employees per cooperative reached 1,835 in 1960.”

cultural continuities.”⁵⁹ However, there is a paucity of literature on how post-socialist governments signal the beginning of a new era by deliberately distancing themselves from the socialist past and proclaiming programs that intuitively come across as “antisocialist.” Arguably, such was the case with educational reform in Mongolia.

As the voucher example illustrates, distancing can be restricted to the discursive level with few consequences for the actual practice. The policy talk on vouchers provoked miraculous associations to a free market in education, in particular to a supply and demand-driven teacher education reform. Voucher-based reform clearly signaled a departure from the previous system of in-service teacher education, which was centrally planned and offered. By “adopting the language of the new allies,”⁶⁰ and by introducing international reforms in Mongolia that were supposedly competition driven, the Ministry of Education positioned itself at the opposite end of the equity-driven reforms that the former socialist government used to advance. “Antisocialist” proclamations in public prevailed in the first few years of the transformation period but seem to have lost their momentum in the last few years. One example is the apparent disregard for rural development in the first transformation decade. Only in the last four years have government officials recognized the limitations of their laissez-faire policies toward rural development.

In 2003, the government and two large loan agencies (ADB and World Bank) held a series of meetings to revisit the ecological, demographic, and economic consequences that their neglect of rural development had had and initiated a series of corrective measures.⁶¹ A similar development has been observed in the education sector. The plan for a large-scale rehabilitation of school dormitories, dormant for a decade, was revived in 2000. It is important to bear in mind, though, that the school dormitories of 2000 are different from the institutions that they were in 1990. With the transformation of school dormitories into institutions that nowadays tend to accommodate children from poor families rather than all children from remote rural areas, the school dormitories have lost the socialist flavor that international donors attributed to them through the late 1990s.

It would be presumptuous to argue that the voucher-based reform was all about signaling a shift from universal access to quality enhancement and was primarily developed for the purpose of breaking with an undesired past. Only the *idea* of vouchers, which dominated policy talk in the first few months

⁵⁹ Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 188.

⁶⁰ Iveta Silova, “Adopting the Language of the New Allies,” in *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*, ed. Gita Steiner-Khamisi (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 75–87.

⁶¹ For example, a proportion of the ADB’s third loan has been assigned to rural school development. The World Bank highlights in its *Mongolia Public Expenditure and Financial Management Review* the increase in inequality between urban and rural areas (xi). See also Gita Steiner-Khamisi and Ines Stolpe, “Non-traveling ‘Best Practices’ for a Traveling Population: The Case of Nomadic Education in Mongolia,” *European Educational Research Journal*, forthcoming.

of the reform in 1998, was a stark contrast to the previous system. How the reform was actually enacted and implemented had more to do with financial cutbacks, lack of resources, and a dilapidated transportation system during the 1990s. Whether these conditions are transitional or not remains to be seen and can be assessed only retrospectively. The shift from human to physical capital, from access to quality, from urbanism to urbanization, or from institutions to networks, might very well be reversed or become obsolete in the future. For example, the importance of raising the salaries of public sector civil servants and making them more competitive with salaries in the private sector has been on the government's agenda for the past decade.⁶² Undoubtedly, adequate salaries for teachers and school administrators would mitigate the need for additional and informal sources of income, diminish nepotism, and strengthen institutional regulations rather than personal networking as a means of gaining access to additional resources.

The features of the Mongolian voucher system reveal a complex situation in contemporary Mongolia. This study has not sought to replace one "black box" ("transition") with another ("postsocialism") but, instead, to highlight the competing, and overlapping, practices and discourses of the 1990s. Clearly, a few of the features of the Mongolian voucher model are antisocialist, and several might qualify as transitional, but many are reminiscent of the socialist past. Although I highlighted only three features of postsocialism, there could indeed be more. Therefore, distinguishing between these divergent forces that shape the postsocialist period might expand existing theories that explain the attraction, indifference, or resistance toward education reform models borrowed from elsewhere.

Caroline Humphrey addresses the importance of enlarging our analytical framework beyond the transition period in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of developments in the postsocialist period. She writes, "It would be perverse not to recognize the fact that people from East Germany to Mongolia are making political judgments over a time span that includes the socialist past as their reference point, rather than thinking just about the present trajectory to the future."⁶³ Humphrey also reminds us that we should not get too attached to the terminology of "postsocialism." She argues that people from postsocialist countries themselves must tell us how to label this

⁶² After the threat of a nationwide strike of teachers, the government raised teacher salaries by 25 percent in 2003. Teacher salaries and, in general, the salaries of civil servants, however, are still low compared to international benchmarks. Real GDP per capita was \$403 in 2000, and the average public sector salaries were 1.4 times the per capita GDP. In contrast, the Fast-Track Initiative set the benchmark of 3.5 as a multiple of per capita GDP for annual teacher salaries. This means that the annual teacher salaries in Mongolia should be on the average 3.5 times (rather than the current 1.4 times) the per capita GDP. World Bank, *Mongolia Public Expenditure and Financial Management Review*, iii; Barbara Bruns, Alain Mingat, and Ramahatra Rakotomalala, *Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003).

⁶³ Caroline Humphrey, "Does the Category 'Postsocialist' Still Make Sense?" in Hann, *Post-socialism*, 13.

particular period in their history. For example, in many European Union accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the term is avoided. The common socialist past is presently considered less meaningful than the common future with (Western) European countries and other European Union accession countries. More important than the label, which is arguably more academic than colloquial, are the research paradigms associated with post-socialist studies. In analogy to postcolonial studies that rely upon, among other things, a thorough investigation of imperial ideology, administration, and practices, researchers of educational reform in postsocialist countries are likely to find important clues for understanding the discrepancies of the present by considering the socialist past. Applying a postsocialist research framework implies not only a focus on a particular historical epoch, frequently referred to as the transition period. It also is a recognition that the socialist past has functioned as a frame of reference for adults in these countries, forcing decision makers in education to take a stance on whether they selectively propagate ideologies, beliefs, and practices from a dissolved past or, as in the case of the policy talk on vouchers, they make a radical break with their socialist past.

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