

URAN CONFERENCE

**International Conference on Media & Communication Research
in the Age of Globalisation**

Macquarie University, Sydney

September 24-26, 2001

**The Mongolian Media Landscape in Transition – a Cultural Clash
between Global, National, Local and no Nomads Media**

Munkhmandakh Myagmar, Ph. D.

Head of the Monitoring Section, Press Institute of Mongolia
mandakh_m@yahoo.com

Poul Erik Nielsen, Ph. D.

Associate Professor, Department of Information and Media Studies, University of
Aarhus (leave of absence)
pnielsen@imv.au.dk

**The Mongolian Media Landscape in Transition – a Cultural Clash
between Global, National, Local and no Nomads Media**

Munkhmandakh Myagmar, Ph. D.

Poul Erik Nielsen, Ph. D.

On the road from Bulgan to Sevrei, we noticed that almost all the gers that we passed in Sevrei had windmills, a satellite dish, and a vehicle. The soum itself seemed more developed than the

other soums which we visited. There were 4 or 5 shops, a bakery and many other services. The soum had power from 7:30 – 12:00 PM. (*The Gobi Initiative* unpublished).

”It is not my desire to destroy the original Mongolian identity but in order to survive we have to stop being nomads.” Mongolian Prime Minister Nambaryn Enkhbayar (Murphy 2001)

Since the end of the communist era, the Mongolian society has gone through dramatic changes towards a democratic society with market economy. The country is in the midst of a challenging rebuilding of a new national identity while it undergoes two fundamental transition processes: one in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, and another in the vast rural areas. The two transition processes are interconnected and overlapping yet quite different in scope.

Despite all the political, financial, and climatic hardship that the country has gone through the last decade the capital is heading towards a complex modern urbanised city with significant reminiscences of the nomadic tradition and the communist era. The transition process in the countryside is heading toward a revitalisation of the traditional nomadic life and Buddhist religion, and simultaneously the rural areas have in respect to health and education witnessed significant deterioration in living standards.

This paper deals with the role of the media in these transition processes. Taking its point of departure in a brief presentation of the historical development of the Mongolian media during communism and the 1990's the paper will document the major current trends in the Mongolian media landscape. The recently obtained freedom of expression has led to new print and electronic media mushrooming in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, while the media situation in the vast rural areas has deteriorated, and many aimags (provinces) do not have any local newspaper or any local electronic media. In short the media situation in Mongolia is characterised by great ambivalence.

The last part of the paper addresses in a more exploratory discussion some of the social and cultural implications of the current societal development and specifically looks at the role of the media in these transition processes.

Brief history of the Mongolian media

Mongolia is a country covering a vast territory of 1.6 million square kilometres, but it has a modest population of 2.4 million people. Traditionally the Mongolians lived as nomads, and traditional herding of livestock is still dominating in the rural areas, even though the government, during communism, forced many to work in collective farms. One fourth of the population is still living as nomads in gers (felt tents).

But another crucial factor, especially since the 1960s, was urbanization. Throughout this century, but particularly its latter half when an ambitious industrialization programme gathered speed, Mongolia experienced an urbanization on an unparalleled scale and speed – from a few per cent living in towns in the 1920s to 55-60 per cent in 1990. Since the demise of the command economy, however, there has been a marked abandonment of the towns as people move back full-time into the pastoral economy. [Gilberg and Svantesson 1996, p. 20]

The population of Ulaanbaatar has increased from 150.000 in 1960 to 800.000 today¹, so the country is experiencing an ambivalent development, where more

¹ Unofficially the population in the capital is about a million, and in the outskirts of the city several suburbs have popped up, where migrants are living in traditional gers.

and more people move to the modern urbanised capital, while others turn to the traditional pastoral living.

Mongolia is divided into the capital and 21 aimags (provinces) each with around 50.000 to 120.000 inhabitants (Gobisumber aimag only 13.100). The Aimags are divided into 336 sums, which again is divided into around 1600 bags (brigades) with an average of 200 households. All levels have a local governor, and during communism the sum-level was developed with medical care, schools, libraries and cultural activities, and the literacy was almost total. The communist government controlled the media closely. The national newspapers run by the state and party were well distributed to aimag centres, sum centres, and many times even out to bags. Besides the national newspapers the aimag governments ran local newspapers and often radio and television stations as well. In addition were the state run national radio and television covering almost all areas of the vast territory.

In the latter part of 1980s the government loosened the grip on the media partly due to the Mongolian version of 'Perestroika'. The editorial staffs were given more freedom to make independent decisions and the journalists began to write about controversial issues, although it was still within the party and government controlled media. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980's the transformation of the authoritarian communication system took pace, and the birth of the free press was celebrated in February 1990 with the first issue of the newspaper *Shine Toly* (New Mirror). Within the next one and a half year 155 new publications were launched, and the newspaper spectrum included a wide variety of newspapers with several newspapers run by political parties, some of independent political publishers, and a considerable amount of 'yellow' tabloid newspapers.

The government hardly attempted to stop the enormous spreading of independent newspapers by direct sanctions². The real restrictions came on the financial front especially during an economic collapse in Mongolia in 1992 to 1994: The new independent newspapers were financially vulnerable, while the government media enjoyed considerable material and financial support from the State. The unequal market conditions threatened the new publications practically in all fields: In the supply of newsprint, printing and distribution. Newsprint became a scarce commodity because of suspension of supplies from Russia in 1993, and the rationing of newsprint, predictably, favoured government newspapers, since the primary publisher in Mongolia at that time was the state owned *Suhbaatar Publishing House* that published about 70% of Mongolia's printed material. Many of the independent newspapers appeared irregularly because of the lack of newsprint. The financial disadvantages forced private newspapers to charge higher prices compared to the government-owned, and the average income was so low that the majority of people could not afford to buy an independent newspaper, consequently many people had to rely on the information supplied by the relatively less expensive government newspapers. A new printing house, *Free Press*, founded in 1996 and funded by the *Danish Development Agency* improved the situation of the independent print media

² Since autumn of 1991, all new media outlets should be registered at the Ministry of Justice; however, this procedure has been of formal nature.

outlets considerably. Nevertheless, the state run daily newspapers *Ardyn Erkh*³ and *Zasgiin Gazryn Medee* dominated the print media market through out the 1990s by their number of circulation.

The state run *Mongolian Radio* was founded in 1934 and since 1960 the station has been broadcast nation-wide with an almost total coverage. In 1994 *Mongolian Radio* got a second channel *Khukh Tenger* broadcasting in Ulaanbaatar and the central region. In the mid-1990s several private radio stations were launched in Ulaanbaatar beside a new station from the local government.

Mongolian Television was established in 1967, but it took a while before television played a significant role in Mongolia, since only 6 out of 100 households had a TV set in 1970, 14 out of 100 in 1980, and 41 out of 100 in 1990. Until 1986 the *Mongolian Television* only broadcast limited hours four nights a week.

Russian television has played a significant role in Mongolia, because a retransmission of the Russian station *Orbit* was launched as a second channel in 1970, and from 1976 *Orbit* could be received daily. *Orbit* broadcast more hours than the *Mongolian Television*, and *Orbit* enjoyed great popularity especially among the youth until it ceased in the beginning of the 1990s.

In the mid-1990s two private television stations were launched in Ulaanbaatar. A Christian American-Mongolian foundation, *AMONG*, established *Eagle TV* in 1994 and the biggest Media Corporation in Mongolia *Mongol News Co.* launched *MN Channel 25* in 1995. In 1999 the local government in Ulaanbaatar launched *UBS TV*.

In the mid-1990s several cable-TV systems were established in the many huge apartment complexes in Ulaanbaatar and a few of the urban centres in the countryside. With the introduction of cable and to a lesser degree satellite-TV some of the Mongolians acquired access to a wide range of transnational and Asiatic television channels.

During communism the rural areas had good access to the widely distributed national print media as well as radio and television to the the households had radio and TV receivers. Further more all aimags had a government run local newspaper that was distributed to all sums and many bags. Many of the aimag centres had a local radio and/or TV station too, and some of them also took the opportunity to cut away from the *Mongolian Radio* transmission for four half-hours a week for local programmes (Simering 99). This well organised top to bottom dissemination of information from the different government levels broke down after the collapse of communism. The national print media are not distributed to the same extent any longer, and many of the local media outlets have ceased, so the national radio and television plays a more significant role.

The Media Law of 1998

The Mongolian constitution adopted in 1992 guaranteed the freedom of expression as well as the right to seek and receive information, but it took 6 years before these freedoms were specified in a media law. The media law is a serious step forward in respect to media freedom. The censorship authority was

³ According to Williams (1996) *Ardyn Erkh* had a circulation of 162.000 in 1990.

abolished already in 1989, but it was not until the 1998 media law that censorship was prohibited.

One of the main issues in the 1998 media law was to free all state owned media from government control. The Parliament Standing Committee on the State Institution was entrusted to elaborate a draft decision regarding the property, the structure, composition and statutes of the institutions.

The former state run and owned newspapers *Ardyn Erkh* (now *Udriin Sonin*) and *Zasgiin Gazryn Medee* (now *Zuuny Medee*) were privatised in 1999 according to the law, even though the way it happened created some criticism among journalists and media people. According to the law *Mongolian Radio* and *Mongolian Television* was to be dismantled and organised as national public broadcasting institutions, but this has not yet happened. Neither has the national news agency *Montsame* been transformed into a public entity.

The current media landscape

In 1999 the *Press Institute of Mongolia* sat up a *Danida* funded monitoring project that has established a systematic and thorough documentation of the Mongolian media landscape in regard to supply and structure⁴. The following interpretation of the Mongolian media situation is based on annual reports of 1999 and 2000.

Unfortunately there has not been systematic monitoring in respect to readership and radio and television audiences⁵, and neither is it possible to get reliable figures on penetration of radio and television sets and the access to cable TV.

In 2000, a total of 111 newspapers, 24 magazines and 6 TV and radio stations have been registered as new entities by the Ministry of Justice and Interior, bringing the total number of registered outlets since 1990 to more than 1270.

Many of these registered outlets are not running any longer and some might not have been launched at all or only published one or two issues.

According to the monitoring project 160 newspapers (5 daily, 6 biweekly, 28 weekly, 54 bimonthly, 37 monthly and 33 irregularly) and 37 magazines were published in 2000, 28 radio and 29 television stations were broadcasting, 8 cable TV-systems were operating. The Mongolian media landscape is blooming with a quite impressive number of media outlets for a country of 2.4 million people, and new media outlets are mushrooming. When it comes to freedom of expression it is not only the formal right to freedom of expression and the prohibition of censorship that has been established in Mongolia, many Mongolians are taking real advantage of the freedom of expression.

In a way the Mongolian media landscape might be seen as volatile with so many new outlets launched every year and just as many ceased outlets, and the media landscape is definitely going through some dramatic changes. On the other hand some of the major trends are pretty stable both within the press and the electronic media.

⁴ The main goal of this monitoring project has been to establish reliable documentation on the development of the Mongolian Media Landscape. The systematic information retrieval has been based on declarations from the publishers, but although the project has not had access to directly verify the data cross checking of some of the data has shown that the retrieved information is reliable.

⁵ Every week *Mongolian Television* makes a small survey on audiences in Ulaanbaatar of their own programmes.

Newspapers and magazines

The number of daily newspapers has remained unchanged since 1999. The total circulation of the 5 daily newspapers decreased from 45.000 in 1999 to around 41.000 in 2000. *Udriin Sonin*⁶ (the former state run *Ardyn Erkh*) is by far the largest with a circulation of 17.700 in 2000 decreased from 22.300 in 1999 and way below the circulation of *Ardyn Erkh* during communism. The other former state run newspaper, *Zuuny Medee*, and the privately established newspaper, *Unoodor*,⁷ come in second and third with a circulation around 7-8.000. A quite impressive number of 90% of the daily newspapers are sold in subscription.

Besides the circulation of 41.000 daily newspapers there is a significant circulation of weekly newspapers of around 120.000. The privately established *Seruuleg*⁸ is by far the largest with 37.100, and the likewise privately established *Khongorzul* comes in second with 17.600.

Anyhow the total circulation of newspapers is relatively low compared to the great variety in the supply of newspapers, and the total circulation indicates that many people, even in the capital, are not reading newspapers regularly. A decisive reason for the relatively low total circulation of newspapers might be the price. The average price for daily newspapers rose in 2000 from 200 to 250 tugrek (US\$ 0.25). Compared to an average monthly salary around 40.000-60.000 tugrek it is quite expensive to buy a newspaper every day.

Magazines play a minor role in Mongolia. In 2000 there was only one weekly magazine with a circulation of 3.000 and 11 monthly magazines with a total circulation of 5.100.

Radio and television

Mongolian Radio is the only radio station broadcasting nation-wide. The station is financed by three sources: state subsidies, license fees, and advertisement, and the station broadcast an extensive and varied programming (in 1999: news 17%, politics/social 20%, music 16%, education/youth 9% culture 5%, advertisement 12%, etc.).

Mongolian Radio also broadcasts a local channel in Ulaanbaatar, *Khukh Tenger*, likewise with a varied programming but anyhow broadcasting 54% music and entertainment. Besides the two channels from *Mongolian Radio* there are 6 radio stations broadcasting in Ulaanbaatar. The local government runs the station *Ulaanbaatar Radio* mainly with music (72%) and there are 5 private commercial stations also dominated by music and entertainment, but some of them have news and politics as well.

In many ways the television situation correspond to the radio situation. *Mongolian Television* is financed in the same way, and it broadcasts a varied programming nation-wide 7 hours a day (in 2000: news 20%, movies and dramatic TV series

⁶ *Udriin Sonin* is partly owned by the only very big private media company *Mongol News Corporation*. The company owns the newspapers *Udriin Sonin* (partly), *Unuuduur*, *Tavan Tsagari*, *Bi Bi Bi*, *Weekend Nyam*, and *UB Post*, the radio station *FM 107,5*, and the television station *MN Channel 25*

⁷ *Unoodor* is owned by *The Mongol News Company*, which owns several weekly newspapers and the television station *MN Channel 25* as well.

⁸ *Seruuleg* also runs a private radio station in Ulaanbaatar in addition to a minor second newspaper.

20%, education and youth 15%, politics/social 10%, advertisement 8%, etc.). 75% of the programming is nationally produced.

In Ulaanbaatar there are 4

local television stations, *UBS TV* run by the local government, *Eagle TV* run by *Among*, and two private commercial stations *MN Channel 25* and *Noyan* (only in some parts of Ulaanbaatar). *UBS TV* and *MN Channel 25* have a varied programming with news, politics/social, and a great deal of movies. Around half the programmes are nationally produced. *Eagle TV* is predominantly broadcasting news (69%) and Christian value family programmes. Besides a daily nationally produced news programme the main part of the news programming at *Eagle TV* is taken from CNN (partly delayed and dubbed, partly directly from CNN).

Besides the terrestrial television there are 8 cable TV-systems operating in Ulaanbaatar and in a few of the urbanised areas in the countryside. The cable systems are providing between 14 and 33 channels of predominately foreign television. There are channels from Russia, China (Inner Mongolia and China in general), Korea and Japan as well as transnational channels like *Star TV*, *CNN*, *BBC*, and *Deutsche Welle*. There is no available data on the penetration of cable.

Local Media

While the media landscape in the capital might be seen as blooming, the situation in the countryside is discouraging. In the countryside the former system of state run media has fallen apart, and there has not been established a new sustainable alternative in stead.

24 newspapers were by the end of 2000 published in the countryside. Out of those were 4 weekly, 17 bimonthly, 4 monthly, and 5 published irregularly. 12 newspapers were recently established and 16 newspapers ceased during 2000 among those several of the recently established. Several aimags had more than one newspaper, while 7 out of the 21 aimags did not have any newspaper by the end of 2000. The average circulation of the local newspapers was 800, and the total annual circulation for all the local newspapers was 406.000 with a population of 1.6 million in the countryside.

The population in the countryside has access to some of the newspapers from Ulaanbaatar. The 5 daily newspapers and about one third of all the newspapers are distributed nationally to the aimag centres, but the newspapers are rarely distributed to the sums as the state and party run newspapers were during communism. There is no exact data on how many copies are sold outside Ulaanbaatar. Hence it is difficult to tell how big an impact the varied supply of national newspapers has in the countryside, but it is obvious that the access to printed information is very limited outside the aimag centres⁹.

The most influential media in the countryside are the state run radio and television stations, which have almost total coverage. The fact that the signal is accessible in all rural areas does not mean that all households have access to radio and television. Most of the nomad families do have a radio, while television sets are rarely seen among the herders, and even though the preamble is telling about nomads having access to satellite television, this is not common.

⁹ A new UNESCO financed study *Mongolia: Access to books and other printed Materials* shows that the public's access to information in the rural areas has decreased the last 10 years.

13 out of the 21 aimags had a local radio station. Half of the radio stations broadcast regularly and extensively for 3 to 16 hours daily, and in the urbanised areas in Darkhan-Uul and Orkhon aimags there are three competing radio stations. The rest of the radio stations broadcast irregularly for only 1 to 7 hours each week.

17 aimags have a local television station, but it is only in Darkhan-Uul and Selenge aimags that the stations are broadcasting extensively, while all others are broadcasting between 30 minutes and 7 hours each week. Most of the local radio and television stations can only be picked up in a limited range around the aimag centre.

The 66 local media outlets employed about 215 people full time making 12% of the total number of employees within the media. The average number of employees per local newspaper was 2.5, while it was 3.2 for radio stations and 4.0 for television stations. These figures include directors, editors, journalists, technical support, and administration.

Almost half of the local newspapers do not have any editorial office, and they are in general very poorly equipped regarding phones, computers, and Internet access. Only a few of the local newspapers have access to local printing facilities, so 70% of the local newspapers are sent to Ulaanbaatar for printing at the *Free Press* printing house and then send back again. This takes at least 2-3 days, so the local newspapers cannot compete on time and news value.

The electronic media are also working under very poor conditions. The government run local television station in Uvurkhangai can illustrate this. The station broadcasts 90 minutes each week. The programmes are produced live on tape in a provisional studio at the town hall with one camera. Afterwards the tape is brought to the transmitter on a nearby hilltop.

Some local radio stations have been set up with donor money and hence from the beginning been better equipped and better staffed, but the stations cannot sustain that level without continuous donor support.

Financial and legal aspects

When the monitoring project was established one of the aims were to monitor the financial matters as well, because it is important that the media outlets operate within a sound financial environment, otherwise they cannot fulfil their purpose in the democratic process. Many of the media outlets refrained from participating in this part of the monitoring, so the project has only genuine data on the ownership of the media.

As mentioned earlier the two former state run national newspapers have been privatised, so on a national level the state is not running any newspapers. In the countryside the local governments are still running some newspapers, but from 1999 to 2000 newspapers owned by state organisations have decreased from 15 to 11%. 65% of the newspapers are privately owned, while NGOs and political parties own the rest. Hence it is obvious that Mongolia on a national level has developed a freedom of expression that is widely accessible. It is more questionable, if the print media is operating in a sound financial environment.

There is no doubt that some of the daily newspapers as well as some of the most popular weeklies are making money. But the many ceased outlets indicate that it

is extremely difficult to break even, and many of the small newspapers are philanthropic and political projects.

When it comes to the electronic media the situation is quite different. Because of the scarcity of the frequencies there is a long international tradition that the freedom of expression in some ways are suspended in the electronic field, since a broadcaster needs a license. The main problem in the current Mongolian situation is that the state is running monopolies within national radio and television. This is a reminiscence of the communist era and it is in direct conflict with the 1998 media law demanding that the government should give up control of media institutions.

The state run monopolies are a serious problem, because radio and television are very influential media both in the capital and in the countryside. The situation in Ulaanbaatar is quite complex because the local government is running a radio and a television station as well. On the other hand there are competing private stations in Ulaanbaatar, and this mixed broadcasting system has already forced the government run stations to adjust their programming policies. Anyhow the government control of national radio and television is hampering the process of turning Mongolia into a complete democratic society with free and independent media. One likeable way to go would be to transform the state run radio and television stations into public broadcasting companies out of reach of the government.

The idea of public broadcasting in Mongolia is not new. Back in 1991 came the first proposal for a public broadcasting channel that should supplement the state run channel. Since then the concept of turning the state run stations into public broadcasting has been discussed extensively, but the different parties in power have not been ready to give up the control over the national broadcasting media. In the countryside the problem of government owned media in some ways are even worse, because the local media in many cases have a total monopoly on local issues. Further more the financial situation for local media is so bad that it is impossible to run local media of a certain quality without financial support. The most urbanised areas like Darkhan and Erdenet are exceptions. The local governments could put in the money for the local public broadcasters and/or independent community newspapers, but it is not likely to happen in a situation where health care and education is deteriorating.

Donor organisations like UNESCO and MFOS (the SOROS Foundation) do support a few radio stations and a few newspapers. Most donor organisations see radio as the most appropriate medium for local communication. In 1998 MFOS proposed a three year programme with the following goals:

- Set up an effective regional information network to strengthen local voices.
- To increase the quality and quantity of local programming.
- To increase herder oriented central programming.
- To increase the professional skills and knowledge of rural broadcasters.

To advance these goals, we propose the creation of a rural radio service with the following structure:

Establish a station in each aimag that has the ability to originate daily local information programming of substance. (Siemering 99)

The proposal can be seen as ideal, because it stresses the participatory aspect in local media projects and at the same time focuses on the need for enhancing the professional skills. MFOS did never start this comprehensive project, but they started local radio stations in Darkhan and Selenge two of the biggest urban centres in the countryside, and the signals can be picked up in a narrow range (10-15 kilometres) of the aimag centre. The real challenge, though, for a local network of radio stations would be in the rural areas, and so far most rural areas are not even close to having access to local radio.

Journalistic standards

Above we have analysed the transition in respect to supply and structure, but the media is also changing content-wise. One of the main difficulties is to establish genuine professional journalistic standards. For decades the journalists have worked within a system controlled by the government, and it is not easy for them to break out of the mould. It is extremely difficult for critical journalists to get access to information from the authorities and other relevant sources, and the sources of information expect the same loyalty from the journalists as they experienced during communism. Furthermore the *Mongolian Radio*, *Mongolian Television*, and many of the local media outlets are still run by the government, so many journalists are working within a system with double standards. It will take some years before the transition of the journalistic standards is accomplished, and it will involve more training of the journalists, some structural changes of the electronic media as well as a change of attitude on all levels. On the other hand, Mongolia has, at least in the capital, taken a huge step toward a thriving media landscape to the benefit of the democratic process and as an invaluable source for the daily life of modern Mongolians.

Issues to be addressed

After this factual interpretation of the historical development and the current media situation, we would like in a more exploratory discussion to address some of the social and cultural implications of the current societal development in Mongolia. Specifically we would like to discuss some issues related to the role of the media in the country's rebuilding of a new national identity. Finally, we would like briefly to discuss some specific problems concerning the development of the local media in Mongolia.

When dealing with the societal development in countries in transition it is important to analyse the issues in a contextual perspective and avoid a general and often Western dominated theoretical perspective. The Mongolian development is in many ways unique, because of the nomadic heritage, the seven decades long communist rule, the long oppressed Buddhist religion, the geo-political siting between Russia and China, and the geography of the country. In Ulaanbaatar you easily see the complexity of the society. Young people in fashionable clothing and with mobile phones are living side by side with young Buddhist monks and people of all ages wearing traditional clothing accustomed to the Mongolian climate. Busy shopping streets and markets are situated beside the Soviet style apartment buildings and big neighbourhoods with gers and livestock. Ulaanbaatar is a modern urbanised city with significant reminiscences

from the nomadic tradition, or as Prime Minister Enkhbayar says it: "This is a half-nomadic city" (Murphy 2001).

The rural areas are also undergoing significant changes. Even though the communist rule made major political mistakes as the forced collectivisation of nomads and the oppression of the Buddhist religion, the centralistic planned development during communism succeeded, anyhow, in establishing a widespread health care and education system for the whole population including the nomadic herders. This system was supported by a thorough dissemination of information and systematic organised political and cultural activities even in remote rural areas. The collapse of communism led in the rural areas both to a relaxation of the restrictions and to a disintegration of the central supported social system. In the following years it has not been possible for the changing governments to re-establish a well organised social system. Many aimags do nowadays lack sufficient health workers and medicine, and schools and libraries do not have access to new books, so the teaching in the primary schools is often based on old books from the communist era.

The harsh living conditions in the rural areas have the last two years made matters worse because of extremely cold winters and dry summers. The consequence has been a large-scale migration to the capital and other urbanised areas, but there has also been substantial traffic in the opposite direction of people migrating back to the nomadic life as a refuge from the dreary 'modern' life.

Hence, the Mongolian society is facing not only financial and social problems the country also has to establish a new identity for the Mongolians. This new complex identity has to bridge the huge gap in living conditions and life expectations between modern urban and traditional rural areas, between youth and old people in urban as well as rural areas, and between growing social differences.

The euphoria over the obtained democratic freedom has long been replaced by a severe hangover and a more down to earth understanding of the social and political realities. On the other hand Mongolia has many strong integrative elements like ethnic homogeneity, strong family ties, as well as mythic, religious, and social rituals like the family celebration Tsargan Sar and the sportive Naadam festival.

Through apparatuses as diverse as museums and village dispensaries, post offices and police stations, tollbooths and telephone booths, the nation-state creates a vast network of formal and informal techniques for the nationalization of all space considered to be under its sovereign authority. States vary, of course, in their ability to penetrate the nooks and crannies of everyday life.

Appadurai p. 189.

In the midst of the two contrary but intertwined transition processes the Mongolian society is rebuilding the national identity on the remains of the communist system and the still vital traditional family and religious traditions. This process is foremost dependent on the social, economic, and political development and it will take place in a contest between modernity and traditional values, between the state and social classes and between the local (neighbourhoods), the national and the global level. The process is fragile and the Mongolian State is by far not capable 'to penetrate the nooks and crannies of daily life'.

Among other things literature, art, folk and popular culture and the media contribute to the development and negotiation of the local and national identities. In the following we are addressing the role of the media in this complex development.

Media and democracy

Since the start of the first independent newspaper, *Shine Toly*, in 1990 Mongolia has witnessed an impressive utilisation of the freedom of expression. In the last decade new print and electronic media have been launched continuously, and although many media outlets have ceased, the number of operating media in the capital is significant.

Based on the political freedom and the freedom of expression the impressive and varied supply of partisan political newspapers serves the political debate in the public sphere and has been essential to the democratisation process in the country. Furthermore, the varied supply of newspapers is an insurance against any democratic setbacks although the political situation is continuously volatile. Anyhow the supply of newspapers might be varied, but the total circulation is not impressive and indicates that only a limited part of the population is engaged in the democratic process.

The political newspapers are often one-sided focusing on political issues and they are less interested in more soft issues related to the social and cultural changes of the daily lives of the Mongolian people. There are several yellow newspapers focusing on crime, violence and sex, but although they are catering to specific needs among the readers, they are not providing valuable contributions to a better understanding of the new complex Mongolian society. This might be one of the reasons, why the newspapers have a quite low total circulation and hence only have a limited social and cultural impact outside a narrow political discourse.

The political newspapers, *Eagle TV*, the state run *Mongolian Radio* and *Mongolian Television*, and the majority of local media have, despite all their differences, one thing in common: they are all governed by a strong sender oriented desire to agitate. This mode of address is characteristic of a dominance model (Servaes, 1996) where the media are communicating in a paternalistic manner seeing the receivers as passive subjects who need to be enlightened or educated.

Nomadism puts the group ahead of the individual: "Social cooperation whether voluntary or legally enforced is the keystone of both nomadic and socialist-communist societies." [*Area Handbook for Mongolia*, p. 180] Political loyalty to a patron or leader in traditional Mongolian society was smoothly transferable to the communist era's authoritarian relationships. Concepts such as popular sovereignty, political freedom and majority rule never had a place in Mongolia in the past.

The challenge for Mongolia today, in the era of democratization, will be to break this psychological mindset to encourage personal initiative and civic responsibility. (Campi 1996, p. 93).

It might be correct that the nomads are raised within a collective mindset in order to survive, and there might be some resemblance between the nomadic and communistic authoritarian relationships and on the other hand this paternalistic mode of address. The political elite acts in this manner, since the shifting governments irrespective of political views strained have maintained the government control over national radio and television.

On the other hand, it has often been argued that the Mongolians have an individualistic mindset. The Mongolians are sceptical to accept authoritarian rules, and they enjoy freedom to an extent that is contrary to modern industrialised societies. The silent resistance to the communistic rule, the revival of the Buddhist religion and the varied supply of newspapers representing competing views suggest that at least there is a competing individualistic mindset.

Anyhow the varied newspaper supply and the launch of commercial radio and television stations point to the fact that the Mongolian media landscape in its totality, at least in the capital, is changing in the direction of a pluralistic model. The Mongolians have accepted the democratic challenge.

Media and cultural identity

As earlier mentioned there is unfortunately no reliable figures for readership and radio and television audiences. *Mongolian Television* has recently established a weekly audience survey in Ulaanbaatar of the stations own programmes. The ratings are unbelievable high, but anyhow the surveys suggest that television in general and *Mongolian Television* in specific are playing a significant role in the daily lives of people living in Ulaanbaatar. It is not possible to support this with further fact, but the general opinion among professional media people in Mongolia is that radio and television play a significant role in the capital. It is worth mentioning that *Mongolian Television* and to some degree *MN Channel 25* and *UBS TV* are providing a varied programming of predominantly nationally produced programmes within news, politics, documentaries, youth/education, and dramatic TV-series. The *Mongolian Television* conducted audience surveys suggest that the national programming is among the most popular, and that the foreign programmes only play a marginal role. There is probably no doubt that nationally produced radio and television are some of the main forces in establishing a new social and cultural identity for the Mongolian population living in the capital.

Eagle TV is a specific case. The station is on the one hand an example of the utilisation of the freedom of expression and the right to hold different religious opinions. On the other hand, the station is in two ways exponent of globalisation. Following in the line of a thousand years old tradition of religious globalisation this electronic 'missionary man' is agitating for Christianity through old American family value programmes. Secondly the station is supporting the modern globalisation of the western dominated news flow and world order through the retransmission of the CNN programming, either delayed and dubbed or live retransmission of the CNN signal. The two different forms of globalisation converge since the latter is a tool for *Eagle TV* to proselytise the Mongolian Buddhists through the lure of western capitalism and American suburban lifestyle. As far as we can assess *Eagle TV* as such has had limited penetration, but the many different lures of consumerism and Western life style are anyhow making an impact on the modern life in Ulaanbaatar, so it is hard to isolate the impact of *Eagle TV*.

To thoroughly understand the character of the media's role it would be necessary to include textual analyses of the different media, but this is not available in Mongolia and it is out of the scope of this paper. Instead, we would like to raise a

few issues to be addressed in further research. In a situation where the societal development encompasses two fundamental transition processes it is interesting to analyse how the media deals with the tension between the two processes. Since all the significant media are based in Ulaanbaatar, and most of the media are aimed at the population in Ulaanbaatar, and furthermore 88% of all media employees are working in Ulaanbaatar it would be reasonable to think that the media are more concerned with the transition process in the capital and less interested in the transition process in the rural areas. If this is the case the media will support a new 'national' identity marked by the limited yet complex local experiences of the tension between modernisation and traditional values in the daily life in the capital.

Local media

In the factual presentation of the current media situation in Mongolia we pointed out that the media situation in the rural areas is paradoxical, because the lack of local media means that the people in the countryside have limited access to local media while they have better access to national media and sometimes even international media. The two most important media in the rural areas are the government run *Mongolian Radio* and *Mongolian Television*, the latter depends on people having access to electricity and a television set. As earlier mentioned we have no access to the rural population's use of the national, and how satisfied the audiences are with the national programming.

Anyhow, it is obvious that there is a huge gap between the specific needs for local information and the information provided by the national media. The rural people using the accessible national and international media are constantly confronted with the difference between the presentation of the modern urban life and their own pastoral way of living. The increased migration to the capital indicates that rural people are tempted by the urban life as an alternative to the rural life. This might partly be caused by the luring presentation of urban life in the media, but there are many other reasons for the migration not least the lack of prospects in the rural areas in general and the harsh winters the last two years. The media certainly plays a secondary role, and it is by no way problematic that the rural people have access to the content of modern media, instead it is problematic that they do not have access to local media.

Fortunately, we know a little about the rural people's interest in local media from two surveys conducted by two donor organisations in relation to the implementation of donor supported local radio stations (MFOS) and local newspapers (*Gobi Initiative*). Both surveys suggest that the rural population is very interested in receiving information on local issues. The herders main interest is to have access to reliable information that relates to their own lives e. g. prices on the market for cashmere, rice, etc., news about relatives in other sums and aimags, and more detailed local weather forecasts. The rural people are interested in local media, but the few existing local media have only in limited extent been able to connect to that interest, partly because the local media have had difficulties in providing relevant information to the rural people.

The main problem for the local media is nevertheless related to the infrastructure and the financial situation. It is impossible by reasonable means to establish and run local media in the rural areas, so it is hard to see how the local media

situation can be improved unless the financial problems are solved politically or by substantial donor money.

At present, the Mongolian government is developing a radical political strategy for the rural areas involving dramatic change for the herders. The goal is to urbanise up to 90% of the Mongolian population over the next 30 years.

Under the ambitious social-engineering project, a series of regional cities connected by modern communications would be built along a 2,400-kilometre east-west highway [the Millennium Road], transforming a country where almost half the people live in rural areas and some 40% of the entire population rely for their livelihood on tens of millions of livestock. ...

Agriculture, now largely tens of thousands of medium sized herds, would shift to intensive, well-managed animal husbandry involving as little as 10% of the population. (Murphy 2001).

In other words the rural people have to abstain from being nomads and move into urbanised centres in the countryside. This is a radical and centralistic approach to the geographical problems of the country. To some extent the plan is understandable because of the difficulties of developing and sustaining an infrastructure within health care, education etc. Furthermore, the devastating living conditions in the rural areas the last two winters are definitely reasons for innovative initiatives. But the plan is a dramatic transformation process changing the lives of hundred of thousands people.

Campi argues that many of the economic advisers to Mongolia have been trapped in a misapprehension of the universal excellence of the modern free-market economic theories.

The fundamental significance of nomadism to Mongolia's future growth is ignored today by some of these advisers, because they believe that integration of the country's extensive pastoral nomadic economy with its thin dispersion of people into an intensive concentrated agricultural economy mixed with industry is inevitable. (Campi, 1996 p.92)

The ideas of the foreign advisers have obviously been accepted by the present government, and it seems that the government is ready to give up the traditional nomadic culture for a modernisation of the country.

The phenomenon of nomadism is an alternate, living economic culture with its own laws and social relations that must be further studied and understood, if true economic reform and modernization are to be successfully implemented in Mongolia. (op. cit. p.93)

It is of course a political question to what degree a country wants to develop the rural areas in respect to health care, education, media and infrastructure in general. The media situation will obviously reflect these political decisions, but it is difficult to see how a dramatic transformation process can be successful unless the involved people participate in the process.

Mongolia a unique case

Above we have addressed some cultural and social issues about the media's role in the current transition of the Mongolian society. We have put together some bits and pieces to shed some light on the issues, and we have pointed out interesting facts and relations, which again have raised new important questions. On the other hand we have by no means been able to analyse all the issues satisfactorily, because we lack detailed knowledge on the media content and knowledge on readership and audiences.

The Mongolian media have quite successfully on the national level (in the capital) served the public sphere in the democratisation process, but the media situation

in general is in many ways out of synchronisation with the current social and cultural changes. Especially the dominating paternalistic mode of address is an inadequate way of addressing the complex societal changes, although this mode of address in some ways is well-known from both the nomadic tradition and the communist era.

The media situation is in a complex transition process, where the media themselves undergo structural, financial, and editorial changes and simultaneously have to operate in a society in the midst of complex transition processes. The Mongolian situation is in many ways unique and it does not fit into any well-established general theory, so it has to be analysed in its specificity. The national media and the local media in the capital have merged into each other both on the sender and the receiver end. All the 'national' media are based in the capital and 9 out of 10 media employees are working there. The 'national' media are also aimed at the population in the capital (the government run national electronic media is partly an exception). This capital/national level is predominant even on a content level, so the local and global levels play minor roles.

The local media are in their insignificance extremely local, and the media outlets are continuously struggling to survive. The global level is primarily represented by an electronic 'missionary man', while the global influence on the national media is limited. In the cable TV systems there are a second kind of globalisation, or maybe more correct, a kind of trans-national regionalisation with Inner-Mongolian (Chinese), Russian, Chinese and Japanese TV, but the impact of trans-national cable TV seems to be limited.

Mongolian media are Mongolian.

References

Arjun Appadurai: *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* Public Worlds, vol 1 University of Minnesota Press 19xx

Ole Bruun and Ole Odgaard ed: *Mongolia in Transition Old Patterns, New Challenges* Curzon 1996

Alicia J. Campi: *Nomadic Cultural Values and Their Influence on Modernization* In: Ole Bruun and Ole Odgaard ed: *Mongolia in Transition Old Patterns, New Challenges* Curzon 1996

Rolf Gilberg and Jan-Olof Svantesson: *The Mongols, Their Land and History* In: Ole Bruun and Ole Odgaard ed: *Mongolia in Transition Old Patterns, New Challenges* Curzon 1996

The Gobi initiative (Unpublished 1999)

Media Freedom in Mongolia International Federation of Journalists 1996

Monitoring Mongolian Media 1999 Press Institute of Mongolia 2000

Monitoring Mongolian Media 2000 Press Institute of Mongolia 2001

David Murphey: *No Rooms for Nomads* Far Eastern Economic Review, May 31, 2001 www.feer.com/0105_31/p030region

Bill Siemering: *Rural Radio in Mongolia* (Unpublished 1999)

Jan Servaes: *Communication for development* Hampton Press 1999

Jan Servaes, Thomas L Jacobsen, and Shirley A White ed: *Participation for Social Change* Sage 1996

John W Williams: *Mass Media in Post-Revolution Mongolia* (Unpublished 1996)

