

The Tradition of Patronage Appointments in Mongolia

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Abstract: Mongolia is a democratic country located in Central Asia. More than 30 years ago, the country transitioned to a democratic system and initiated and implemented wide-ranging social, economic, and political reforms. One component of these reforms was the reform of the civil service. However, recent studies have pointed out that the efforts made to reform and change the civil service have not been effective. One of the more important political factors affecting the quality of civil service institutions in Mongolia is the colonization of the state apparatus by politically appointed public sector employees. In other words, patronage appointments have long characterized the professionalism of Mongolia's civil service.

The article attempts to study patronage appointments in Mongolia's civil service and their current state from a historical perspective. Researchers propose that throughout Mongolia's statehood history, five types of patronage appointments have existed, influenced by the organizational characteristics of the states that prevailed in different periods.

Keywords: Patronage Appointments, Public Service, Politicization, Bureaucracy, and Mongolia.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mongolia was under a socialist regime for about 70 years. Since the political movement in 1990, it has transformed into a democracy. Alongside this transition, Mongolia initiated comprehensive changes including all aspects of social life. An essential component of these reforms focused on developing a professional civil service. Over three decades have elapsed since implementing the merit-based civil service system. However, a system has emerged that combines political favoritism, cronyism, and widespread corruption. This has led to a scenario in which unelected appointments predominantly cater to the interests of those in power, enabling them to consolidate their control by placing party loyalists in influential roles.

Mongolia presents an interesting case for examining political patronage. The country's current administrative system is shaped by a mix of deep-rooted traditions and the impact of its state-socialist past. This system blends candidates' social standing and party loyalty with a strictly merit-based selection process, all focused on centrally managing a planned economy.

According to the World Bank's recommendations, no more than 5% of a country's total civil servants should be

appointed through patronage. Exceeding this threshold can negatively impact the professionalism and stability of the civil service, leading to increased politicization and hindering the country's development [1].

According to the report by Mongolia's Civil Service Council, as of 2023, the country has 226,496 public servants, accounting for 6.46% of the total population. The number of public servants has steadily increased since 1995. Public servants in Mongolia are categorized into four groups: administrative, special, support, and political servants. The number of public sector employees has grown, along with an increase in the number of civil servants. As civil servants have grown, illegal appointments and dismissals have become more common. The Civil Service Council's report indicates that between 2019 and 2024, there has been an increase in complaints, disputes, and resolutions related to unlawful appointments.

Between 2019 and 2024, 2,000 appointments were found to violate regulations among 20,596 administrative civil servants across 1,202 organizations. This means that one in ten (9.7%) administrative civil servants is affected by political patronage. Of these, 1,423 decisions were annulled by the appointing authorities, 209 by the Civil Service Council, and 45 decisions were suspended. An inspection involving 1,883

career civil servants from 16 ministries revealed that the appointments of 168 officials were found to violate the law (Civil Service Council, 2024). Turnover in the civil service has also shown a consistent upward trend. In 2007, 5.20% of all civil servants were subject to turnover, increasing to 9.32% in 2012, 11.52% in 2013, 13.09% in 2014, 13.35% in 2015, 14.23% in 2016, 15.50% in 2017, 16.88% in 2018, 22.30% in 2019, and 21.80% in 2022 [3], [4], [2].

It can be concluded that one in five civil servants in Mongolia experiences turnover each year. Additionally, one in ten civil servants faces unlawful appointments or dismissals, indicating a lack of professionalism and stability within the system. The prevalence of patronage appointments in Mongolia is influenced by several factors, including longstanding traditions associated with the civil service.

II. METHODOLOGY

In writing the research article, the methods of historical analysis, comparative analysis, and content analysis were employed.

Within the scope of the article, an attempt was made to examine and define the concept of patronage appointments, which is a significant notion in modern political science, as well as its manifestations, distinctive characteristics, and essence in the historical context of Mongolia's state tradition. In doing so, the aforementioned research methods were utilized.

In modern political research, patronage appointments are considered one of the main methods and tools of power distribution and retention by the ruling party and forces.

Political scientists have mentioned four main approaches to studying patronage in the civil service: political economy, cultural, institutional, and political. A characteristic feature of the political economy approach is the patronage attribution in the civil service to social and economic factors such as poverty, education, and income levels.

Yet, the institutional approach prioritizes patronage as a representational norm of social interaction.

There is also a cultural approach to patronage study in the civil service due to cultural backwardness in developing countries. Additionally, the approach to politics emphasizes power distribution in the political arena and the influence of parties and politicians in the process [25].

Patronage, defined by researchers in many different ways, contrarily based on common characteristics, can be considered as follows. We understand and determine political patronage as a two-way relationship between patrons and clients involved in appointing members and supporters to public positions requiring knowledge, qualifications, and experience, as well as dismissing public servants, regardless of the resolution's legality [24].

III. RESULTS

Merilee S. Grindle's work states that no country is free of political patronage [5]. From the perspective of Mongolia's statehood traditions, studying this phenomenon would require tracing it back to the first powerful nomadic state, the Xiongnu Empire. While some researchers claim that Mongolia has a history spanning five thousand years (Bold 2013), archaeological evidence suggests that the first nomadic state, the Xiongnu Empire, was established over two thousand years ago, around the 4th century BCE [7], [8].

Until its downfall in 93 CE, when the combined military forces of the Han Dynasty and the Xianbei tribes defeated them, the Xiongnu played a significant role in the region. Researchers [9] [10] have also noted that the Xiongnu had a unique bureaucratic tradition. The ruler of the Xiongnu Empire was titled "Chanyu" and was considered extraordinary and divinely ordained, often accompanied by the phrase "Chenli Gutu" [11]. The Chanyu was usually chosen from the Xülanti tribe. Throughout the existence of the Xiongnu Empire, 46 Chanyus took the throne, indicating that the line of succession remained largely uninterrupted.

However, the bureaucratic system was quite distinct. Bureaucracy is defined as "an administrative organization where officials, distinguished by their knowledge and accumulated experience, exercise a unique political and legal authority to govern and execute duties according to state-established norms" [14].

The civil service and bureaucratic system of the Xiongnu Empire were characterized by strict hierarchy and organization. According to researcher D. Baigal (2022), the 16 essential qualities required for a government official during the Xiongnu period were categorized into knowledge, skills, and attitudes [15]. However, the selection and promotion of officials heavily depended on their clan affiliation. Later scholars have extensively documented that, despite emphasizing competence, experience, and loyalty, the Xiongnu rulers primarily appointed officials from specific dominant clans such as the Huyan, Lan, and Xubu [10].

Weber (1978) described this practice as a form of patriarchal political rule, where power was concentrated among esteemed male leaders of a lineage or clan. In this system, the emperor and his officials shared a relationship akin to that of a lord and his vassals. The emperor was chosen based on military and intellectual excellence, and the aristocrats who served as officials were expected to demonstrate loyalty to him. However, if the emperor's charisma declined, these aristocratic officials would compete for the throne, leading to political instability. Although the emperor demanded loyalty, he could not arbitrarily undermine the social status of his officials, as they derived their power from their clan heritage rather than the emperor's authority [16], [17].

The bureaucratic tradition established during the Xiongnu period continued through the Xianbei, Rouran, Turkic, Uyghur, and Khitan states. This tradition dictated that,

even if an individual possessed knowledge, experience, and loyalty to the emperor, they could not be promoted unless they belonged to a ruling clan. Favoritism (placing trust in a particular individual) and nepotism (appointing individuals based on family ties) were considered fundamental aspects of the bureaucratic system. Since the emperor was the primary authority responsible for distributing state resources [17], a mutually beneficial relationship formed between the emperor and his officials, who were both members of the ruling clan and loyal to him. The system can be defined as clan-based political patronage.

Clan-based political patronage persisted from the emergence of early states in Mongolia until the early 12th century when the Mongol Empire consolidated power. However, during certain periods, emperors sought to maintain political stability by appointing dependent officials to administer the state. This transition gave rise to a distinct bureaucratic structure known as the patrimonial civil service.

The concepts of patronage, patrimonialism, and neo-patrimonialism are used to describe different structures of political and social relationships and the methods of power distribution. While these concepts have distinct meanings, they are interrelated.

Patronage encompasses a wide array of relationships where political and social elites grant favors to their clients in return for loyalty and support. In such a system, patrons wield power and distribute resources, while clients gain employment, wealth, opportunities, and protection in exchange for their allegiance. A central feature of this practice is political patronage appointments, where loyalty takes precedence over merit.

Patrimonialism describes an authoritarian system where state power and governance are treated as the ruler's personal property. In such a system, state offices and resources are distributed at the ruler's discretion as if they were private assets. Government institutions and officials serve the personal interests of the leader rather than the public. Power is concentrated within the leader's family and inner circle, legal institutions are weak, and personal relationships dominate governance. **Patrimonialism** is a system where the state is managed like personal property, a practice deeply rooted in absolute monarchy traditions. Unlike the patriarchal model, the ruler in this system became an absolute authority, and a bureaucracy of officials who obeyed him without question emerged. In this case, kinship and clan relations no longer played a decisive role in selecting and promoting officials; instead, loyalty to the ruler became the key factor. In other words, the ruler sought to strengthen his rule by appointing his trusted inner circle to government positions [17]. This characteristic became particularly prominent in the 13th century, during the formation of a unified and powerful feudal state in Mongolia. Specifically, it was firmly established during the reign of Genghis Khan and his successors in the Mongol Empire.

Temüjin, who unified the fragmented clans and tribes and became the Khan of the Khamag Mongol in 1189, played

a crucial role in the development of Mongolian statehood [18], [14]. At the same time, he is seen as a reformer of the bureaucratic system. Genghis Khan prioritized intelligence, talent, strategic thinking, broad-mindedness, and resilience when selecting officials to build and consolidate the state. Although he valued noble lineage, he did not consider ancestry or aristocratic background when appointing officials to administrative and military positions. Instead, he focused primarily on an individual's competence and moral integrity [19].

During previous states, clan-based political patronage had been an effective system, but it changed during the reign of Genghis Khan. As the historical records state, "...the nomadic people became just and orderly, and in the Year of the Tiger, they gathered at the source of the Onon River, raised the Nine White Banners, and granted Temüjin the title of Genghis Khan (Great Oceanic Khan)". This event marked the beginning of a transformation in Mongolia's statehood and bureaucratic system. The clan-based political patronage that originated during the Xiongnu period declined, giving way to a system where an individual's knowledge, skills, and loyalty were prioritized over clan affiliation in appointments and promotions. In this context, some scholars argue that a merit-based system in civil service emerged during the reign of Genghis Khan. For example, scholar D. Lkhaashid (2009) stated in his work that "Genghis Khan laid the foundation for the modern meritocratic system" [18].

However, whether a system that strictly prioritized knowledge and skills in civil service selection and promotion was fully established remains questionable. During Genghis Khan's rule, the principle that knowledge, skills, and loyalty to the Khan were more important than clan affiliation was firmly upheld. Figures such as Boorchii, Muqali, Jebe, and Subutai exemplify this approach. This system can be described as political patronage based on personal loyalty.

The form of political patronage effectively implemented during Genghis Khan's time persisted in some form until the end of Kublai Khan's reign. Although there were attempts to modify the patronage-based appointment system by introducing elements of meritocracy, it never fully developed into a systematic practice. For instance, Ögedei Khan, upon the request of Chu Mergen, issued a decree to recruit scholars into government service, leading to a selection process in 1237. Additionally, in 1235, a state school was established to train officials for governing foreign territories. However, these initiatives did not evolve into a well-established system and remained as isolated efforts by individual rulers.

A significant shift in the bureaucratic system occurred during the reign of Emperor Öljaitü Temür, who integrated elements of the traditional Chinese system into Mongolian governance. Although Kublai Khan had initiated reforms, their effective implementation is closely associated with Öljaitü Temür. In particular, the document known as *Li-Zheng-Yi* ("Proposal for State Establishment"), drafted by the Chinese official Hao Jing, played a central role in this transformation. Despite opposition from Mongolian nobles

like Bayan, the emperor ultimately approved its implementation [20].

Professor Têng Ssu-yü of Indiana University highlighted that "the mechanism for selecting officials developed during the Qin, Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties ceased to be used in the early Yuan Dynasty but was revived in 1313 and effectively practiced until the Ming and Qing dynasties, continuing until 1905" [20].

With the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in China in 1370, Toghon Temür Khan returned to Mongolia, marking the beginning of a period of political fragmentation [7]. During this period of disunity, civil service appointments and promotions considered both clan affiliation and an individual's knowledge, skills, and loyalty. Furthermore, this system persisted into the Qing-Mongolian alliance under the Manchurled Qing Dynasty. This hybrid form of political patronage remained to some extent until 1921.

This system can be categorized as *hybrid political patronage*, where, alongside an individual's knowledge and loyalty, their belonging to the *Golden Lineage* of Genghis Khan and their stance on dominant religions were also considered in official appointments. Although hybrid political patronage existed between 1370 and 1921, its implementation varied across different historical periods. The following stages of hybrid political patronage can be identified:

- Hybrid political patronage during the feudal fragmentation period
- Hybrid political patronage during the Qing-Mongolian alliance under the Qing Dynasty
- Hybrid political patronage during the national independence restoration period

The feudal fragmentation period is referred to in Mongolian historiography by various names, including the *Era of Minor Khans* and the *Period of Political Disunity*. However, it generally covers the time between 1370 and 1691. During this period, centralized power weakened, the authority of the emperor declined, and the power of local nobles increased. Consequently, it became necessary to entrust state affairs to trusted and loyal individuals, particularly those with high status within their clan. This period's bureaucratic system reflected this necessity, balancing competence, loyalty, and clan affiliation in appointments.

As Mongolian nobles and emperors lost influence and Mongolia came under foreign rule, significant changes occurred in the bureaucratic system. These changes can be understood through the characteristics of Qing Dynasty governance, which included:

- A coexistence of nomadic and Chinese bureaucratic traditions.
- A preference for appointing officials from Mongolian, Manchu, Chinese, and Tibetan backgrounds.
- A focus on inter-ethnic competition to ensure political stability in the central government.

- An emphasis on trust and personal, clan, and familial ties in appointments.
- A principle of considering both competence and clan affiliation in the selection of local leaders.

The primary goal of these policies was to establish a stable Manchu rule in Mongolia. As a result of the National Liberation Movement of 1911, an absolute theocratic monarchy was established in Mongolia. The primary goal of the state was to consolidate and protect its independence, and the appointment and promotion of officials in the civil service were based on this objective. However, it is noteworthy that, in addition to knowledge, skills, and loyalty, the principle that lineage and tribal affiliation were important remained firmly in place.

On November 26, 1924, Mongolia adopted its first constitution, which led to changes and reforms in the rules and regulations governing civil service operations. With the adoption of the 1940 and 1960 constitutions, further reforms were introduced to the civil service regulations. While the official structure of the state did not undergo significant changes, the mechanism for appointing and promoting civil servants became increasingly sophisticated.

However, the principle that "the party is the red corner of the state" [22] became the foundation for appointing and promoting civil servants. In other words, the appointment and promotion of officials were based on whether they were party members, their loyalty to the party, their experience within the party, and the endorsements of other party members. This system later came to be described by scholars as "nomenklatura." For instance, Yugoslav political scientist Milovan Đilas and Soviet scholar Mikhail Voslensky defined nomenklatura as "a new ruling class that enjoys special privileges and is detached from society". In Soviet-era political textbooks, nomenklatura was described as "a list of key positions that are pre-approved, discussed, and ratified through party committees (district, city, provincial), with appointments and dismissals following this process. The nomenklatura includes employees appointed to key positions" [23].

This system can also be explained by the neo-patrimonial model of domination developed by Max Weber. Neo-patrimonialism refers to a form of governance that combines elements of traditional patrimonial systems with modern state institutions and administrative structures. This system is characterized by the implementation of traditional leadership practices through modern state mechanisms.

Although state institutions appear to function according to formal rules, in reality, they serve the personal interests of the ruling elite. Patronage relations are widespread, and the political system is structured to legitimize power. Later, political scientist Ts. Batbold (2013) referred to this as "politicized bureaucracy." According to him, politicized bureaucracy refers to a system in which "instead of managers and technocrats, members of the ruling political party are appointed to leadership positions in public administration and all other sectors" [17]. The goal was to weaken the capacity,

independence, and political neutrality of the civil service while strengthening the ideological control of the ruling party and subjecting all members of society to abstract ideological principles.

This situation remained consistently in place at all levels in Mongolia from 1924 to 1992. On June 30, 1940, during the 8th Congress, amendments were made to the constitution, altering the structure of central and local governance. The amendment reaffirmed that the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) was "the leading force in directing all state and social organizations" [24]. Although some changes were observed in party and state personnel policies following the adoption of the 1960 constitution, the fundamental principles remained intact. This system can be defined as political patronage based on nomenklatura.

In modern Mongolia, patronage-based appointments remain strongly entrenched in the civil service. For instance, one in every five civil servants experiences job turnover annually, while one in ten is subjected to unlawful dismissals and reassignments. Political parties, factions, interest groups, and individual politicians exert significant influence over appointments. This indicates that a mixed form of patronage continues to play a dominant role in Mongolia's civil service recruitment and placement.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

➤ *The Researchers draw the Following Conclusions within the Context of the Paper:*

First, from the perspective of the history of statehood in Mongolia, the tradition of patronage has been stronger than the merit-based system in the civil service.

Second, the nature of patronage appointments was different across various historical periods.

Third, five main forms of patronage appointments existed in the history of Mongolia's statehood.

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