

BOGDO KHAAN, the Rebel Monk

Only recently the truth about the life and deeds of Bogd Khaan, the head of the Lamaist religion and the last Khaan of Mongols emerges. For decades the communist powers badmouthed and distorted his image portraying him as an old debauchee, half blind syphilitic and the oppressor of people.

But in reality he was the key figure behind the declaration of independence of Mongolia after 200 years of Chinese rule. For his quest of the country's independence he was named the Rebellious Priest. It was him who ordered in 1911 to arrest the Peking appointed governor and defeated the Chinese harrison taking Manchu rulers by surprise.



A man of letters, fond of life pleasures, Bogdo Khaan (1870-1924) braved the might of Chinese rulers to declare independence.

While Beijing remained shocked by such a impudence from usually meek Mongols, and the bureaucratic machine was slowly eschewing the news, Bogd Khaan liberated the country and announced himself khaan of Mongolia.

The ceremony of elevating him to the throne took place in December of 1911 and turned into a nation wide celebration, marking the end of the Chinese rule. Thankful Mongols granted the title of All Elevated Khaan to 42-year-old Tibetan and presented him 99 white mares and 99 white she camels according to traditions of Chinggis Khaan times.

The warning from Beijing to stop the "mutiny" did not slowed down Bogd Khaan in his far reaching quest for Mongolia's liberation, including Inner Mongolia as well. In spring of 1913, Mongolian troops defeated the Chinese army on the southern border and advanced to Inner Mongolia, and were it not for the diplomatic demarch of Russian they would have taken over even Beijing.

The Russian emissary to Beijing urgently signed with China an agreement, according to which Outer Mongolia was recognized an autonomy and both superpowers consenting not to occupy it. Inner Mongolia however still remained under the Chinese jurisdiction.

Despite the fact that Bogd Khaan played a crucial role in the history of Mongolia of 20 century century very little is known about him as a person. No documents or private papers and just a few religious verdicts remain after him. We only know that he was a well educated man of letters and a shrewd politician thinking far ahead and precisely. "He was wise enough to use the Chinese mutiny to



The Summer Palace of Bogdo Khaan, now a museum.



declare Mongolia independent," wrote Russian press.

As any Buddhist he was not an orthodox and stayed open for new ideas. After stepping on throne he allowed to set up a two-chamber parliament replacing the National Council consisting of nobles exclusively. He encouraged education and helped to set up a number of non-religious schools.

Being Dalai Lama, he though was not the best example for own subjects, marrying despite his religious vow. He did not avoid worldly entertainments and love pleasures. His most beloved drink was champagne. He patronized artists and painters, but also collected technical gizmos. He even set up a zoo and a small exhibition bringing an elephant all the way from India.

He was merciful but strictly observed the law. When his old friend from childhood made a drunken fight during which he broke the Khan's teeth, the Bogdo Khan forgave him. But when he ordered a noble who spent public money to be publicly executed. Despite all these frivolities, Mongols deeply revered him and even loved him.

"At night I was woken up by a deep roar. It was late and streets were deserted. It seemed the whole town was mesmerized by this strange sound. I put on clothes, went out and walked all the way to Zuun Khuree monastery where I saw rows and rows of monks, perhaps 10,000 of them."

"In the night darkness they prayed in one, thousands strong choir. The prayer fluctuated from deep roar to a thin, almost unbearable tenor, then went down again to bass. Something inhuman, grand was in this song. All the while the town remained empty and streets deserted. And though I asked many Mongols what it was no one told me," recalls I.A. Sorokovikov, that time an officer with the Red Army.

This was the last will of the dying, deeply ill Bogdo Khan. What monks prayed for? And what prophecy it bore? That time the first wave of repressions was dawning with close associates of Bogdo Khan being arrested.

He died on April 1924 and was buried with honors inside the Gandan monastery. Few years later the monastery was turned into a barrack for Russian military and his remains disappeared without trace. As well as the true culture of Buddhism.



Bogdo Khan came to Mongolia from Tibet at age of five to become the Rebel Monk.

