

RESEARCH NOTE

RESEARCH ON MONGOLIA IN CANADA

By *Julian Dierkes (Canada)*

Canadian companies have been playing an increasingly active and important role in the Mongolian economy. Canadian investment, primarily in the natural resource sector, has topped \$200 million over the past few years and Canada has thus become one of Mongolia's "third neighbours". Academic relations are lagging behind these economic links, but interest in Mongolia is growing in various Canadian research institutions. However, this interest has not been institutionalized in any research unit that is specifically devoted to Mongolia.

Historically, Canadian universities were relatively late in institutionalizing research foci on Asia with the first dedicated appointments and departments appearing in the 1950s. Owen Lattimore was one of the more prominent individuals with a Canadian connection to specialize on Mongolia. He served as an editor and published frequently in *Pacific Affairs*, including articles and reviews of books on Mongolia, continuing this history after *Pacific Affairs* had moved to the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Since normalization of diplomatic relations between Canada and Mongolia in late 1973 there have been a number of individual researchers who have conducted studies on Mongolia including Robert Bedeski of the University of Victoria. This level of individual attention has increased since the early 1990s.

Central and Inner Asian Studies (CIAS) at the University of Toronto has been closest to an institutionalized interest in Mongolia. In 2007, CIAS is hosting the 12th conference on Central and Inner Asia since 1994. While these conferences have been organized thematically rather than geographically within Inner Asia, they have always included presentations on Mongolia. CIAS continues to make publications from these conferences available to the research community and the public. Historian Michael Gervers has served as the coordinator of CIAS. His own research is focused on medieval economic and social history.

Recently, the UBC's Institute of Asian Research (IAR) has initiated a Mongolia Lecture Series and has also offered a course on mining regulation in Mongolia as a part of its Master of Asia Pacific Policy Studies. Building on the

participation of Paul Evans (IAR and Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada) and Brian Job (Political Science and Liu Institute for Global Issues) in security-related research and activities, Julian Dierkes (IAR) is now spearheading the establishment of Mongolia expertise at UBC. UBC's strength in mining engineering and the concentration of mining exploration companies in Vancouver suggests that interest in Mongolia will be expanding in the future. Marcello Veiga (Mining Engineering) has already broadened his on-going global research on artisanal mining to Mongolia and more concrete research projects are likely to follow at UBC.

Currently, the most significant funded activities on Mongolia are being conducted at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) and at St. Mary's University through grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture is participating with Agriteam Canada in a CIDA-funded project to develop minimum tillage in Mongolia. This project promotes sustainable rural development through the strengthening and collaboration of agricultural research, teaching and extension institutions, especially the Mongolia State University of Agriculture and the National Agricultural Extension Centre. The project is led by Paul Stevens (Agriculture) and aims at poverty alleviation through cooperative development and institutional coordination between levels of government within the central region. An additional project is spearheaded by Lou Hammond Ketilson of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. This project focuses on the training needs to support cooperatives and economic development in *soums* within *Tov aimag* of the central region. Through its activities and focus on agriculture, the U of S has attracted a number of Mongolian graduate students. A number of these students have been working on the establishment of a Mongolia-Canada Society.

At St. Mary's University, the activities funded by CIDA have been focused on the mining sector and on facilitating curricular reforms in response to the economic transition that is occurring in Mongolia. These activities have been directed by Jaroslav Dostal (Geology) and are occurring in collaboration with the Mongolian University of Science and Technology (MUST). Project activities have included numerous technical workshops and conferences, as well as research at three Mongolian mining sites including training of and research collaboration with Mongolian colleagues at the faculty and graduate student level. Activities have also included curriculum development planning and implementation for MUST relying on the expertise on mining education at St.

Mary's but also on an understanding of mining operations in the stringent Canadian regulatory environment. A final substantive area of focus has been the gender distribution within the professional mining community in Mongolia.

In addition to these larger CIDA-funded projects, York University has recently begun collaboration with the National University of Mongolia (NUM) focusing on sustainable water management. This program builds on Canadian expertise in and promotion of human security in the context of the supply of clean water. The project will involve student and faculty exchanges as well as a number of specific research activities and is directed by Dawn Bazely (Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability) in collaboration with researchers in NUM's Water Resource Centre.

In the field of health research, Craig Janes (Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University) has been conducting research on links between risk factors and a particular disease, including individual, cultural, social, and community level context variables in Mongolia. He has also examined the impact of the dismantling of the centrally-planned economy on poor communities. While working at Health Canada, Miga Chultem is completing a doctoral dissertation on the gender impact of health care privatization in Mongolia at York University.

The Canada Fund and Special Awards for Canadian Studies have brought a number of Mongolian scholars to Canada in recent years and it can only be hoped that these links will expand in the future. While research on Mongolia has not found a dedicated institutional home in Canada, the growing economic interconnections between the two countries as well as increased Canadian government attention to Mongolia, which will hopefully lead to a full-fledged diplomatic presence in Ulaanbaatar, suggest that academic links will continue to grow and that Canadian academics will increasingly be able to play a more visible role in research on Mongolia.