

Online Journal of Space Communication

Volume 2
Issue 5 *Satellites Address the Digital Divide*
(Fall 2003)

Article 10

June 2021

Social and Cultural Issues: The Digital Divide in the Gobi Desert: Spatiality, the National Identity Collapse, and a Language Gap

Undrahbuyan Basaanjav

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/spacejournal>



Part of the [Astrodynamics Commons](#), [Navigation, Guidance, Control and Dynamics Commons](#), [Space Vehicles Commons](#), [Systems and Communications Commons](#), and the [Systems Engineering and Multidisciplinary Design Optimization Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Basaanjav, Undrahbuyan (2021) "Social and Cultural Issues: The Digital Divide in the Gobi Desert: Spatiality, the National Identity Collapse, and a Language Gap," *Online Journal of Space Communication*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 5 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/spacejournal/vol2/iss5/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the OHIO Open Library Journals at OHIO Open Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Online Journal of Space Communication by an authorized editor of OHIO Open Library. For more information, please contact debord@ohio.edu.

**The Digital Divide in the Gobi Desert: spatiality, the national
identity collapse and a language gap**

Undrahbuyan Baasanjav, Ohio University

Introduction

This paper explores how the people in rural Mongolia and modern information technology influence each other. The Internet reached the Gobi desert in 1999, mostly in the form of Community Information Centers or Internet cafes. The Gobi desert in Mongolia presents a picture of extreme remoteness. No research has been conducted to examine how people in the countryside of Mongolia use the Internet and what social and cultural influences the Internet gives to these people. All aspects of the digital divide phenomenon - global, social and democratic divides - are exacerbating factors for the Gobi desert digital divide case. The Mongolian case presents a unique situation because of its geography, nomadic tradition, and Communist history.

This paper focuses on three geographical and cultural aspects of the digital divide in the Gobi desert of Mongolia. First, this paper examines how the Internet breaks the geo-spatial notion of local vs. global in remote areas like the Gobi desert in rural Mongolia. Second, the paper examines whether or not the Internet changes the notion of national identity among people in rural Mongolia. Thirdly, this paper examines the language aspects of Internet development in rural Mongolia.

This research explores the same developments in the Asian region, and conducts a literature review on the cultural aspects of the digital divide in developing countries. The research approaches the digital divide issue from the point of view of cultural study theories. In-depth interviews were conducted through interactive chat and over the phone

with an expert group in the Gobi Desert, particularly in Umnugobi aimag (province) to explore how people in the Gobi Desert use the Internet, the changes the Internet has made to their culture and community, and their social and economical constraints.

Mongolian context

Mongolia is a landlocked, nomadic livestock breeding country sandwiched between China and Russia. It has a sparse population of 2.4 million on its 1.5 million square kilometer territory. After the collapse of Genghis Khan's Mongolian Empire and its many subsequent kingdoms, the country survived a three-century-long Manchu colonization. During the rise of the Mongolian Empire, Mongolians developed an efficient intelligence and communication system – the pony express information system. This military information system consisted of Urtoo – a node along the network and Ulaach - a messenger who conveyed important military information.¹ The nodes of the intelligence system were mainly gers – circular felt tents that are easily set - up and dismantled. The ger remains home for nomadic Mongolian people even today. The messaging system operated till the very beginning of twentieth century.

In the early 1900s, Mongolia underwent civil unrest caused by the Socialist Revolution in Russia, and the Chinese military dominance of the Kuomintang. Both China and Russia invaded the country and created much political disorder. Mongolia's independence was announced only in 1911 as a Monarchy with Bogd Khan as the religious and political leader of the nation. Not long after, in 1921, the country became the second socialist country as the result of the People's Revolution and remained so until another revolution, this time democratic, in 1990. Since the democratic revolution, the country is taking the road to democracy and a market oriented economy as it is

¹ Mayhew, B. p. 20

promulgated in the new 1992 Constitution of Mongolia. According to the new Constitution, Mongolia is a democratic republic where freedom of speech, press and information is guaranteed.

Umnugovi province in the Gobi desert

“The romance of the desert will be destroyed. Tourists will sit in heated cars, eating the food of Europe, reading week-old newspapers, and comprehending not at all the glorious history, the tragedy and the romance of the Gobi trails.”

Roy Chapman Andrews. (Mayhew, 2001, p.286)

The Umnugovi (South Gobi) province is the largest but the least populated aimag in the southern part of Mongolia. The Gobi Desert covers most of the province. The wildlife in the province is rich with thousands of gazelles, wild sheep and rare snow leopards. Also the province has the biggest number of two-humped domesticated camels in Mongolia and a large number of cattle. The untapped landscape and the preserved nomadic culture are the main characteristics of the province.

The flat steppe and the Gobi desert are the homeland to nomadic people still riding their horses and living in their transportable gers (a compact circular felt tent home of the nomadic people built and dismantled in a few minutes.) Typically, nomadic Mongolians are owners of five types of animals – sheep, goats, horses, camels, and cows. They move from one place to another throughout the year seeking fresh pasture for their animals. The families in the Gobi desert maintain a self-sufficient and simple life. The traditional nomadic culture in Umnugobi province has been preserved in most places except the province center.

Modernity and globalization have changed the province centers of the Gobi Desert. The movements of people to urbanized areas intensified during the socialist period. For herders, the city provided education, and increased opportunity, and many of them moved to the province center and the capital, leaving the rural areas even more deserted. The province center in the Gobi, like other Mongolian urbanized areas, generally consists of two territorial parts. One of them is a “placeless” modern apartment area, built during the socialist period and the other part is the “ger district” where people, who recently moved into urbanized areas or people who cannot get apartments live in the traditional Mongolian felt homes. The apartment complexes are commonly in the downtown, which provide easy access to social services and resources, while ger districts surround the apartment areas and do not have easy accesses to basic services such as electricity, water pipes, and telephone access. As Holt-Jensen (1999) pointed out, these apartment areas and ger districts clearly create “social exclusion circles.” Typically, people living in ger districts do not have easy access to technology and social life.

After the democratic revolution of 1990 and the collapse of socialism, Mongolia has become an open country for tourists. The Gobi remained one of the most homogenous cultures until the 90s, due to remoteness and political conditions. As Mr. Andrews predicted, many tourists from different parts of the world travel to Umnugobi province to experience untapped nature and preserved nomadic life. Mr. Andrews visited the Gobi desert in the 1920’s, and the Hollywood character Indiana Jones was based on his life. Globalization brought tourist camps creating hybridization zones in the Gobi. Kraidy (1999) argues that locality is inherently a hybrid space created by cultural flow. Tourist camps create blending in the culture of the Gobi desert. While

studying Hawaiian culture, Akindes (1999) asserts that there are two different cultures that are separated from each other - one superior for-tourist front culture that is shut from the back region culture, the latter believed to be threatening for tourists. In addition to the tourist camps, there are many international organizations that add to these increasingly hybridized localities. Tourism and hybridized space plays an important role in the study of the digital divide in the Gobi desert.

Internet in the Gobi desert

Ramanathan (2001), in his analysis of the Internet development in Asia, identifies three categories of countries in the region based on the accessibility of the Internet. These three categories are - Internet-rich Asian countries, countries with Internet sufficiency, and Internet-poor Asian countries. According to Ramanathan, Mongolia is considered an Internet-poor country along with mountainous countries like Tibet, and Afghanistan.

The Internet reached the Gobi desert in 1999, in the form of Community Information Centers or Internet cafes. The Internet café is a room in a public library with computers and a satellite dish that allow people in the province to communicate with other parts of the country, as well as with the outside world. After two years of operation Internet access has been extended to government, educational and local judiciary offices. This extension to a wider population through wide area networks allows many organizations in the Gobi to be a part of the global information society.

The access to the Internet in the Gobi desert is provided using a wireless solution. As can be seen in Figure 1, various combinations of wireless technology are being used in the Gobi desert. The province center is connected to the Internet through a Very Small

Aperture Terminal or VSAT at the local library. Six more government and educational institutions are connected to the Internet using a wide area network through radio modems. Besides, individuals can access the messaging service through their cellular phones.

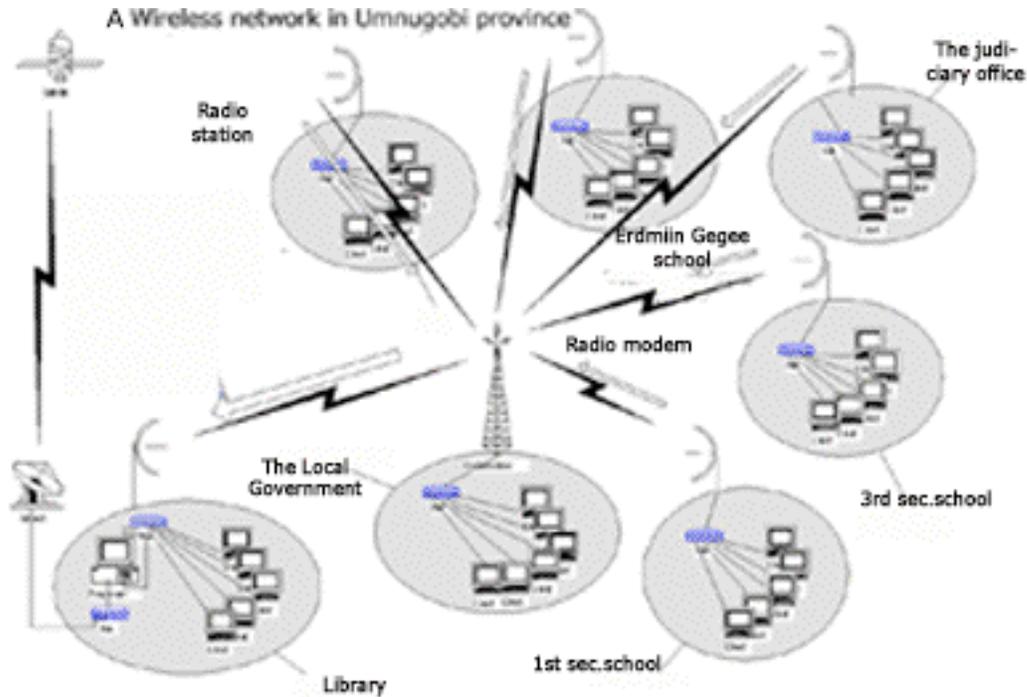


Figure 1 A Wide Area Network in the Gobi Desert.

Due to the underdeveloped fixed line infrastructure, the satellite and wireless solutions are economically preferred in the Gobi desert. Besides, these technological solutions seem to be culturally appropriate - wireless Internet access will hopefully be extended to nomadic herders. The wireless technological solution with satellites, radio modems, and cell phones in the Gobi Desert has been preferentially selected because they better fit the market and the culture than the high capacity broadband wire connection, which is the next stage of the new media development in the industrialized world.



Figure 2. The public Internet center in the Gobi Desert

Poster (2001) in his book “What is the matter with the Internet” states that the Internet is a social space that has been continually changed and reappropriated by the users of it. The development of the Internet has been grown into different directions by opening new territories, new cultures, and new forms. Initially designed for the military purposes, the Internet has become a social space where multiple forms of commerce, virtual communities, and communications occur imploding the differences of space and time, and mind and body. He goes on to say that the Internet “opens new cultural and social worlds that are only beginning to be explored.” (p.37) Poster’s explanation of the Internet is directly used in this exploratory study, which examines how people in the rural area of the Gobi desert reappropriate the Internet in their local settings. The people in the Gobi desert do not necessarily use the Internet in the same way as the users in the developed and urbanized areas. This study strives to find out the social and cultural changes that are happening in the Gobi desert due to the Internet use and the differences and similarities between the use of the Internet by “have-nots” in the extreme remoteness and the users in the developed countries.

Interviews with experts in the Gobi desert and findings

There is neither research conducted on the usage of the Internet in the provinces of Mongolia, especially in the Gobi, nor is there statistical data available on the use of the Internet by the people in the Gobi. To understand more about those who uses the Internet, how they use it, and the cultural implications and changes caused by the arrival of the Internet in the Gobi desert, in-depth interviews were conducted with an expert group in the Gobi desert. The researcher of this study has been involved in the project of the Soros Foundation which funded the Internet centers in the Gobi from the very beginning. This situation provides the researcher the advantages of knowing people and talking to the people who are most involved in the Internet use project of the Umnugobi province. The interviews were conducted using the Internet relay chat (IRC) and over the phone.

Informants

The first interviewee, Odon, is the administrator of the Internet café in the public library. She runs the Internet center and conducts computer and Internet training for people in the Gobi. The next interviewee Bat is a regional coordinator of the Soros Foundation, the organization that started the Internet project in the province. He implements regional educational, information and other programs in the province. The first two interviewees have both grown up in the province and got their education in the capital Ulaanbaatar. The third interviewee, Sarah has been working in Umnugobi for three months. She is a student in Bath University, England, doing her degree in economics and international development. Sarah has a year - long contract from the Youth for Development (YFD) program of an organization called British Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). It is noteworthy to compare the opinions of westerners with

those of the local people about Internet implications on the local society. This is especially the case because Sarah is the first person to conduct surveys on the usage of the Internet in the Gobi Desert.

The majority of users are children and women

The Internet users in Gobi use the Internet solely in the Internet cafes and work places currently. The use of the Internet in public places, and in collective forms allows for an estimation of the size and make up of the current population of the Internet users in the Gobi. Bat says there is a growing interest in the province to have the Internet at home. However, this possibility is currently limited; the only home usage of the Internet is messaging service through cell phones.

Odon, Bat and Sarah all point out that the people who take the most advantage of the Internet in the Gobi are children and young adults. They use the Internet to email their friends or to chat to each other using Yahoo messenger, and to listen to their favorite music, as well as to the FM radio stations that broadcast mostly in the capital. Odon says that young people tend to conduct the Internet chat in the Mongolian language using the Latin alphabet, even though Mongolian is typically written with Cyrillic letters. Bat mentions a local school, which conducts joint projects with a Japanese school on the Internet. The project is proceeding to have student exchanges between the two schools.

The second group of the Internet users, Bat says, is public servants, educators and pupils of secondary schools, who use the Internet at their work places and schools for work and educational purposes. Public institutions like schools, the local radio station, the judiciary office and the local government office have Internet access through a radio modem connection in Umnugobi province. People working in these institutions use the

Internet mostly in their work and use information in the local language. Bat says that the document processing in these organizations has become more efficient because of the use of file attachments. Surprisingly, Bat points out that most of people working in these institutions are female. This dominant use of the Internet by women is observed in all educational institutions of Mongolia. Women compose the biggest part of the high school and college graduates in Mongolia. One of the reasons for the better education of women in Mongolia, Bat explains, is because herders in Mongolia tend to send their daughters to schools leaving the boys to help in the hard labor of cattle breeding.

A survey conducted by AltaVista Asiawide (2000) defined Asian Internet users as “typically in their 20s, affluent, well-educated, technically oriented and surprisingly – more often female than male.” (Ramanathan and Becker, 2001, p.13) The Internet users in the Gobi desert seem to comply with this survey; young people and women use the Internet more. However, there are no statistics from the Gobi to explore age, gender, and income factors in the use of the Internet.

Income, age, and language factors in the use of the Internet

Sarah thinks that the majority of Mongolians are very poor, too poor to afford Internet services, and so it is only the middle class and above who can utilize the Internet. To make them sustainable these Internet centers charge 300 Mongolian Tugrigns (US\$ 0.30) for children and 800 Tugrign (US\$ 0.80) for adults an hour. The costs of the Internet cafés are even very high standards by the middle class Mongolians because the average salary of public servants ranges 40,000 – 70,000 Mongolian tugrigns a month (US\$ 40-50). Even with these high prices, the Internet network is overloaded and very slow during the peak hours in the afternoons. Sarah thinks that training children in

computer and Internet skills and giving them a chance to see a wider world, are useful for the future. However, she says, the Internet does not provide Mongolians in the Gobi with much useful information. “As opposed to the Internet centers, the local radio station seems a much better and more accessible way of providing information” says Sarah, because the radio reaches everyone including those who do not have computers or can not afford access, most importantly herders in countryside.

Odon points out that the biggest problem for Mongolians in the Gobi desert is the language barrier. The users in the Gobi are faced with plenty of information only accessible in the English language, and they are not able to find information in their local language. This situation causes people to feel the frustration of half-illiteracy. That is why Odon herself uses the Internet to learn English. She conducts Internet chat with foreigners to improve her English. Another informant, Bat, asserts that the largest number of the Internet users are foreigners – volunteers, missionaries, people working on contracts and tourists. Confirming two previous interviewees’ points about the language barrier, Sarah says that the major problem for providing information to people in the province, is the lack of Mongolian content online. She thinks that encouraging people to publish on the web will increase local content, which will help people to have more information. Besides, she goes on, making the centers more information oriented is a challenge “ as there is not a 'culture' of information here... I don't think people are really into books.... so we need to promote the fact that you can find things out on the Internet.” Sarah talked to a Peace Corp volunteer in the province who told her that people really are not into books [...], perhaps due to the Communist ideology of being told everything and not seeking for oneself.

The age factor, like other factors of this study needs more empirical data. Odon says that in comparison with young people, a very small number of senior people use the Internet in the café. These senior people use email to communicate with their children and relatives living outside the country or in the capital. Odon says that older people do not feel comfortable using the Internet or have a fear of using the Internet. They tend to ask younger people to help them print out their emails and send their letters to their children.

A growing interest in e-commerce.

Two informants, Odon and Bat, mention some people in the Gobi who are very enthusiastic about conducting business using the Internet. In order to take advantages of this “network business” (e-commerce) people in the Gobi take the Internet training courses offered at the café. People register on websites that wholesale different products. The most popular two websites are www.mylexus.com and www.oriflamme.com, which sell western cosmetic products. People order their products on the website and also help the website company to find more distributors in their neighborhood. The more product people sell or the more distributors they find for the website, the greater their rewards will be. This snow-balling business also brings many people from the capital who conduct the same “network business.” However, the third interviewee, Sarah, is a bit cynical about these possibilities of “network business” in the Gobi. Some people approached her in the street through her translator asking her if she know about it! Sarah says “everyone talks about the cosmetics sold at the web page www.mylexus.com. A few people signed up to sell these expensive cosmetics, and I can

not imagine there will be enough clients for them to break even... seeing as there are so many people selling the stuff. Besides, people do not have credit cards in the Gobi.”

Even though there is a growing interest in e-commerce in the Gobi desert, it is still in the very rudimentary stage. As Sarah points out, there is not a sufficient market within the countryside of Mongolia. Besides, a payment system based on credit cards has not reached the Gobi Desert yet. Thyfault (2001) states that, there are not many tangible outcomes achieved in e-commerce targeting domestic markets in developing countries. The obstacles for developing e-commerce which target a domestic market include, but are not limited to, low penetration of telecommunications services, and yet to be established payment systems for e-commerce. For example, fewer instances take place, like in India where farmers go online and check prices in neighboring towns, then auction their milk. People do not realize it is even called e-commerce. Despite the lack of access, people understand the potential of technology as a tool to escape from poverty. Shapiro and Varian (1999) state that as opposed to the developed countries where the wealth of information creates a lack of attention, the people in the developing countries are more interested in the Internet because of the deprivation of information. Besides, Thyfault asserts that poor customers are the most loyal customers. People in developing countries walk 10 miles just to use a phone.

Rao (2001) states that the successful cases of e-commerce in many developing countries start from business-to-consumer (B2C) websites that mostly target the outside market. There are certain niche markets including an outside audience - tourism, export of raw materials, handicrafts and gems - which might be a strategy for Internet economy for the developing countries. The Internet allows developing countries to reach industrial

country markets thus creating large gains from trade. Developing countries' firms that sell labor-intensive, differentiated products such as crafts, software, and business services like remote processing are experiencing increasing demand.

Discussion and Conclusion

The notion of spatiality of people in the Gobi desert

Two interviewees Odon and Bat mention the physical mobility of wireless Internet technology and its provision of possibilities for people in the Gobi to interact with the outside world. Odon mentions the reduced flow of people moving to the capital from the province and the increasing flow of people into the province to conduct “network business.” The Internet offers people in the most remote area of the world to do “network business” in their province. People in the Gobi are starting to understand the possibilities of moving through physical and social spaces, yet they are in too much of an initial stage to elaborate these businesses to target the outside market. Generally speaking, people in the Gobi gained mobility through the Internet despite geographical isolation and a comparatively stable social structure. Odon, like other young Mongolians learned English by chatting on the Internet with foreigners and getting various information from the Internet. The Internet in the Gobi desert seems to be starting to help people to move through social space.

What does all this mean to people in the Gobi? Jones (1998), discussing the importance of computer-mediated communication (CMC), emphasizes “the sense of mobility” that the users of CMC experience. This mobility he speaks of concerns movement through social space and “fixed structures of interpretation and narratives” (p.6). Poster (2001) states that the “simultaneity of email and chat modes on the Internet

completely erases spatial factors and implodes time.” (p.26) To explain this spatial erasure and time implosion, critical cultural theorists Poulantzas, Foucault, Soja and Giddens developed new philosophizing abstractions of physical, mental and social spaces. Soja (1989) states that the illumination of the ontological nexus of space-time-being to explain phenomenon is a powerful resource. Soja asserts that spatiality is socially constructed and goes on saying

“As socially constructed space, spatiality can be distinguished from the physical space of nature and the mental space of cognition and representation, each of which is used and incorporated into the construction of spatiality but cannot be conceptualized as its equivalent.” (p.120)

This spatiality he speaks of is more than just physical space and perceptual space. It is the result of electronic networking of people who previously were not together. Another cultural study researcher, Strate (1999), states that cyberspace is often times an underdetermined “open text” consisting of three levels of cyberspace. The first level is defined based on its ontology and concerns cyberspace’s disputable reality. At the second level, Strate identifies physical, conceptual and perceptual cyberspace. The second level of cyberspace concerns the material base of cyberspace like computers, wires etc. and their users, or conceptual concerns such as the sense of space generated within the mind as we interact with computer technology, or the interaction of these two. The third level of cyberspace is generated in association with the human symbolic transaction during informational transmission and reception.

To better understand the human symbolic transaction during informational transmission and reception by Mongolians living in the Gobi desert, it is useful to understand their perception of space and time-being. The space – time - being nexus in

the Gobi desert reminds us of the space-time-being nexus in oral cultures. Giddens (1987) states that “In oral cultures integration of time and space with the setting of interaction, together with time experience are necessarily different from cultures which possess writing and other information storage.” (p.141) He differentiates between the *durée* of day-to-day life and institutional time. For Mongolian nomads, the *durée* of the day-to-day is scheduled with their every-day herding experiences rather than being scheduled by institutionalized time. However, nomadic people’s sense of physical space is more refined in terms of human-cattle-land relationships. Mongolian nomads perceive physical space in terms of dynamic symbols, like the head of herds. For nomads, the questions of where to settle and how close to settle next to each other tend to be determined by the size of the herd and the number of cattle.

The notion of spatiality and the mobility of the Internet within the nomadic culture has yet to be studied. The articulation of social space and information technology in the context of the Gobi gives a unique picture, created a very young system of institutional time. However, cultural studies predicate that “origins do not determine endings.” (Carey in Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002, p.490) Therefore it will be interesting to see what cultural changes the Internet brings in the Gobi. A few implications were found in the interviews with the people in the Gobi Desert. Bat mentioned the messaging service on his cell phone, as well as instant messaging at his work. It can be interpreted from his interview that this high mobile information service helps him to compress physical and social space and distance. Also it can be elaborated from his interview that the instant message service helps him to break the main narrative of social hierarchy. He mentioned the efficiency of file attachments when processing

documents and the easy access to important people high in the social hierarchy through mobile phone or instant messaging.

National identity clash in rural and urban areas of Mongolia

While discussing the role of media in Mongolia's transition process toward a democratic society and a market economy after the collapse of Communism, Munkhmandakh & Nielsen (2001) state that the collapse of the centrally supported socialist system caused polarization in society, and a gap in living conditions between modern urban areas and traditional rural areas. The authors state that this gap in living conditions causes a national identity gap in Mongolia. The capital Ulaanbaatar, where one third of population reside is becoming a modern complex society; yet people in remote rural areas are more inclined to traditional nomadic animal husbandry, the Buddhist religion and family-tie traditions. The authors emphasize the migration to urban areas in Mongolia and the concentration of media outlets in the capital.

The undermining factors of the national identity gap between rural and urban areas in Mongolia consist not only of social polarization and the concentration of media outlets in the capital, but also modern technology and information accessibilities. Poster (2001) explains the Internet's ability to threaten and undermine traditional social institutions and the notion of the nation-state. Poster explores the anxiety and paranoia aroused by the Internet that takes place in almost all areas and spheres: everyday life, the national governmental level, and in academia. Many of these fears concern the nation-state. Poster explains how the Internet influences an individual within a nation and how the state of "being" online in cyberspace affects the national identity. First of all, he reminds the reader that the nation-state is not a fixed institution; in fact it is

“imaginative.” Then he goes on to say that “Internet globalization suggests an articulation of the universal and particular at a level at once more general and more local than the nation-state.” (p.127) Poster concludes saying that “the Internet is a social space” where people can communicate regardless of the restrictions imposed by different traditional nation-states.

Two interviewees Odon and Bat talk about young people listening to their favorite foreign pop songs in the Internet café. Bat also mentioned the visitors who think of people living in Ulaanbaatar as “others” compared to people living in the countryside. Bat told a story of visitors from other provinces to Umnugovi province. After experiencing the wireless Internet and cell phones messaging, they felt like they were in the capital not in a province. This case indicates different notions of national identity among people living in the capital and people living in the countryside. This situation makes one think that not only social and traditional cultural values, but also the collateralization of information and media in local settings define our notion of “imaginative national identity.”

Marked gap – language

While people in rural Mongolia are overcoming geographical fragmentation through modern communication technology, they encounter communicative barriers or a ‘marked gap’ in their efficiency of communication as stated by Karl Deutsch.² Poster (2001) borrows from George Yudice (1992), by saying that “transculturation” of the West occurs globally at three levels reflecting cultural and social traits of the West. The first and second levels of transculturation occur in association with hardware and

² Halavais, A. (2000). National Borders on the World Wide WEB. *New Media and Society*, 2, 7-28.

software production and their globalization. The third level of this transculturation of the West is “English, which is becoming a lingua franca and less dominant at the same time.” (p.49)

Halavais (2000) claims that the residue of cultural structure can be seen in the WWW, even though the new medium is more or less unimpeded by national borders. Halavais revealed that most websites have 1) more domestic links than international links; and 2) links to the outside are dominantly directed to the U.S. more than to any other country. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002) state that cultural study interrogates the relationship between social space and technology through two agencies, one of which is language. They go on by saying that language and technology have a contingent relationship with each other and this relationship defines human social space. This situation can be seen in the circumstances of the Internet use in the Gobi Desert.

Both interviewees of this study stressed their and other people’s frustration concerning the language barrier when they go to cyberspace. All interviewees note that language barriers are the biggest obstacle. Odon mentions people’s frustration of half-literacy and the discouraging situation where people seek information for a long time and are not be able to understand the information they find.

Language frustration among Mongolians living in Gobi is not limited to the lack of the local language content on the Internet. This is also related to the Latin alphabet used in most Internet Relay chatting and communicative software interfaces on the Internet. Mongolians have been using the Cyrillic alphabet for more than a half-century after they switched from the Mongolian alphabet. The version of the Cyrillic alphabet used in the Mongolian language has two extra vowels that are not found in any other

languages that use the Cyrillic alphabet. These two extra vowels are the most frequently used vowels in the Mongolian language and are not yet included in the Unicode character set, which is commonly used for the Internet browser software. Due to the dominance of corporate companies on the world software market, the inclusion of a small nation's character set into the common software like web browsers are not immediately solved in the favor of small nations. The big software companies like Microsoft are wary to include the small nations of 2.4 million people into the Microsoft character sets.

Language barriers in Mongolia are much greater than in both its neighbors- China and Russia. Both Mongolian neighbors have a big market for ICT products and have solved their problems in terms of creating online content and getting local language software. Both China and Russia have a great pool of human intelligent capital and the market size to attract multinational corporations. Content in Russian and Chinese is increasing dramatically. It is noteworthy to mention that the previously mentioned "network business" cosmetic websites were created in different languages including Russian. There are a large percentage of people who speak Russian in Mongolia among the generation above 30 years old, which helps some Mongolians take advantages of the Internet. Perhaps, the more the people in the Gobi desert are better acquainted with new possibilities of the Internet, the more they will benefit from the services on the Internet such as online translation services.

Bibliography:

- Akandes, F.Y. (1999) "Methodology as Lived Experience: Rhizomatic Ethnography in Hawai'i" Diegesis 5 (winter), 17-26
- Brey, P. (1998). Space-shaping technologies and the geographical disembedding of place. In A.Light, & J.M.Smith, (Ed.) Philosophy and Geography III: Philosophies of Place, (pp.239-263). Lanham, MA: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Giddens, A. (1987). Social theory and modern sociology.Stanford, CA:Stanford University Press. p.141
- Halavais, A. (2000). National Borders on the World Wide WEB. New Media and Society, 2, 7-28.
- Holt-Jensen, A. (1999) Geography: History and Concept. Thoasand Oak, CA: Sage Publication.
- Internet in Asia. (2001) (Ed. Ramanathan and Becker, J.) Singapore:Asian Media Information and Communication Centre.
- Jones. S.G. (Ed.) (1998). CyberSociety 2.0: Revisiting computer-mediated communication and community. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Kraidy, M. (1999) "The global, the local and the hybrid: a native ethnography of glocalization." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 16/2, 456-76
- Liewrouw, L.A. and Livingstone, S. (2002) Handbook of new media: social shaping and consequences of ICTs. Thoasand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mayhew, B. (2001). Mongolia. Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Ltd.
- Munkhmandakh, M. & Nielsen, P.E. (2001). The Mongolian Media Landscape in Transition: A Cultural Clash between Global, National, Local and "no Nomads" Media. NordiCom Review: Nordic Research on Media and Communication, 22(2)
- Pippa, N. (2001). Digital divide. Cambridge University Press.
- Poster, M.(2001). What is the matter with the Internet, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rao, M. (2001). "Emerging Markets, Pockets of Excellence: India in a Global Internet Economy" e-OTI: OnTheInternet. March/April available at <http://www.isoc.org/oti>
- Shapino C.L (1999). "Information Rule: A Strategic Guide to Network Economy" Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Soja, E.W. (1989). Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory. London & New York, NY: Verso.
- Strate, L. (1999). The Varieties of Cyberspace: Problems in Definition and Delimitation. Western Journal of Communication, 63 (3), 382-412
- Thyfaut, M.E. (2001). "Global Opportunities-People Around the World Are Starting To Realize That the Power of Technology Can Help Them Escape Poverty" Information Week, March 26, p.65