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Anti-Party Clique of Tsogt-Ochiriin Lookhuuz and Baldandorjiin Nyambuu and the Technocrat Paavangiin Damdin

Preface

This English translation by Mary Rossabi of the remarkable interviews conducted by Dr. I. Lkhagvasuren and Professor Yuki Konagaya yield the invaluable recollections of three principal leaders of the economy in twentieth-century Mongolia. The men offer, in their own words, a first-hand panorama of life and politics in a dictatorial State. In their own salty, occasionally humorous but often sad commentaries, they provide a vivid glimpse of everyday life in a country which was isolated from most of the world during its communist period from 1921 to 1990. They furnish colorful details about herding, Mongolian traditions and institutions, the Buddhist monasteries which were a dominant force prior to 1921, agricultural and industrial development, the purges which led to executions or exile, and the internecine political squabbles in a communist State. Most important we get to know these three men, even if they do not necessarily reveal as much as we would like about themselves and their families.

Naturally, they present twentieth-century events from their own perspectives. Two of the men were purged in 1964, and their views were kept muted. These interviews represent the first time that they have had an opportunity to voice their opinions in public.

In the Introduction that follows below, I provide a historical context, as well as explication, of some of the events they describe, events which may not be familiar to the general reader. I occasionally contradict their versions of events and provide sources in the footnotes which offer a different perspective than theirs. However, their reminiscences are sharp and lively.

Specialists on Mongolia will find their perceptions of great interest, but I believe that the general educated reader will also find their testimonies moving, unique, and informative.

We have chosen to translate three of the ten interviews of leading figures in twentieth-century Mongolian history. Translations into English of all ten would have gone beyond our scope and could not have fit into the one volume planned for this project. We were left with the difficult decision of selecting three interviews which offered a cohesive view of aspects, mostly of the socialist period, in Mongolia. Having decided that the criteria for selection ought to be made clear to the reader, we will seek to define them briefly. It

would have been ideal to provide translations of all the interviews. However, time and resources precluded such a strategy.

We decided first to select individuals who actively participated in economic and political decision-making. The interview with a writer was thus excluded. A second criterion was that the height of the individual's career ought to be in the socialist period. P. Ochirbat, the first democratically elected President of Mongolia, achieved his most important position in the post-socialist era and was thus excluded. A third criterion was possible links among two or more of the interviewees. T. Lookhuuz and B. Nyambuu were perfect matches. Both had played prominent roles in the socialist economy, and each had criticized and therefore incurred the wrath of Y. Tsedenbal, the Head of State. In 1964, he had them stripped of their posts and exiled them because of their alleged anti-Party activities. As noted above, their version of events has not been told, and it seemed fitting to select them as illustrations of the purges that afflicted the socialist system.

A fourth criterion was balance between diverse political and economic views. Lookhuuz and Nyambuu epitomized the critics of the socialist system and, in particular, of Tsedenbal. We chose a contemporary of theirs, P. Damdin, Minister of Industry, to represent opposition to their views. He spoke positively about Tsedenbal and the socialist era, recording Mongolia's strides in industrial development and growth. Both he and Lookhuuz were pragmatic technocrats, but Damdin was dismayed by the decline of standards and the corruption in the post-socialist era.

Lookhuuz, Nyambuu, and Damdin have distinctive and thoughtful views and express them vividly, another criterion for their inclusion in this volume.*

We would like to thank Dr. I. Lkhagvasuren, Dr. U. Barkmann, and Ai Maekawa for providing the photographs included in this book.

Morris Rossabi

*For an analysis of these interviews, see Yuki Konagaya, "Socialist Modernization in Mongolia as Narrated After Socialism," *Inner Asia* 12: 1 (2010), pp.5-24.