

Biographical Introduction

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Biographical Introduction

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Tsogt-Ochiriin Lookhuuz (1923-)

Early Life and Schooling

Tsogt-Ochir Lookhuuz is the quintessential Mongolian pragmatist. As an official in the Gov-Altai *aimag* (or province) and Director of the State Farms of Mongolia, he focused on results. Although he had studied and then taught at Communist Party Schools and was well informed about Marxism-Leninism, he did not believe in rigid implementation of ideology and repeatedly scorned ideologues who failed to examine real conditions before devising policy. He argued that practical considerations, rather than slavish adherence to Marxism-Leninism, ought to be paramount in economic decision-making. His oral interview, reproduced in this volume, is replete with criticisms of indolent, dictatorial, and ineffective leaders who brooked no dissent. Lookhuuz remains a contentious figure with strong opinions, not a characteristic which would endear him to colleagues and especially leaders in an authoritarian system. Judging from the interviews recorded in this work, he was almost bound to clash with the authorities.

He was born in Gov-Altai in 1923, two years after the socialist revolution which gave rise to a new Mongolia. In 1921, following ten years of turbulence after the collapse of Qing China (1644-1911), which ruled Mongolia from 1691 on, and the ensuing failed opportunity for the Mongolians to achieve independence, patriotic Mongolians, with the assistance of the USSR, founded the world's second socialist State. Lookhuuz had not lived in the old society and had not experienced what older leaders of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (hereafter MPRP, the socialist and only political party in the country from 1924 to 1990) had described as a Mongolia subjugated by Qing China, Chinese merchants and banks, Mongolian noblemen, and Buddhist monasteries. He had not witnessed the chaos of the period from 1911 to 1921, when disunity and avarice among the Mongolian princes and the Bogdo Gegen, the Mongolian equivalent of the Tibetan Dalai Lama, prevailed.¹⁾ White Russian forces seeking sanctuary from the Bolshevik Revolution, Chinese warlords, the mad Baron Roman Nicolaus Ungern-Sternberg (1887-1921),²⁾ and Japanese-supported forces fought over the country and contributed

to instability. Because Lookhuuz had not seen, with his own eyes, the oppressive conditions prior to 1911, he did not share the older generation's animosity toward the Mongolian nobility and the Buddhist monks.

Indeed his father had been a *taij* or nobleman, and his grandfather had been a lama. In the interviews, he adamantly insists that his father, despite his noble status, did not own serfs. Lookhuuz has a jaundiced view of developments in the 1920s and 1930s, years before he could have personally observed conditions. His perception of that era runs counter to the official ideology that prevailed until 1990. First, he questions whether D. Sükhbaatar (1893-1923),³ the leader of the 1921 Revolution, died of natural causes. He implies that the demise of the national leader offered the USSR and its Comintern agents greater leverage over Mongolia.⁴ Second, he asserts that it permitted these agents to initiate purges against those whom they labeled counterrevolutionaries, many of whom had been nationalists and questioned overly close ties with the USSR, thus antagonizing Comintern agents. Lookhuuz challenges the charges made against these individuals, including the former lama D. Bodoó (1885-1922) and the former customs officials Kh. Danzan (1873-1924), and states that they were wrongly executed.⁵

He describes in a disparaging manner the sudden policy shifts from 1928 to 1932. The MPRP had, at first, enthusiastically supported a specific policy and then would turn against it, leading to dismissals and purges. In October of 1928, the Seventh Khural (or Parliament) condemned so-called Rightists who reputedly controlled the government. It sponsored much more radical policies, starting by confiscating the property of the *taijs* and lamas. Shortly thereafter, it initiated a forced collectivization of the herds and sought a monopoly on foreign trade. These radical policies met considerable herder resistance. Chaos plagued the countryside, as many herders slaughtered their animals rather than turning them over to collectives. The government suppressed several violent protests, led by lamas or herdsmen, but it recognized that continuance of this policy could prove disastrous. Blaming so-called Leftist Deviationists for wrong-headed policies and dismissing or jailing these officials, in 1932 the government ended the effort at collectivization.

In 1937, it initiated still another shift in policy, which led to more disruptions and violence. Part of the explanation for this shift was fear of Japan, which from its base in Manchukuo, sought greater sway over Inner Mongolia and supported dissent, especially by lamas, in Mongolia.⁶ Both Joseph Stalin and some leaders in the Mongolian hierarchy feared growing Japanese influence and incursions and were determined to stamp out Japanese sympathizers. The Buryat Mongolian⁷ J. Lkhümbe (1902-1935), the Secretary of the Central Committee of the MPRP, was charged with collaborating with

the Japanese and was executed.⁸⁾ The ensuing purges went way beyond the initial objectives and resulted in the deaths of many innocent individuals. Like the simultaneous purges in the USSR, the violence ensnared many top leaders, including former Prime Ministers Peljidiin Genden (1892 or 1895-1937) and A. Amar (1886-1939). Genden,⁹⁾ who apparently sought to protect lamas and monasteries, was stripped of his positions in Mongolia in 1936 and then executed in the USSR in 1937. Lookhuuz writes that the accusations against nearly all of the individuals who were purged were total fabrications, a sentiment shared by nearly all present-day Mongolians and certainly by nearly all historians of modern Mongolia. He is withering in his criticisms of Stalin and Khorloogiin Choibalsan (1895-1952), the Mongolian Head of State who instigated this period of purges.

The instability and repression had an impact on Lookhuuz, a boy of thirteen when the purges began. His father, a member of the despised *taij* or noble class, was a potential target, and indeed after a perfunctory trial, was given a death sentence, but somehow was saved and received a relatively minor prison sentence. His older brother was drafted into the army in 1932 and allegedly became involved in disturbances by soldiers. At the same time, a tragedy struck the family. In 1937, Lookhuuz's mother died at the age of 44 after giving birth to his youngest sister. It seemed as if the family was star-crossed.

After his mother's death, his father made a decision which altered Lookhuuz's life. Unlike many herders who rejected secular schools in favor of education at lamaseries for their children, Lookhuuz's father sent him, at the age of 14, to primary school, where he learned basic reading and writing skills, mathematics, geography, and science. In his interviews, Lookhuuz reveals some of the school's problems. Pens, notebooks, and pencils were in short supply, and education was rudimentary.

Within two years, Lookhuuz had graduated from primary school but appeared to have come to an end of his education. There were no high schools either in the countryside or in the capital city of Ulaan Baatar. Even with this basic education, however, Lookhuuz was recruited to conduct propaganda work for the new Constitution. He would probably have remained a low-level functionary or clerk had not a fortunate encounter with an official offered an opportunity to study at the Finance Technicum in Ulaan Baatar.

From Ulaan Baatar to Moscow

In 1939, he set forth for his first visit to Ulaan Baatar, and his interview provides a vivid description of the city and of the whole country. Even traveling to the capital, he faced a harrowing trip on poor, almost impassable,

or non-existent roads. He knew that cars often had no spare parts, and he could not count on repair shops or telephones in seeking assistance. Nonetheless, Lookhuuz arrived safely in Ulaan Baatar, which startled him with its electric lights, radios, and silent movies. Even more surprising to him was the food he ate. His descriptions of his first vegetables and beer are amusing and yet point to the differences between the countryside and Ulaan Baatar. Limited transport and communications prevented herders from exposure to electric lights, cinema, and even the foods which the inhabitants of Ulaan Baatar enjoyed.

In Ulaan Baatar, Lookhuuz made his way and met some of the principal leaders of the next generation. His studies at the Finance Technicum went so well that he was chosen to attend the MPRP Party School. Here he learned about Marxism-Leninism, and he saw that disagreement with the official policies and line was hazardous, although he himself would not abide by this principle. He also encountered the gruff and imposing D. Molomjamts (1920-2006), who later became a highly influential Minister of Finance and a member of the Politburo, and the gentler and more scholarly B. Baldoo, who later was a member of the Central Committee of the MPRP and the Director of the Institute of Party History, as well as Ambassador to North Korea and India.¹⁰ Yumjaagiin Tsendenbal (1916-1991), who became Prime Minister and Head of the Mongolian State, and his Russian wife Anastasia Ivanovna Filatova (1920-2001) turned out to be the most important of his new acquaintances. Even then, Mongolians who met Filatova did not like her. They considered her to be pro-Russian, condescending toward Mongolians, and overly influential over her weak husband. Lookhuuz is even more withering in his criticism of the couple and is incensed that she did not speak Mongolian and supposedly never spent a night in a *ger*.¹¹ These limitations cut her off from the Mongolian people and spilled over on to her husband's attitudes, whom Lookhuuz repeatedly portrays as incompetent and who favored Russians, even at the expense of Mongolians. Unlike Choibalsan, the Head of State until 1952, whom Lookhuuz condemned for instigating purges but also depicted as competent and as having recruited meritorious individuals as high officials, Tsendenbal would choose flatterers and sycophants from his own native region of Uvs *aimag* for important posts. Lookhuuz's repeated critiques of Tsendenbal appear somewhat excessive. After all, Tsendenbal was to be Mongolia's supreme leader for over three decades. He cannot have been as hapless as Lookhuuz portrays him. Indeed his accusations about Tsendenbal's allegedly treacherous behavior surely indicate that the eventual Head of State had the bureaucratic skills to mobilize against his opponents.

World War Two interrupted his studies at the MPRP Party School and shifted his concerns away from Tsendenbal and others he met in Ulaan Baatar.

He and other Mongolians sent gifts of gold, *deels*¹²⁾, gloves, hats, and boots for the Red Army, and the Party School ordered him to make speeches advocating assistance to the USSR. His lectures emphasized fostering Mongolian industries to provide goods for the USSR. He proved to be such a fine speaker that the Lecture Bureau recruited him in 1944, a position in which he remained for six years. Until Stalin's death in 1953, this period witnessed considerable repression, as the USSR leader became increasingly paranoid. To a certain extent, Choibalsan, the Mongolian Head of State, followed suit, but Lookhuuz was not affected. During his time at the Lecture Bureau, he taught about Marxism-Leninism and studied Russian on his own, making him eligible for an assignment in the USSR.

His ability and dedication garnered attention and led to admission to the Soviet Party College in Moscow.¹³⁾ He took full advantage of this opportunity, asserting that he often read until 2 or 3 in the morning. He reveals that he also capitalized on the shortage of Russian men caused by the war. Meeting a Russian woman teacher whom he talks about lovingly almost six decades later, he joined her in attending the theater and going to museums and dances. They shared interests in cultural pursuits and reading, and he bought numerous records and books. However, their relationship could not continue because of a prohibition on Mongolians and Russians marrying. On the eve of his departure in 1953, Lookhuuz and his girl friend appealed to the authorities, but a Soviet official denied their request. These decisions were capricious. Tsendenbal and other, later prominent, Mongolians who studied in the USSR received permission to marry Russian women. Lookhuuz had bad luck in the Russian official who heard their case.

Early Positions to Director of the State Farms

In 1953, he returned to Mongolia and was appointed First Secretary of the MPRP Committee of Gov-Altai *aimag*, where he first demonstrated his pragmatic bent and his skills. He did not implement any specific ideology. Instead he studied actual conditions in the *aimag*. After intensive scrutiny, he concluded that sheep could give birth twice rather than once a year, resulting in an increase in the number of animals and especially in wool and other animal products. However, if he wished to institute such a new policy, he would need to seek permission from a dazzling array of levels of bureaucracy, reaching all the way to the Central Committee of the MPRP. Recognizing that this process would entail lengthy delays, he started this policy on his own initiative. As he also acknowledged, failure could "land [him] in prison." His gamble worked, and the herds increased. He used the profits to build a museum for the *aimag*. Similarly, without specific authorization from the

central government, he dug a channel from the Zavkhan River to the steppelands, increasing the grass available to the larger number of animals. Lookhuuz was the supreme technocrat.

In 1956, he met and married Jamban Buyanjargal, noting the disparity in their ages. He was thirty-three, and she was much younger. They had two children of their own — a son when she was thirty-five and a daughter when she was forty. They also adopted a nephew, his brother-in-law's son, and a little girl. Like most Mongolians, he tells us little about his private life, except that his wife, a pharmacist by training, and his children suffered considerably as a result of his political difficulties. One child was not granted permission to attend higher education abroad, and another was only able to leave the country to study through a fake passport. Yet he reveals almost nothing else about his family. No interesting or informative anecdotes about his wife and children appear in these interviews.

In any event, after three years of successful leadership in the Gov-Altai *aimag*, he was selected as the Director of the State Farms system. Shortly before this, Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the USSR, had proposed a Virgin Lands policy, by which marginal land would be made arable and would thus lead to an increase in agricultural production. Lookhuuz wanted to follow this model, but as was his nature, he first intensively studied agronomy, spending two months in Moscow to consult with scientists and advisers on possible crops to plant in Mongolia. Simultaneously, the USSR sent agronomists, soil specialists, and veterinarians to improve animal breeds in Mongolia. Lookhuuz himself returned to Mongolia at the height of the establishment of *negdels* (or collectives), which, according to him, aroused much herder resistance. Other contemporary observers report that the *negdel* movement appeared to be smoothly managed. However that may be, the State Farms, his own bailiwick, faced problems.¹⁴⁾ Herders opposed plowing because it damaged the pasturelands; the equipment, especially the tractors, at the State Farms required constant repairs and often lacked spare parts; wheat and oat production was not profitable; and many laborers, having no incentive to work hard, did the minimum or migrated to towns or to Ulaan Baatar. Lookhuuz apparently persuaded herders that plowing would not interfere with or harm their land; he invested resources in maintenance of equipment and planted millet, fruit trees, and shrubs of berries; and he began to pay wages to workers. If the workers over-fulfilled their quotas, they would receive higher wages, the beginnings of a market economy. As output in the State Farms increased, he added pigs, chickens and eggs, rabbits, ducks, sables, and stags. Success translated into money for construction of palaces of culture, recreation rooms, and individual radio sets.

As Director of State Farms, he could capitalize on his practical bent. Wherever he went, he tried to gather useful information. He learned, for example, that the Chinese employed fermented sewage for gas, which he then advocated. The books he consulted centered on agronomy and other technical subjects, not ideology. Through such careful study, he learned about fish farming and geese and duck raising, which he introduced in the State Farms.

By 1962, tired of and frustrated by what he believed to be the government's, and especially Tsedenbal's, reputed meddling, corruption, and ignorance, he resigned from his position and requested permission to pursue graduate work in sociology. Tsedenbal would allow him to enroll only in a training center in agronomy. Lookhuuz made the best of it, spending the next two years earning a doctorate at the Temeriazov Agricultural Academy in Moscow, writing a dissertation on State Farms and on their value in rural areas. While there, he missed a major struggle, which led to purges.

Lookhuuz's views on this controversy entail a sustained questioning of Tsedenbal's character, intelligence, and treachery. He contrasts the two sides, to Tsedenbal's disadvantage. He portrays Tsedenbal in an exceedingly negative light. Tsedenbal was reputedly not well educated. D. Tömör Ochir, one of his opponents and an important member of the Politburo, had earned a Ph.D. and a Sc. D. in Moscow and had been a teacher at the MPRP History Institute, and L. Tsend, another opponent and a member of the Politburo, had received a Sc. D. in Economics. Lookhuuz asserts that Tsedenbal depicted these and other well-trained professionals as "deluded intellectuals," which undermined expertise and harmed the economy. He states that Tsedenbal was an "accidental" choice for a major post. Because of the purges of the professional and intellectual classes in 1937-1938, few Mongolians other than Tsedenbal were available for top positions in the MPRP and the government. Tsedenbal also knew Russian and had a Russian wife, significant advantages in a Soviet-influenced system.

Lookhuuz implies that Tsedenbal made decisions favorable to the USSR and almost accused the Head of State of working for a foreign power. Tsedenbal's support of the USSR in the Sino-Soviet dispute, his sale, at low prices, of Mongolian goods to the USSR, his acceptance of poor quality USSR commodities sold at absurdly high prices, his continued request for Soviet loans, which led to substantial debts, and his slavish adherence to Soviet advisers resulted in a lagging economy and generated considerable political and economic problems in Mongolia. Mongolians who knew Russian or had studied or worked in the USSR constituted an elite, and they commanded high salaries and privileges. Tsedenbal, on occasion, dismissed or banished those Mongolians who questioned favoritism toward the Russians. Lookhuuz himself

did not oppose good relations with the USSR; he was simply averse to Mongolian policies which benefited the USSR, but not Mongolia.

Lookhuuz comments negatively on Tsedenbal's actions and personality. He accuses the former Head of State and his wife of embezzling State property and of favoring, employing, and promoting flatterers and fawners in the bureaucracy, contributing to an ineffective and inefficient government. Seeking to avoid competition from capable and intelligent officials, Tsedenbal initiated purges against them and sent some of the best leaders into exile. With these outstanding Mongolians pushed aside, he could more readily create a cult of personality, with repression and with encouragement for people to spy on each other.¹⁵⁾ Lookhuuz then introduces a conspiratorial argument, saying that some of Tsedenbal's opponents had died under mysterious circumstances. Tömör Ochir, one of Tsedenbal's rivals whom he had exiled to the city of Darkhan, had been murdered on October 2, 1985. However, the date of Tömör Ochir's death undermined Lookhuuz's accusation because Tsedenbal had been forced out of office in 1984, a year before this crime.

Lookhuuz's incessant critique of Tsedenbal and his wife lacks credibility. It presents an unrelenting, overly dark portrait of the couple. For example, Filatova was renowned for her efforts on behalf of children. She provided funds for construction of playgrounds and children's cultural palaces. Filatova never accommodated to life in Mongolia, but she deserves credit for her positive contributions. At the same time, Tsedenbal surely cannot be blamed for all the economic problems which plagued the country during his thirty-two years as Head of State. Many other officials played roles in decision-making and in implementing policy. Tsedenbal cannot really be accused of ordering the murder of his rival Tömör Ochir. Moreover, his support for the USSR in the Sino-Soviet dispute resulted in tangible benefits for Mongolia. He negotiated an agreement with the USSR, which provided much more aid than the Chinese could offer, and he gained admittance into the Soviet bloc's economic union, the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA), then the only Asian country in that organization. His maintenance of close cultural relations with the USSR translated into Soviet assistance in education, science, health, and the arts (including the ballet and opera)¹⁶⁾ and training in the USSR for diplomats, scientists, journalists, academics, and physicians, among other professions. To be sure, the stationing of more than one hundred thousand Soviet troops on Mongolian soil during the Sino-Soviet conflict, Soviet influence on Mongolian politics, the perks (including special elite stores) for Russians who lived in Ulaan Baatar, and the ubiquity of secret police in the Soviet system, which spilled over into Mongolia, were not positive contributions, but Tsedenbal was not solely responsible for these developments. Finally, Tsedenbal merely

dismissed or banished and did not kill those whom he purged from the government. Unlike the 1930s, the so-called anti-Party or anti-government groups of the 1960s were not executed.

The immediate pretext, which resulted in the dismissal of Tömör Ochir, centered on the eight-hundredth anniversary of Chinggis Khan's birth, but had more to do with the Sino-Soviet dispute. The USSR and the compliant Mongolian leadership had condemned Chinggis as a world conqueror who had inflicted tremendous damage to the regions he subjugated. The MPRP's official line was critical of Chinggis' career except for his actual unification of the Mongolians. However, in 1962, historians, joining together with some officials, prepared to convene a symposium in Chinggis' honor, issue a stamp with his image on it, and mount a festival. In promoting these efforts, Tömör Ochir was more concerned with challenging Tsedenbal's overly strong links with the USSR than with the celebration of the renowned father of the Mongolian Empire. He favored a policy of neutrality in the Sino-Soviet conflict and used the eighth centenary of Chinggis' birth to challenge contemporary policy. Tsedenbal, perhaps at the USSR's instigation, criticized the planned activities as reflections of ultra nationalism, as attacks on Mongolia's ally, the USSR, and as anti-MPRP.¹⁷⁾ Many of the MPRP leaders lambasted the supporters of the celebration for praising Chinggis for his so-called religious toleration and for his empire building. Most of the festivities were cancelled, and Tömör Ochir, one of the sponsoring officials, was twice stripped of his position and eventually exiled to Darkhan. Later L. Tsend, a possible contender for Tsedenbal's position, was also condemned for his "anti-Party" activities and exiled.

Exile and Prison

Appalled by this purge of leading officials, Lookhuuz spoke out more openly against Tsedenbal in an attack, which led to severe retaliation. In 1964, he was expelled from the MPRP and exiled, with his wife, two of his children, an older sister, and his stepmother to Övörkhongai *aimag*. He attributes the harshness of his sentence to a return to a hard line policy in the USSR, reflected in the replacement of the relatively moderate Nikita Khrushchev by the less conciliatory Leonid Brezhnev. He concludes by saying that he became a shepherd in Sant *sum*. His equanimity in confronting the difficulties he faced is truly praiseworthy. He acknowledges, however, that his numerous contacts throughout Mongolia sometimes helped his family and him. Friends secured and then gave him warm clothing for the entire family.

At the beginning of his stay in this demanding environment, Lookhuuz revealed his ingenuity. He showed his ability to accommodate rapidly to

whatever situation confronted him. He devised one amazing technique or project after another to satisfy consumer demand and to ensure a healthy profit. His entrepreneurial skills were remarkable, and his observant eye yielded numerous business opportunities. He first fattened up his herds and increased their number by moving as much as ten to fifteen times a year to locate grasslands. I will not spoil the reader's pleasure by recounting his various legitimate money-making schemes. The reader will be dazzled by his analyses and by the implementation of his various projects. During his six years in Sant *sum*, he produced well-treated lamb skins and saddle cloth, among other goods, at a substantial profit.

By 1970, his children were ready for school, and he petitioned to move to a larger city. The authorities permitted him to move to Kharkhorin, the ancient capital of the Mongolian Empire. Here he raised a sufficient number of pigs to sell pork to Russian troops stationed nearby, and then learned to make fine books, which could be sold at a high price. He earned enough to buy a motorcycle and a car, remarkable in a country in which there were so few privately-owned vehicles.

Success resulted in a potentially worse position for him. Accused of starting private businesses and profiteering, a taboo in Mongolia's socialist era, he was, for the first time, imprisoned. A court handed him a sentence of six years and confiscated his property and belongings. Here again he made the most of his circumstances. He gave lectures to the prisoners, studied cooking and nursing, and set up several businesses in prison. However, now that he was labeled a criminal, his family suffered from discrimination and was, for example, denied identity papers and passports. They coped, and his two daughters actually finished college.

In 1982, he was finally released from prison, and for the next eight years moved from one residence to another, but could not return to Ulaan Baatar. In Khövsgöl *aimag*, he set up a workshop to build tables and chairs for schools, hospitals, and palaces of culture, and in Gov-Altai *aimag* he made silver buttons for *deels* and sheepskin boots. The 1980s ushered in a period of liberalization in the Soviet bloc and eventually gave him his freedom. In 1989, when he was allowed to return to Ulaan Baatar, he started a flourishing business to produce lamps, bowls, and prayer wheels for the newly reopened Buddhist temples and monasteries.

Life in a Freer Mongolia, 1990-2010

Demonstrations in 1989-1990 led to the abandonment of the one-party system and the planned economy in favor of a multi-party political system and a market economy. An election for the Khural was held in July of 1990, and

Lookhuuz was elected to that body. Then he was exonerated of all the charges made against him in 1964, and the State recompensed him for the property it confiscated. Yet again he found opportunities for profit by selling salad greens and mushrooms, taking orders on his cell phone, a modern convenience which reveals once again his ability to adapt to his environment.

Although he has not played a significant role in politics since 1990, he has had strong opinions on public issues. He favored the abolition of the *negdels* and supported the controversial policy of immediate privatization of the herds. Many experts disagreed with the rapidity of change and blamed the rising incidence of poverty and the growing disparity of incomes in the rural areas on these overly quick changes. Indeed many of the international agencies (e.g. World Bank, Konrad Adenauer Foundation), which originally supported privatization, now are promoting cooperatives in order to protect individual herders. Lookhuuz himself laments the decline of the herding economy and the subsequent migration of herders to Ulaan Baatar. At the same time, he disapproves of impoverished herders moving, with their animals, closer to or actually into the capital city. Yet many herders believed they had no choice because, in the remote regions where they lived, they had no transport or facilities to market their animals and animal products. Thus they migrated to be near Ulaan Baatar, their most important market. Yet Lookhuuz does not link the decline of State support in marketing, transport, construction of wells, information about weather and prices, and veterinary services to the deplorable circumstances many herders face.¹⁸⁾

On the other hand, Lookhuuz appears delighted with greater freedom, especially the ability of Mongolians to speak with foreigners and to travel abroad, which the State frowned upon or forbade under the old socialist system. He suggests additional reforms, including reduction of State power, abolition of the MPRP, and limitations on avaricious and arrogant businessmen who are hostile to society's values and interests. The incidences of corruption and nepotism in government, politics, the economy, and educational and medical facilities concern him as well. He also criticizes the new Democratic Party for its internal struggles, its disunity, and its lack of a strong leader.

It is instructive to compare Lookhuuz's testimony to the work of J. Sambuu, who had a distinguished official career, wound up as Chairman of the Presidium, and author of one of the few Mongolian autobiographies. Sambuu was born in 1893 and lived for nearly two decades in the traditional society while Lookhuuz was born after the establishment of the socialist society. Because Sambuu saw and suffered from the excesses and exploitation of the old system, he was virulently anti-Buddhist or at least highly critical of what he perceived to be the avariciousness, ignorance, and duplicity of monks, as

well as of the *taijs* and princes. On the other hand, Lookhuuz, having witnessed the destruction of monasteries, the pillaging of their artistic and literary treasures, and the killing of many monks in the 1930s, was more sympathetic to the Buddhist establishment and was highly critical of both Stalin's repression of the Orthodox Church in the USSR and of the MPRP's similar attacks on Buddhism and Buddhist monasteries. Unlike Sambuu, who was born to a modestly, well-off herding family, Lookhuuz derived from a *taij* background and was thus repelled by the indiscriminate and brutal suppression of the nobility from the earliest days of the socialist revolution.

Each also had different views about the purges and their instigators. Lookhuuz condemned the purges of 1937-1938, the punishments meted out to Tömör Ochir and Tsend in 1962-1963, and his own exile in 1964 and subsequent imprisonment. He said that the charges were fabricated and that the purges were, in part, designed to consolidate the powers of Choibalsan and Tsendenbal, two repressive leaders, the latter of whom was barely competent. Sambuu did not mention the purges. In the late 1930s, as Ambassador to the USSR, he was not in Mongolia. Thus he could write about his years in Moscow and withhold judgment on events in Mongolia, which he could not have witnessed. Then he concluded his autobiography describing the Korean War of 1950-1953 and could avoid mention of the later dismissals, exile, and imprisonment of leading officials in the 1960s. Yet he was Chair of the Presidium during the 1960s and must either have acquiesced to or collaborated with Tsendenbal in the purges. He also portrayed Choibalsan in a positive light, showing how the Mongolian Head of State negotiated with the USSR reputedly to obtain the optimal conditions for Mongolia. Similarly, he depicted the pre-Head of State Tsendenbal as a competent and loyal bureaucrat.

Their differing personalities determined their fates under an authoritarian system. Sambuu was a gentle and much beloved figure whose empathy extended especially to children and the exploited.¹⁹⁾ His autobiography yields a portrait of an idealist dedicated to improving the lives of Mongolians. Those in Mongolia who remember him repeatedly express great admiration for him. I have never heard him criticized. On the other hand, Lookhuuz was and remains disputatious and contentious, characteristics which were bound to lead to conflicts with the authorities. Confident in his own beliefs, he openly challenged the wisdom of the Head of State and crusaded against policies based on ideology rather than analysis of real conditions. Like Sambuu, at present, he has many admirers in Mongolia.

It remains to be said that the interviews conducted with Lookhuuz are lively, moving, and often amusing. Even in his eighties, his drive, his strongly-held views, and his pride in overcoming more than two decades of defamation

and repression emerge from these conversations. He has survived to tell his own side of the story and obviously relishes the opportunity to do so. The reader can now read Lookhuuz's own words in the pages that follow.

Baldandorjiin Nyambuu (1922-2008)

Early Life and Career

In the history of the MPR, Tsogt-Ochir Lookhuuz and Baldandorjiin Nyambuu are linked, and in truth they shared some career patterns and some views. In December of 1964, they were stigmatized as part of an anti-Party clique, and the government sent them into exile. Both had reached the highest levels in Mongolian society and had fathers who suffered during the Mongolian purges of the 1930s, which influenced their perceptions of the MPRP and the government. Surprisingly, at the time of these interviews, they were not as critical of Choibalsan, the leader of the government when their fathers were wrongfully accused and imprisoned. They were much more critical of Tsedenbal, who merely exiled opponents rather than having them executed. To an extent, this is understandable. It was Tsedenbal who thwarted their careers and ordered them to be exiled for decades and, in Lookhuuz's case, imprisoned for a time. However, they both portray Tsedenbal in an unflattering light. Judging simply from their accounts, Tsedenbal was ignorant, weak, not especially competent, manipulated by his wife, and beholden to the USSR. To determine whether this portrait is overdrawn and overly hostile to Tsedenbal would require additional research, as well as testimony from contemporaries. J. Sambuu and B. Shirendev, the second of whom Tsedenbal purged and compelled to give up his position, offer a less negative view of the most powerful Mongolian in the period from 1952 to 1984.²⁰⁾

Lookhuuz and Nyambuu differed in social backgrounds. Lookhuuz's father was a *taij* while Nyambuu's father was an ordinary herder, although "ordinary" may not be the right term to describe him. He was clever enough to branch out and train race horses and hunt for marmots in addition to tending his animals. Sale of marmots afforded the family a comfortable living. Nyambuu's father had become a herder after withdrawing from a government post. His position signified that he was a member of the MPRP and that he was literate. The family consisted of four sons, with Nyambuu being the next to last. Nyambuu was born in 1922 in Töv, the *aimag* closest to Ulaan Baatar, which at that time may have had a population of several ten thousands, not a major metropolis. His father not only taught him herding skills but also to read and write the old Uyghur script of Mongolian. Study with a local Buddhist monk offered him training in Tibetan and mathematics.

Purges

Nyambuu's interview yields almost nothing about his early life in Töv *aimag* except for his description of his father's arrest. Agents from the Ministry of Internal Security detained him, fabricated a case against him, apparently forced him to sign a confession admitting to counterrevolutionary activities, and executed him, probably on November 10, 1938, when Nyambuu was about sixteen years of age. Nyambuu does not reveal the nature of the purported crime or the confession. This information is perhaps immaterial because many of the charges were concocted in an atmosphere of fear and fabrication. Accusations of spying for the Japanese or engaging in often unspecified counterrevolutionary activities or support for nefarious Buddhist plots led to imprisonment and execution. To be sure, a few Mongolians, perhaps in contact with the Japanese via Inner Mongolia, provided such intelligence information, but the number whom the authorities labeled guilty far outstripped the actual individuals guilty of such betrayals. Although like many others, Nyambuu was devastated by his father's disappearance and death, he does not reveal his feelings in the interviews. He simply notes that in 1990 his father was rehabilitated.

The families of the accused would often be stigmatized as well, but Nyambuu escaped such a fate. Families would frequently be discriminated against or be denied privileges or even basic rights. However, Nyambuu's career was not thwarted. He was permitted to attend a school for communications technology in Ulaan Baatar. Because the nearest town to his family's household had no elementary school until 1940, he had had no formal education. Nonetheless, the tutoring from his father and a Buddhist monk had provided him with the academic tools he required to perform well at his first school. Even here, he witnessed the harm that the purges engendered. He saw agents from the Ministry of Internal Security arrest professional engineers and fellow students. Ironically, a team leader who started at his new post condemning counterrevolutionaries himself disappeared shortly thereafter.

Nyambuu testifies to the haphazardness of the purges. No one, including top leaders, was safe, as indiscriminate arrests, executions, and murders rippled through Mongolian society. The brutality of the purges is well known, but Nyambuu offers concrete evidence about them from his own experiences. He describes, in detail, Soviet and Mongolian agents' probable poisoning of M. Demid, the Minister of Defense, who was subsequently labeled a counterrevolutionary. The purge of government and military leaders spread to physicians, intellectuals, and monks. All those arrested had to be compelled to confess, and many endured incessant interrogations and bouts of torture. Even more horrifying, if it was the norm, was Nyambuu's assertion that the Ministry

of Internal Security demanded that investigators fulfill quotas for arrests and, possibly, executions. The indiscriminateness and capriciousness of the purges offer support for his assertion. He also repeats the rumor that Choibalsan was at hand for some of the secret executions.

This atmosphere of suspicion and accusations finally caught up with Nyambuu and terminated his studies before he could complete his program in communications engineering. He speculates that a report about his father's "crime" must have reached the authorities, prompting them to expel him from the school. Over the next few years, he alternated between low-level positions in his native county and promising career moves. Nyambuu does not explain how, in the face of the policy of guilt by association, he repeatedly was granted opportunities to return to Ulaan Baatar to train for better job prospects. His career careened from one extreme to another. Did he have MPRP or government sponsors or supporters who again and again interceded on his behalf? Was there a paucity of literate individuals during World War Two, which forced the authorities to recruit anyone with special skills? Nyambuu does not enlighten the reader about these vagaries in his employment and place of residence. From 1939 to 1948, he held a succession of jobs and then returned to herding. He attended a teacher training college, taught elementary school students in Khentii *aimag* and then in his own native Töv *aimag*; at the age of twenty, he was elected governor of his town and later was recruited for an aviation school to train as a pilot.

Climbing Up the Ladder

Again inexplicably, in 1948, the authorities chose him to attend a College for Senior Party members, which was a launching pad for a high-level career. The three-year course prepared students for MPRP positions. Nyambuu does not describe the curriculum, but it probably comprised a heavy dose of Marxism-Leninism. Graduating in 1951, he became Head of Ideology and a Secretary for the MPRP. He must have impressed his superiors because in 1956 he was appointed First Secretary for Ömnögov *aimag*, the most influential position in the area, and was made responsible for the *negdels*. He backs up Lookhuuz's description of the difficulties in initiating the *negdels* and of herder resistance to turning their animals over to collective ownership. He and Lookhuuz concur that the new organization resulted in duplicity by herders and *negdel* managers, increased demands to fulfill quotas for animals and animal products, more *negdel* debts to the State, and greater and greater herder pauperization. Other Mongolians and foreigners have offered different views, emphasizing *negdels* as offering insurance for herders whose animals were devastated by bad winters and providing government support for

marketing, veterinary services, and maintenance of wells, in addition to education for children, rudimentary medical care, provisions for wages and pensions, libraries and newspapers, and recreational and social opportunities in *sum* centers.²¹⁾ Both descriptions may be partly accurate. The herders had greater security and support but also faced greater government control in the *negdel* system.

From the time of his appointment as First Secretary of Ömnögov *aimag*, Nyambuu's reminiscences shift to an almost exclusive concern with Tsedenbal. Although he was an official in a province distant from the capital, Nyambuu spent much of his time in Ulaan Baatar. He dealt with and observed Tsedenbal, and he now unleashes a litany of complaints against the supreme leader of Mongolia during that era. He asserts that Tsedenbal deteriorated badly in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Tsedenbal succeeded Choibalsan in 1952 through a series of reputedly shady machinations and, in Nyambuu's opinion, was not the best candidate to lead the country. It is unclear what Nyambuu means by "deteriorated." Did Tsedenbal have an emotional or mental collapse? Or was it that the USSR and his wife had a greater influence on him from the late 1950s on? In any event, in the late 1950s, Tsedenbal's close association with Choibalsan came under fire. Nikita Khrushchev's criticism, in 1956, of Stalin's "cult of personality" had reverberations in Mongolia, as Choibalsan could be accused of adopting the same policies as Stalin, with statues and books hailing him as a great figure. As perhaps Choibalsan's closest underling, Tsedenbal was vulnerable if the campaign against the cult of personality spread to Mongolia. Tsedenbal owed much of his career to Choibalsan who promoted him successively from his first position as Vice Principal of the Finance College to President of the MongolBank, the country's only bank, to Vice Minister of Finance to even higher MPRP and government positions. Thus Tsedenbal had to defend himself from potential criticism by concurring that Stalin's cult of personality was indeed damaging, but that Choibalsan's cult was minor compared to Stalin's. In 1958 and 1959, he plotted against Dashiin Damba, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the MPRP, who disagreed and wanted to publicize Choibalsan's excesses and crimes. Fearful that he might be ensnared and criticized in a campaign against Choibalsan, Tsedenbal, in turn, criticized Damba for his rudimentary education and his lack of knowledge of Russian and had him dismissed from important positions in the Party.

Nyambuu then catalogs Tsedenbal's other damaging campaigns against individuals and groups. Facing opposition from sophisticated government and academic leaders who criticized his economic program and his closeness and even dependence on the USSR, Tsedenbal lambasted what he referred to as

“the illusion among intellectuals.” His opponents argued that Soviet advisers did not listen to Mongolians, were paid high salaries by the Mongolian government, had extraordinarily privileged lives in Ulaan Baatar, and suggested policies that were not beneficial to Mongolia. They complained that the USSR sold poor quality goods at high prices while paying little for Mongolian products. In short, they proposed that Mongolia develop its own domestic policies and that it trade with non-Soviet bloc countries. Tsendenbal responded by proclaiming the USSR to be Mongolia’s “big brother” and protector in helping to defeat the Japanese on Mongolia’s borders at the battle of the Khalkh river in 1939. He then engaged in a systematic dismissal of intellectuals and other opponents. His 1962 campaign against D. Tömör-Ochir for his alleged support of ultra-nationalism, espousal of a heroic depiction of Chinggis Khan, and anti-Soviet views has already been described. The following year he initiated a campaign against Tsend basically for attempting to oust him as the Head of State. Both Tömör Ochir and Tsend were exiled.

Unwilling to conclude with critiques of Tsendenbal’s policies, his intellect — at one point, he refers to Tsendenbal as “thick headed” —, his lack of original ideas, and his “deterioration” in the late 1950s, Nyambuu then offers damaging but speculative information about Tsendenbal’s character. He speculates that Tsendenbal may have been a KGB, or Soviet Secret Police, agent, but the evidence he provides is paltry. He also accuses Tsendenbal of making a pass at an official’s wife who rejected his clumsy efforts. According to Nyambuu, Tsendenbal reacted by dismissing the official, on false grounds that his father had supported the White Russians during the 1921 Mongolian Revolution, and his wife, on false grounds that she had slandered the Party, from leading positions in the MPRP and government. Again the evidence is skimpy and somewhat ambiguous. Another of Nyambuu’s accusations is that Tsendenbal wanted Mongolia to abandon its independence and to become part of the USSR. This accusation lacks substantial proof. Still another of Nyambuu’s charges is that Tsendenbal appointed sycophantic incompetents as officials and provided them with substantial bonuses to support him. Finally, Nyambuu criticizes Tsendenbal for spending his summer vacations in the USSR at government expense. This last criticism seems petty. After all, Tsendenbal’s wife was Russian. Was she not entitled to devote part of the summer to visit relatives and friends in the USSR? A few of these criticisms reek of overkill. There are sufficient grounds for criticizing Tsendenbal so that some of these additional accusations alleging misbehavior are simply beyond the bounds and actually may elicit sympathy, especially if the accusations prove to be untrue.

After the dismissal of Tömör-Ochir and Tsend in 1962-1963, Tsendenbal’s next campaign was directed at Nyambuu and Lookhuuz. In the same year as

the purges of Tömör-Ochir and Tsend, Nyambuu passed a stiff entrance examination to be admitted to the select Communist Party School in the USSR. During his two and half years there, he often met with other disgruntled Mongolians who were dissatisfied with Mongolia's progress and blamed Tsendenbal for the country's problems. Nyambuu decided to speak out and was given a perfect venue for doing so — the MPRP/Central Committee Sixth General Assembly to be held in Ulaan Baatar in December of 1964. Although he still needed six months to conclude his studies in the USSR, he elected to return to Mongolia for the meeting and told his fellow Mongolian students of his plan to criticize Tsendenbal. In the interviews, he asserts that an informer among the students relayed this information to the Mongolian government, allowing Tsendenbal to prepare for the attack. At the meeting, he and Lookhuuz spoke about Tsendenbal's dependence on the USSR and of Soviet economic exploitation of the USSR-Mongolian relationship. Nyambuu emphasized the increasing Mongolian debt, the high prices of basic commodities, and the scarcity of goods in Mongolia and attributed these conditions to Tsendenbal. In his interview, he lashes out at the Soviet advisers in Mongolia who had better housing, stores stocked with products unavailable to nearly all Mongolians, and higher salaries than Mongolians performing the same duties. He then goes too far in saying about the Russian advisors: "It is difficult to answer the question of what they did. I cannot answer the question because they did nothing." He ignores the immense Russian contributions to the economy (e.g. mining engineers who helped to set up the Erdenet copper mining complex), education, health, veterinary medicine, and the arts (e.g. ballet and opera), among other areas of influence.

Purged and Exiled

In any event, Tsendenbal criticized a so-called Anti-Party clique, consisting of Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, and had sufficient support to oust them from the MPRP and the government. T. Ragchaa, a member of the Central Committee, asked for Nyambuu's Party identification card as he left the meeting, and agents followed him from that moment until his departure from Ulaan Baatar. The media joined in the continued attacks on Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, describing them as anti-Party and virtually counterrevolutionaries.

The government then exiled Nyambuu and his family to Dornod *aimag*. He was assigned to be a herder in the countryside while his wife, a physician, and his three children lived in a small town. This separation caused problems because his wife frequently had to travel to treat patients and would have to leave the young children on their own. Nyambuu wrote to Tsendenbal and explained the difficulty the family faced and requested a transfer to town.

Tsedenbal allowed him to move to his family's residence, and the family remained in Dornod for eleven years. Despite his talents, Nyambuu could only obtain menial jobs and was, in other ways as well, the object of discrimination. Similarly, local residents castigated and called his offspring "children of an anti-Party" leader. Again, Nyambuu wrote to Tsedenbal seeking assistance, and his former opponent responded by chiding the local townspeople for their attitudes and behavior and by ordering them to be more hospitable to Nyambuu and his family. In 1975, Nyambuu once again wrote to Tsedenbal, asking that his family receive permission to move to a city where his children could attend secondary schools. Yet again, Tsedenbal was receptive to Nyambuu's request and permitted the family to move to Shariin Gol, a major coal mining center. The children went to acceptable secondary schools, and Nyambuu appears to have enjoyed his stay in the area, partly because he was close to Tömör Ochir's place of exile in Darkhan. Each visited the other, and Tömör Ochir, who had plentiful sources of information, kept Nyambuu well-informed about developments in Mongolian politics. Finally, a few years later, Nyambuu asked for permission to transfer his family either in or close to Ulaan Baatar, so that his children could attend university. Tsedenbal approved of still another move.

Two generalizations emerge from Nyambuu's catalog of his repeated moves while in exile. One is Tsedenbal's graciousness in responding positively to several of Nyambuu's requests. Nyambuu actually characterized Tsedenbal as a gentle person and, except for Tsedenbal's alleged attempts to initiate an extramarital affair with an underling's wife, attributes his attacks on rivals to the influence of Filatova, his Russian wife, the USSR, and his own ignorance and lack of sophistication about economic matters. Nyambuu implies that Tsedenbal, when free of those influences, was decent and could be empathetic. Two is the lack of information about Nyambuu's family. He reveals nothing except that his wife was a physician. Information about his wife's and children's lives and reactions to exile are omitted. Hardly any light is shed on the privations they suffered in exile except for his descriptions of the temporary taunting of his offspring as "children of an anti-Party" leader. Nyambuu does not tell us about his children's lives or careers. Interviewing numerous Mongolians for books I have written and especially for a volume on the lives of six prominent individuals and families, I have found that they are reluctant to talk, in personal terms, about themselves and their relatives. They tend to eschew personal revelations. After exposure to the almost overwhelming gossip-oriented and "let everything hang out" general Western attitudes, I find this reluctance refreshing. On the other hand, it also limits biographers to official careers and public attitudes and behaviors of those whom they write

about.

Nyambuu's interview reveals striking differences in the treatments of Lookhuuz and Nyambuu. Lookhuuz never received the privileges accorded to Nyambuu and was even jailed for six years. Lookhuuz's children had to use forged credentials to have the opportunity to attend university while Nyambuu's children faced no such impediments. Tsendenbal also permitted Nyambuu to return to Ulaan Baatar, but Lookhuuz was not allowed to move to the capital until the collapse of communism in 1990 and then, of his own accord, migrated elsewhere. It could be that Lookhuuz's greater prominence, as Director of the State Farms and other significant positions, may have resulted in a more punitive government policy toward him and in reluctance to allow him any platform to express his ideas. Or it could be that Lookhuuz was more bellicose and disputatious than Nyambuu and thus antagonized the authorities, contributing to the reluctance to improve conditions for him and his family.

Nyambuu ends the interview by expressing his views about the post-communist period. He is pleased at his rehabilitation and at the re-evaluation of Tsendenbal and his impact on Mongolia. He also appears pleased but sober that the government stripped Tsendenbal of his medals and honors in 1990. However, he is disappointed that the legal system prevented a true accounting and possible punishment of Tsendenbal's closest associates, including D. Molomjamts, T. Ragchaa, and P. Damdin, for assisting their leader in harming Mongolia and for what he believed to be embezzlement and misappropriation of State funds. He also expresses disappointment in some of the post-1990 leaders who have used "democracy" for their own benefit and profiteering. Unlike Lookhuuz, he is not a staunch advocate of the market economy. It would have been interesting to know his reactions to the current economic difficulties facing Mongolia.

Paavangiin Damdin (1929-)

Peaceful Early Life and Career

Like Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, Damdin was a pragmatic technocrat. He did not contribute to Party ideology.. His principal objectives were to develop new industries and to foster economic growth. Unlike Lookhuuz (whose father was accused of crimes) and Nyambuu (whose father was executed in the purges), he scarcely became involved in politics and was not affected or harmed by bureaucratic and political disputes or purges. He differed from them in his evaluations of Tsendenbal, whom he labeled a "humane leader" and a "good man." Tsendenbal exiled Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, but Damdin never clashed with the top MPRP and government leaders, nor did he criticize

Tsedenbal in any meeting or conference. Lookhuuz and Nyambuu castigated Tsedenbal in a number of public forums, especially at the Sixth General Assembly of the MPRP/Central Committee in December of 1964. They challenged Tsedenbal's policies, knowledge, and intelligence and counseled other leaders to oust him from top positions in the MPRP and the government. Tsedenbal could not ignore these critiques and had apparently made elaborate preparations to punish these two so-called "anti-Party" figures. Damdin had just begun his career during that time and focused almost entirely on his position as Minister of Industry. In fact, he omits mention of this "anti-Party" case.

Also like Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, he does not dwell on his family or his personal relations. His interview is quite impersonal. For example, he says that he was married in 1961 at the age of twenty-two, but he does not mention his wife's name, nor does he tell us anything about her. Similarly, he gives only the barest details about his early life. Born in Uvs *aimag* to a herder's family, he had an older brother and a younger sister. His father not only tended the animals, but also earned additional income as a metal worker, producing earrings and buttons for *deels*, among other goods. At the age of seven or eight, he accompanied his father to a school where he would board while his family migrated from one region to another to care for its animals. He barely stayed as a boarder, as he didn't like the food, missed his family, and found school useless. His complaints caused the school authorities to call his father to take him home. Judging from this incident, in the 1930s the authorities could not mandate requirements for schooling, partly because the number of schools was insufficient and partly because enforcement of such requirements was difficult in the countryside. Damdin thus became literate on his own and secured a rudimentary education.

He cared for his family's animals and would have remained a herder except for a life-changing event, a visit to Ulaan Baatar. Like the trips of Lookhuuz and Nyambuu to Ulaan Baatar, his travel to the capital led to a momentous alteration in his life and career. Until then, he would see one car every year passing his *sum*, and his major exposure to the outside world was traveling "Ideology Brigades," who showed movies or mounted musical performances, based on propaganda. However, his brother had been conscripted into the army and was stationed in Ulaan Baatar. In 1946, as a seventeen-year old, he and his family went, in his first car ride, to visit his brother. The electric lights, the radio, the trains, the buses, the two-storey buildings, and the people wearing Western clothes dazzled him, prompting him to want to stay behind in the capital. Ulaan Baatar was just recovering from World War Two, during which it deprived itself of much of its tea, tobacco, flour, and rice,

which it shipped to the USSR. There were still shortages of these goods. Moreover, Damdin did not react well to the vegetables and fruits he first tasted in Ulaan Baatar. Even so, he was eager to live in the capital. Because education was one means of ensuring a move to Ulaan Baatar, he decided to prepare for the admission examinations to the Finance Technicum. Living with his brother in the latter's military *ger*, he overcame such difficulties as the scarcity of pens and notebooks and tried to compensate for the deficiencies in his education. He did not do particularly well on the examinations, but the help of an influential friend gained him admission to the Technicum, where he studied from 1946 to 1950. Education paved the way for his career, just as it had for Lookhuuz and Nyambuu. As soon as he graduated, the Ministry of Finance employed him for two years, first as a bookkeeper and then as an accountant.

Training in the USSR and Appointment to Ministry of Industry

Like Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, Damdin recognized that education and training in the USSR was essential for advancement in Mongolia. Although he knew little or no Russian, had had a rather mediocre education, and was sorely deficient in mathematics, he took the qualifying examinations for entrance to schooling in the USSR. He acknowledges that he cheated during the examinations, but he still failed. Again, he was lucky. One of the successful candidates turned out to be an alcoholic, and Damdin was chosen to replace him. His studies at the Economics University in Moscow were demanding because he had to struggle to learn Russian. He succeeded, completed his course, and returned to Mongolia.

Like most Mongolians who studied in the USSR, he was almost immediately granted a high office. From 1960-1968, he was Minister of Industry, and from 1968 to 1979, he became Minister of Light and Food Industry. He was determined to create an outstanding industrial economy. He assumed responsibility for industry at a time when it constituted only ten per cent of the total national income.²²⁾ A Mongolian economist lists the main industrial products at that time as wool fabrics, knitwear, coats, suits, felt and felt boots, sausage, bread and sweets, and milk and dairy goods.²³⁾ Damdin adds rings and earrings, printing, and some electricity and coal. One telling indication of limited industrial development was that the economy produced only about two bars of soap annually for each Mongolian. During the 1920s and 1930s, the government had focused on establishing itself and developing an ill-designed effort to collectivize the herds and then was diverted by the disastrous purges of lamas, officials, military men, and others unfortunate enough to antagonize the powerful. World War Two and the post-War recovery

precluded new initiatives. Only in the 1950s could the government go beyond recovery, and it started with changes in the herding economy. After 1960, it could begin to pay attention to industry.

Damdin turned out to be very fortunate indeed in this context. New developments and policies would facilitate his efforts to foster industrial growth. The 1950s collectivization of the herds was more or less complete, and by 1960, only less than one per cent of herders were not in collectives. The *negdels* offered a tremendous advantage because “the collectivization of herds facilitated industrial diversification and industrial development.”²⁴⁾ Damdin would have the materials for meat, leather, and wool industries. The MPRP also touted the view that “agricultural-industrial Mongolia is slowly becoming an industrial-agricultural country.”²⁵⁾ Thus it would pay more attention to industry because it “shared the Marxist view held by theoreticians in the Soviet Union that industrialization was a desirable goal and the only real basis for economic and social progress.”²⁶⁾

Other economic developments favored Damdin. The government was preparing the Third Five Year Plan (1961-1965) and had decided to provide 31.9% of investment for industry, a 250% increase compared to the Second Five Year Plan (1953-1957).²⁷⁾ Economic planners thus gave Damdin a great opportunity just as he became Minister of Industry. Mongolia’s invitation to become part of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the economic union of the Soviet bloc countries, in June of 1962 offered a second advantage. The only Asian country then and one of the least developed in the CMEA, Mongolia benefited from its association with the USSR and Eastern Europe. CMEA countries invested in Mongolia’s industrial sector and formed joint ventures with the Mongolian government.²⁸⁾ The founding of Darkhan as a second industrial city was still another boon for Damdin. Seeking to decentralize industry, which had been concentrated in Ulaan Baatar, the government decided to build a new industrial base in Darkhan, near the border with the USSR. In 1961, it started to construct the city of Darkhan. Factories for construction materials, leather and fur processing, and garments and a flour mill were erected in the city. Its population spurted from about 1,500 in 1961 to approximately 23,000 by 1969 and to about 85,000 in 1989.²⁹⁾ The government also founded *aimag* centers and towns, culminating in the building of the copper and molybdenum mining city of Erdenet in 1974.

Policies as Minister of Industry

Damdin recognized that more power was essential before industrial projects could be implemented. Electricity and heat were unpredictable, and Ulaan Baatar’s coal-fired, Number 1 thermal power station, built with USSR

assistance in 1934, was insufficient for Mongolia's needs. The Chinese erected the Number 2 power station around 1960, and the USSR helped to construct power stations Numbers 3 and 4 in the 1970s and 1980s. The USSR also built power stations in Darkhan and Erdenet. Damdin himself ensured that the *sum* centers were provided with electricity. One fairly reliable estimate judges that the power stations produced 106.4 million kilowatt hours of electricity in 1960 but increased the total to 3347.9 million kilowatt hours by 1990.³⁰ Similarly, the government put new coal mines into operation, resulting in a more than tenfold growth from 619,000 tons in 1960 to 7,147,500 by 1990. Damdin now began to have power to fulfill his industrial projects.

Two features of Damdin's observations ought to be mentioned. First, he credits the USSR and Eastern Europe for their assistance with industrial development and economic growth. Unlike Lookhuuz and Nyambuu, he repeatedly praises the USSR for its investments in and its technical assistance to Mongolia. He does not share their views about the USSR's self-interested policies in Mongolia or about the arrogance and luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by Soviet advisers and technocrats who lived in Ulaan Baatar, Darkhan, Erdenet, or other industrial towns. In that sense, he is closer to Tsedenbal than to Lookhuuz and Nyambuu in his evaluations of Soviet help. Second, the statistics Damdin cites for specific industrial products are difficult to verify. In checking estimates provided by Alan Sanders, the Asian Development Bank, and Namjim for each decade from 1960 to 1990, I came across significant disparities among the three sources. General trends are discernible, but specific figures Damdin mentions must be used with care.

Damdin documents the successes of the Ministry of Industry during his tenure. Within a short time after he became Minister, Mongolia produced a sufficient number of boots for its population and exported the remaining amount. He then set up a wool washing factory and used the wool to produce knitwear and carpets. Arrogant Ulaan Baatar residents scorned the boots, *deels*, and coats the factories produced, but countryside herders liked, for example, the boots better than Western rubber shoes. Damdin's factories not only produced sufficient flour for domestic purposes but also exported considerable quantities. The country was self-sufficient in rice. Damdin was canny enough to make Mongolian-made bread, sugar, and biscuits popular with Mongolians. He also succeeded in exporting hides and skins to the USSR, carpets to Japan, and twenty million tons of tinned meat to Europe. Taking his cue from J. Sambuu, Chair of the Presidium of the Khural from the 1950s until his death in 1972 and writer of an influential guide to herding, he asserts that Mongolian meat is healthier and tastier than foreign meat. However, Damdin failed in his plan to sell horsemeat to Japan, a great

disappointment because he believes that horsemeat lowers blood pressure and reduces hardening of the arteries. Knowing that the Japanese viewed horsemeat as a delicacy, he approached a Japanese representative about such trade. Damdin blamed the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the only agency with the authority to sign trade agreements, for setting an impossibly high price for the meat, thus precluding trade in horsemeat with Japan. Japan could obtain the horsemeat from the Russians at Ulaan Ude at a much cheaper price. Another two decades elapsed before Mongolian horsemeat reached Japan in large quantities. Despite this particular failure, Damdin enjoyed such success that he became the Secretary of the MPRP Central Committee from 1979 to 1990, and in 1987 he was promoted to serve as an Alternate for the Politburo.³¹⁾

Post-1990 Developments

Damdin expresses anguish and sadness about the undermining of his life's work after the collapse of socialism in 1990. He says, "What a shame that in the last ten years what we built up has been destroyed." Light and heavy industry have suffered dramatically in the so-called transition period since 1990 and have not recovered. Damdin laments that Mongolia imports coats from Germany and Korea, many foods from China, and sugar, beer, sweets, shoes, clothing, and even dairy products from a variety of foreign countries. He claims that several of the factories he built have been turned into bars and that many of the young workers, along with many of those fired when the factories were closed, are undisciplined and often patronize the bars. Part of Damdin's anger is directed at present-day Ministers who ride in elegant foreign cars and are surrounded by lavish furniture at work. He has told one of the Ministers that "he should be embarrassed in his splendid car and to sit in his splendid office" and contrasts their luxurious lifestyle and unwillingness to work hard with his spare and almost ascetic Ministerial office. Facing criticism that the factories and industries he built used outdated technology, he replies that his critics, including foreign advisers, should focus on improvement rather than destruction. He points out that Chinese firms have taken advantage of Mongolia, have moved into the factories he built, and have produced knitwear for the American market.

Unlike Lookhuuz and Nyambu, Damdin is much more critical of the privatization agenda pursued since 1990 and shows the flaws of the process. He notes that the people's resources were squandered and sold at a pittance to favored individuals. Whole factories and industries, such as cashmere, skin, and hide processing, were endangered because of privatization and policies that we would describe as neo-liberalism, though Damdin may not have used that term. Champions of free and unregulated trade and elimination of tariffs

allowed China and other countries to buy Mongolian raw materials and left Mongolian industries with scant amounts of cashmere, skins, hides, and other raw materials. Damdin attributes some of the economic disasters in the post-1990 period to foreign advisers and consultants employed by international financial agencies, which advocated pure market fundamentalism. The consultants' emphasis on limited government involvement in the economy led to closing of government-run factories, which they labeled inefficient. He cautions that "the advice given by these foreigners is based on their own standards," not Mongolia's needs. Workers and trained professional engineers and technocrats were dismissed, and, according to Damdin, eked out livings as street vendors or owners of kiosks. These talented individuals were not training apprentices to take their places, and indeed Damdin is concerned about possibly talented but poor young people forced to survive as street children, a new phenomenon in Mongolia brought about by unemployment, poverty, and the social problems that have plagued society since 1990. He believes that the post-1990 declines in education and the rise in illiteracy have also contributed to difficulties in creating a competent industrial work force and have damaged efforts to restore industry, Damdin's first economic priority. Even without these difficulties, Damdin states that fifteen years would be required to revive industry. Still another problem which he describes is the instability of the post-1990 era. He approves of the freer atmosphere in the country, but he argues that democracy without some regulations or order constitutes anarchism, which he believes to be the current situation in Mongolia.

Finally, Damdin describes his establishment of the Gobi Company, Mongolia's largest cashmere processing firm, as a model for current efforts to revive Mongolian industry. In the 1970s, he conceived of a cashmere processing factory, which could be built with United Nations assistance. Naturally, he wanted to visit foreign cashmere processing sites, specifically in Italy, Japan, and Great Britain, at a time when the government needed to approve foreign travel. He sought permission, and, through canny maneuvering and Tsendenbal's support, was able to visit all three countries and thus knew what needed to be done to develop a cashmere processing plant. Yet he required capital to build such a facility, and here again he turned out to be fortunate. Negotiations with Japan had resulted in a Japanese pledge to pay seventeen million dollars in reparations for the damage inflicted on Mongolia during World War Two. Many Ministries competed for these funds, but Damdin, with Tsendenbal's assistance, secured the money to start the Gobi Company. Next he needed to have several Mongolians trained in cashmere processing, and in 1978, with considerable maneuvering and again Tsendenbal's help, he secured permission to send two students to Japan, the first time

students had been sent to a capitalist country. After all these efforts and successes, it must have been a bitter pill for Damdin to swallow to learn that a Japanese company had bought the Gobi Company during a privatization effort in 2007.³²⁾

Damdin winds up by providing advice in efforts to restore industry. He starts by implying that factories have to motivate, either through rewards or punishments, recalcitrant workers who come to work late, are careless with equipment and machinery, and even sleep on the job. Having faced those kinds of workers in the Gobi factory, he warns managers of present-day start-up industries of these problems.³³⁾ A second piece of advice is to treat foreign technical advisers in the same way that he provided good conditions for Japanese consultants to Gobi Cashmere, offering them superior and well-heated apartments, as well as food to which they were accustomed.

Study of the biographies of these three men, in addition to analysis of the transcripts of the interviews presented here, offers contrasting evaluations of twentieth-century Mongolia. Their views of Tsedenbal, collectivization, and privatization differed considerably. A true analysis of the intricacies of twentieth-century Mongolia will require consideration of all these views.

Notes

- 1) Ironically, the Bogdo Gegers from the middle of the eighteenth century were all Tibetans. On the 1911 to 1921 period, see Thomas Ewing, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil? Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia, 1911-1921* (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, 1980); Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1968), pp. 187-237, and Robert Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series 37, part 1, 1964), pp. 129-180.
- 2) On this eccentric figure, see James Palmer, *The Bloody White Baron* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).
- 3) Urgunge Onon, ed. and trans., *Mongolian Heroes of the Twentieth Century* (New York: AMS Press, 1976) offers short, translated biographies of these early leaders.
- 4) Comintern refers to the Communist International, the union of Communist parties around the world, which the USSR actually dominated.
- 5) On Danzan, see Henning Haslund, *Tents in Mongolia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1934), p. 155.
- 6) For example, the Japanese supported a Mongolian nationalist movement in Inner Mongolia. For a biography of the leader of this movement, see Sechin Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince: The Life and Times of Demchugdangrob, 1902-1966* (Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1999).
- 7) Most Buryats were in Buryatia in the USSR. However, some lived in Mongolia and played an important role in the early days of the Mongolian revolution. Characterized

as a well-educated group, some served in high positions in the government or the MPRP in the 1920s and 1930s and probably suffered disproportionately during the purges.

- 8) Rupen, p. 237.
- 9) Lookhuuz writes that Genden was courageous to the end, citing Genden's slapping of Stalin as evidence. It is impossible to confirm this incident.
- 10) I interviewed Baldoo in Ulaan Baatar on May 18, 1998 and Molomjamts also in Ulaan Baatar on May 19, 1998. Baldoo was distressed by the corruption and avarice of government officials and the influence of foreign advisers in the post-1990 governments. Molomjamts complained about the overly rapid changes since 1990, which led to graft and bribery, but seemed most interested in having me sublet one of the apartments he had in the city.
- 11) Mongolian tent.
- 12) Mongolian robe, at the present time worn mostly in the countryside.
- 13) During this stay in the USSR, he met Zhu De, the chief military leader in the Chinese Communist revolution. For a hagiographical biography of Zhu, see Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Te* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972 rpt). He also encountered Elena Ceaucescu, the wife of Romania's future Head of State. He found her intrusive and was appalled by her involvement in decision-making when her husband became Romania's leader, a sentiment shared by most Romanians.
- 14) A brief description of the State Farms may be found in Alan Sanders, *The People's Republic of Mongolia* (London: Oxford University Press), 1968, p. 112.
- 15) Yet, on at least one occasion, Tsendenbal opposed the cult of personality being created around him. In 1980, he criticized the Institute of Party History for claiming that he had played a role forty years earlier in developing Party theory. See Mary Frances Weidlich, "Mongolia in 1980: A Year of Adjustment and Resolve," *Asian Survey* 21 (1981), p. 64.
- 16) See Morris Rossabi, "Ballet in Mongolia," *Ballet Review* (Spring, 2010), pp. 41-43.
- 17) On these events, see Paul Hyer, "The Reevaluation of Chinggis Khan: Its Role in the Sino-Soviet Dispute," *Asian Survey* (December, 1966), pp. 696-698 and J. Boldbaatar, "The Eight-hundredth Anniversary of Chinggis Khan: The Revival and Suppression of Mongolian National Consciousness" in Stephen Kotkin and Bruce Elleman, eds., *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 237-246.
- 18) Tserendash Namkhainyambuu, a prominent herder, disagreed with him. See Mary Rossabi, trans. and Morris Rossabi, intro. *Tserendash Namkhainyambuu: Bounty from the Sheep: autobiography of a herdsman* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2000), pp. 27-28.
- 19) See Mary Rossabi, trans. and Morris Rossabi, intro., *Herdsman to Statesman: The Autobiography of Jamsrangiin Sambuu of Mongolia* (Lanham: Rowman Littlefield, 2010) for a consideration of Sambuu's life and career.
- 20) See Shirendev's comments on Tsendenbal throughout Temujin Onon, trans, *Through the Ocean Waves: The Autobiography of Bazaryn Shirendev* (Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1997).

- 21) See, for example, Daniel Rosenberg, "Political Leadership in a Mongolian Nomadic Pastoralist Collective," Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1977.
- 22) Asian Development Bank, *Mongolia: A Centrally Planned Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 112.
- 23) Tumuriin Namjim, *The Economy of Mongolia: From Traditional Times to the Present* (ed. by William Rozycki; Bloomington: The Mongolia Society, 2000), p. 55
- 24) Asian Development Bank, p. 15.
- 25) Sanders, p. x.
- 26) Ricardo Neupert and Sidney Goldstein, *Urbanization and Population Redistribution in Mongolia* (Honolulu: East-West Center Occasional Papers 122, December, 1994), p. 15.
- 27) Sanders, p. 85.
- 28) Asian Development Bank, p. 17.
- 29) Robert Doebler, "Cities, Population Redistribution, and Urbanization in Mongolia, 1918-1990," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1994, p. 57 and Neupert and Goldstein, pp. 25 and 39.
- 30) Namjim, p. 55.
- 31) Keith Jarrett, "Mongolia in 1987: Out from the Cold," *Asian Survey* 28 (1988), p. 84.
- 32) *Mongol Messenger* (July 10, 2007).
- 33) He is reputed to have been extremely demanding on workers in his employ. If they didn't measure up to his standards, he dismissed them. He was known as "Knife Damdin" for his willingness to fire people who did not, from his standpoint, do their work properly. Interview, Dr. Zamba Batjargal, New York City, January 8, 2010. Dr. Batjargal is World Meteorological Representative and Coordinator to the United Nations.