

## II. Yumjaagiin Ayush (1926- )

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## II. Yumjaagiin Ayush (1926- )

Translated by Mary Rossabi  
Interviewed in July of 2004

### 1. My Birthplace

YK: I am very pleased to meet you. At this time, would you mind talking, for example, about your early years? How old are you? Where were you born? Could you tell us about your mother and father, older and younger siblings?

Yumjaagiin Ayush (hereafter, YuA): Yes, of course. I was born in 1926 in what is now Uvs *aimag*, Davst *sum*. We were at our winter quarters when I was born. I was one of the twins my mother bore but after the first day my twin died. My mother gave birth twelve times, and I was the eleventh child.

In the spring, we came down from the small mountains to the springtime pastures to plant crops and then went on to the summer pastures. Sometimes we spent the spring on the edge of Uvs Lake. Our summer dacha<sup>1)</sup> and pastures are in the mountains because the summer is so hot and the low lying areas are full of flies. That is why we spend the summer in the mountains. Our summer pastures are up near the Khandgaitin River and are nice and fresh and full of good green grass.

Many rivers have their source in the Ikh Tagnin Mountains and the Khandgaitin River and the Tarkhan River flow through the area of my *sum*.

There is a lot of rock salt in our local mountain area. In fact, much of a mountain was made of salt and was, indeed a fine "Salt Mountain." In 1966, the Mongolian and Soviet governments signed a border agreement which, for a while, placed Salt Mountain in Soviet territory. One side was ours and the other belonged to Russia. Our side had previously contained a similar amount of salt. We used to take an axe and make a four sided shaped crack and thereby got all the salt we needed for a year. And the salt was of a very high quality.

YK: What crops did you plant?

YuA: Barley is the name of the plant. It is a red barley that each family planted in a large area along with other things. The planting took place in the spring, and in the summer each family took turns for twenty days digging channels to provide fresh water to the area.

At the time, each family had a stone mill that was formed from two stones which were layered on top of each other so that the upper sides turned. Grain was placed between these stones and ground into flour, which was good. Besides these crops, our family lived on our herds. Our families needed more

plants but our neighboring *sum*, Salig *sum*, lived by growing plants.

YK: How many animals did you have?

YuA: We had about 100 sheep and goats, 4-5 cows, and 3-4 oxen. In a method called “loose loading,” oxen carried the loads of furniture from the *gers* of families in our area so that the horses were free to drive the other animals. Each family had a few oxen and one or two ran freely. A family with many children had a poor existence, while a family with oxen was wealthy. Both rich and poor families planted crops in the spring and harvested them in the fall. We all voluntarily helped each other in the work of slaughtering the sheep and the goats and were traditionally treated to a good meal. In our area, the grain was harvested in bunches after the threshing and was collected and dried in a special place. Then this threshed grain was put in piles for the winter. A great wind could scatter the grain that then had to be shoveled up into heaps and stored. When the crops withered and rotted the area was cleared.

The western side of our area was inhabited by the Uriangkhai [most of whom lived in Tuva] who spoke the Dorvod language well. When they came to our area, they planted grain and refrained from drinking milk spirits though they made it. But their life among us was not especially distinctive. They made *aruul*, but had fewer animals than we did.

Our *sum* was part of the administrative division of the Dorvod Great Khan *aimag* and the Zorig Khan banner. My father spoke about this. Today, the Dorvod people dwell in the Khyatka area of the Selenge *aimag*, though I do not know much about this. But the Dorvod Great Khan settled on the far side of Uvs lake, possibly because it was a good place for crops. Perhaps the Dorvod thought things might get better for them. I don't know how many times the Dorvod moved—maybe they had moved south more than 100 years ago.

Mother was one of three siblings and was the oldest sister. Then came her brother Chimedtseren, and the youngest was her sister Devay. My mother and her siblings moved near where we live. We have a large family with Chimedtseren adopting his oldest sister's oldest son.

At the end of the 1920s, people had amassed property and were comfortably off. Then my mother's brother, Chimedtseren, was arrested because he had many animals, as did many others. He was imprisoned in “Ulaangom Prison” where he was shot. All his herds were sold, and eventually his wife died. Thus, the boy that Chimedtseren had adopted came back to us, and several years later he was called up for military service. After his discharge, he lived in Ulaan Baatar and died recently.

My father was one of three children. He had an elder sister and one brother, and they lived a herding life. In our area, families had a lot of

children, some of whom were adopted by relatives. If a family had few children, it would try to adopt some even if the parents were not the blood relatives.

I, myself, did not know my older brother Tsedenbal since I was born at the time of “Ulaangom” when Tsedenbal had finished the second class in primary school in Khovd. When he finished the fourth class, like many children in our *aimag*, he went to school in Ulaan Baatar. Some children actually went directly to a Russian school. From there, Tsedenbal went to Ulaan Ude and then to Irkutsk to continue his schooling where one could attend the medical technicum or the financial institute. Ten years passed, and I had never received a letter from him or news of him. My mother told me what I knew about my brother.

My father died at the end of the 1930s. He visited a neighbor in the adjacent Sagil *sum* and when he returned he felt ill and two days later he died from what I now think is appendicitis.

## 2. Meeting my Older Brother

YK: When did you yourself go to school?

YuA: I was about 12 or 13 when a temporary school opened in our *sum* center and many children attended. I studied the Mongolian script for two summers and the four categories of mathematics for two summers. People needed to know how to write and handle numbers when taking the census of the herds. I worked as a census taker of the herds.

At this time my older brother, Tsedenbal, sent news to us for the first time. We said: “When is our older brother coming home?” He had finished his high school in Irkutsk and was appointed director of the Financial Technicum in Ulaan Baatar and spent about a half year there. I think it was in 1939, but I really do not know if my brother had sent us some money. But he did send a message saying that he would be home soon.

Father died at this time, but Tsedenbal did not return home because the war was beginning. In 1939, just before the Mongol Japanese war<sup>2)</sup> began, my brother was appointed leader of the Mongol Bank. When the war began, my brother was responsible to the wartime government behind the lines and worked providing food and clothing for the military.

At the time, the Soviet Union’s sitting ambassador to Mongolia was V. Ivanov. My brother and other men worked together behind the lines in Sükhbaatar, Khentii, and Dornod *aimags*. My brother obtained food for the military from those *aimags* while weapons and military techniques were provided from the Soviet Union. In all likelihood, soldiers came to Mongolia. My brother did not work there very long, maybe just a year.

Then the battle was over, and only later did I find out all about this. The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party had its Great Khural and its Central Committee selected my brother as Party Secretary.

YK: What year was that?

YuA: It was 1940. After being appointed to direct the Mongolian Bank, he was selected Deputy Minister of Finance. Then after working in the countryside he was appointed full Minister of Finance.

In 1940, my brother came home and the leaders of the Central Committee elected him Party Secretary. The evening he returned I was watching the sheep near our home when an elegant black car arrived. I did not know who was in it and almost ran home. The sheep had been grazing faraway, and I was tired from watching them so I fell asleep. Then my brother stepped out of the car, and I met him for the first time. I was 14 years old when I met my brother in Ulaan Baatar, and I had had no news of him for 10 years before he came home. During his time away, he studied in the Soviet Union and returned to work in Ulaan Baatar. There were no letters as communication by mail was difficult. Only the horse relay worked. Did the relay reach Ulaan Baatar? At that time we did not know.

It was the first time we had seen a suit which we called "Russian clothing." At the time, Marshal Choibalsan had gone to work in the western *aimags* and came home with my brother, accompanied by many other men. Ten cars parked in front of our home, and he spent two or three nights using it as his headquarters. I had been watching the sheep and on returning home found a decorated tent and many cars. People said that Marshal Choibalsan and the Soviet ambassador had arrived. The sheep came out early in the morning, and a group of people assembled and made decisions about the Tenth Great Khural.

They prepared a nice framed picture of my brother that he gave to my mother saying "the secretary of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party is a man of merit, and I am giving you a picture of him." Then with our *aimag* leader they came into our *ger*. In the morning, Kh. Choibalsan left with many of the men.

YK: Was that the first time that you met your brother?

YuA: No—I met him when I was a child, but I had not spoken to him. I was a child who watched the sheep, so what could I say to him. However, at that time, my mother and brother talked a lot. I don't know who talked first. It was mentioned that I was studying in school. My mother started talking, and then one morning my brother said that he was going to Khovd *aimag*, and he would drive us.

We spent a night in Uvs *aimag* before going on to Khovd. In due course,

we joined some people to meet with Marshal Choibalsan. Then we all slowly went in the direction of Ulaan Baatar, stopping to talk about the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party's Tenth Khural to local people who were on their horses. We then traveled for two weeks to Ulaan Baatar arriving before Naadam.

At the time my brother and his wife were not married. He lived alone on the second floor of the Mongol Bank, and I lived with him. He spent a lot of time in the countryside, traveling with a commissar who carried a gun and three other men including the driver. Once they were gone for twenty days and sometimes even a month, while I remained at home alone.

I went to the summer Naadam in Ulaan Baatar and lived alone until the fall, buying my own food and water with money from my brother. I used some of this money to go to a restaurant for fried meat dumplings. 10 dumplings cost one *tugrik*—a good price. Now one dumpling costs 130-140 *tugriks*. In fact, I couldn't manage to eat all those ten dumplings, ate only 3, and took the rest home to eat in the morning or evening.

I got tired of being alone when my brother was in the countryside, so I went to the first floor of the Mongol Bank where many people worked. I became acquainted with the young women and men, so went there every day. I got to know them very well, and they wrote me many notes. Since I didn't work, I had a lot of free time to help the busy people transport letters and paperwork to many places. I volunteered to carry these papers here and there, so time passed quickly and I did not get bored.

### **3. I have become a City Man**

YK: When did you first come to Ulaan Baatar? What did you think of it? Did you like it?

YuA: Oh, I don't know. In coming from the countryside I didn't really know much about the city, and there were so many people here.

In 1941, the year of the Soviet-German war, I came to Ulaan Baatar. I lived with my brother who said to me one day: "I work at the Technicum and can enroll you there!" I had nothing to say. Soon after that he went to the countryside. Then one day, my brother's driver came and said to me: "We are going to the Technicum" so I rode in the car to my brother's school. The Financial Technicum was quite a distance from the Mongol Bank which made it difficult for the director to give the classes. We had to wait a while, but the director did not show up, so we went home. On the way, we passed the State Theatre so I said to the driver: "I can't go to school since it is too far from where I live. I don't know where the State Theater and the Mongol Bank are located since I am a country boy and can't find my way around all these

buildings.” Several days passed.

My brother had three drivers at the time, and one day one driver arrived and said: “I am taking you now. We are both going to the Institute!” So I went in the car with him, and we took a long time getting to a building on the top of a mountain where people saluted each other. We had arrived at a military institute where the four forms of math and the Mongolian script were taught. I was given two tests, and I took a long time for each one. I began to meet with the teachers there, and there were many of them. Someone announced that I was finished, so I headed for the door, but another person called out that it was not time to leave: “Stand by the wall.” So I stood by the wall with a red tape across it and was measured. I was measured but did not meet the height requirement, so the teacher said: “Forget it.” So I was rejected at the military school. Then my brother asked the driver what schools were near the bank and instructed him to enroll me in one of them. The Mongol Bank today is where it always was near what is called the Big Department Store. In front of it is a sign which says “The Trade Technicum” so I stopped the driver and said we should go and see it. Thus, we both went into the building and found the testing room where the test would be given on August 25<sup>th</sup>.

Lessons began September 1<sup>st</sup>. The driver told me that the school was part of the Federation of Co-ops which looked out for all the trade and commerce in Mongolia. We returned the next day, and the driver asked which class we should go to. Many commercial classes were mentioned. In the countryside, people used an abacus to reckon accounts and to take the census of the animals. Thus it was essential to know how to use an abacus. I was called on to work on the census of the herds, and the bookkeeper who kept the accounts in our *sum* was always clicking away on the abacus. At the time, I had studied using the abacus for accounts, which was the method I knew. Our teachers laughed when I said “let’s begin by striking the abacus!” Thus began my life at school.

All the other children, except me, had finished ten years of school, but I had only been to school in our area for two summers. For that reason, I was placed in a preparatory class for a year to prepare me for the next four years of school. In the spring of 1944, I finished the Federation of Co-ops School and went to work as an account inspector and held that position for three years.

#### **4. Moscow**

YuA: In the fall of 1946, the Federation of Co-ops sent 3 people to Moscow to study at the Trade Institute, and I was one of them. In Moscow, we stayed at the Mongolian Embassy for several nights, and then I went on to study at

the Moscow Trade Institute. There was, however, a question about those people who had not mastered ten years of education being in the regular class. The school was near the central building of the Soviet Trade Federation. We went there with people from the Mongolian Embassy and met an advisor at the school who asked me to wait a while. In fact, I waited several days and was informed that I would be admitted to another preparatory program at the Commercial Technicum which was more than twenty kilometers away.

I went there with a man from my area who was an economist and who only wished to take a class on raw materials, but there was no such class offered at the school, so this man went to Irkutsk to study raw materials. Another person was a financial specialist who wanted to take only finance classes and finally the school accommodated him, and everything settled down. We studied in our various classes, but the man in the financial course fell ill and returned home, leaving me alone in Moscow. I was, at the time, devoted to studying at the Commercial Technicum, which was near to where I lived, and I did so for about half the year. I also spent a lot of time at the Mongolian Embassy, and one day the secretary told me that I should quickly get my books and clothes from the Embassy and not go to the Technicum. He went on to say that I should live at the Embassy, which was like one big family. But where was that family at the Embassy? Who knows—maybe it had returned to Mongolia. Nevertheless, I stayed in the building by myself for a year until the fall of the following year.

After a year, and autumn began in August, the secretary informed me that we would both go to the Trade Institute. I was given a note about enrolling in the Institute, so I followed him, and we both went to school where I showed the note to the teacher who said that I had to wait a while and that an answer would come soon. A few days later, the secretary at the Embassy told me that the Institute's entrance exam would be given, and children from all the friendly countries would come to the school, and that I had to take the exam with them. Therefore I had to prepare for this exam when I had not even finished the 8<sup>th</sup> class. Children who had come to study at the Institute in Moscow came to the Embassy, and I had become friendly with two of them who had finished the 10<sup>th</sup> class and had learned to calculate.

So, a review session was organized for those children aiming to pass the entrance exam for the Trade Institute, and I attended it with the secretary from the Embassy. Students had to pass the exam before attending the Institute. I knew from youngsters in the Soviet Bloc what was on the exam, so in due course I succeeded.

Later all students were given an exam on the history of the Soviet Union. When the day of the test arrived, the teacher asked me certain questions that I



answered and then the teacher asked me; “Do you have private herds?” I answered that I had my own herds and so did my mother and father. Then the teacher exclaimed: “Who do you think you are? You are part of the private economy.” I thought to myself: “Doesn’t the Institute take into account the private economy?” One who is part of the private economy is called a “yedinochnik” or peasant small holder or maverick. When the teacher asked again “Who do you think you are?” I said nothing.

There was one girl among us taking the test who gently spoke up saying “I am a Marxist.” We all listened and then I said loudly: “I am a Marxist.” The teacher then said “Molodetz! (good fellow!) and graded my exam. I wondered what all of this had to do with a peasant small holder or maverick, but who knows. I imagine I must have been asked the question: “By what ideology are you being educated?” At the time, teachers from the Russian Empire taught in the schools. They really knew about trade and taught that England was the best model to explain the issues of world trade. Many countries were interested in establishing a market price for goods. It was said: “the price of the production of goods was connected to this. So was the price of products from the rural economy. The English pound sterling was almost the only guarantee of a currency that was even more solid than gold.” We gave a report for our teacher on England and the price of gold.

Soon after the war was over, we went to Moscow to study, and life became very serious. Each student from the Institute was given the norm of 500 grams of bread from a food store, which was not a lot.

At that time in the Soviet Union, there were few foodstuffs, and not everyone had a food card that determined how much food each person received. There were four of us Mongols studying at the school. Two of them studied before the war and returned home when the war began and came back to school after the war was over. Products from the herds and raw materials to be exported were taken to the White transfer base and from there freight cars took all of this to Moscow. We students kept our butter in the window to eat with our 500 grams of bread—which, indeed, was very little. Still without this food we could not live, and life with the food card was better than without it.

We students were also given help from the Embassy, and each student received about 500 rubles. At that time, there were altogether about thirty people studying in Moscow. The Mongols studied at the Foreign Language Institute in Moscow University, named after Lomonosov, as well as at the Institute of Foreign Trade. I studied at the Institute of Foreign Trade where I took lessons oriented to foreign trade. The Trade Institute, which was near to the Institute of Foreign Trade, focused on issues of domestic trade, but there were few differences between the schools, and the lessons were very similar.

Attention was paid to such questions as “how does one get money and how is money used?” We could learn from the era of the Russian monarchy, and even though some of these lessons were very old they followed one theory of market relations. However, such lessons reflected a lack of knowledge about the lives of people, and it is important to consider these lives and how they related to the market rate and capitalism. Our Russian teachers knew about socialism and capitalism.

IL: Now, more than ever, after the socialist revolution isn't it responsible to teach about the issues of the market economy from earliest times?

YuA: No, not necessarily. New objectives or goals must now be taught, so that both systems can be understood. Our teachers all speak good English, and we must be taught to speak English as well.

## **5. The Co-operative Union**

YuA: I worked for the Co-operative Union for the ten years after I finished school and did not work in foreign affairs. All the questions about internal Mongolian trade were raised here. In 1960, however, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and its Central Committee raised the issue of foreign trade at the all-Khural, and the decision was made to establish an independent Ministry of Foreign Trade since our Co-operative Union had only been responsible for domestic trade. Deputy Minister L. Ganjuurjav was appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Trade to handle exports, and I started at the Ministry of Foreign Trade when Mr. Ganjuurjav hired me to be responsible for imports.

I was appointed to work at Khatgal transshipment base where our animal traffic passed to the Soviet Union. However, after working there for several weeks, I returned to Ulaan Baatar with a liver ailment and improved after seeing gastroenterologists. One doctor told me that I should take the waters at Karlov Var springs for three years in succession. At the time, we had a sitting ambassador in Hungary who advised the trade ministry and when he returned to Mongolia, I was appointed the advisor. And so I lived in Budapest for five years. I also spent three years in Czechoslovakia and rested at Karlov Var with its famous springs. Once I spent two weeks there and recovered completely from my liver ailment, and I have not had a recurrence of the disease.

IL: So these springs offered you a good treatment.

YuA: Indeed. A very good treatment. The doctors who saw me there insisted that I drink the waters every day. So each day I did. It was very interesting there with more than thirteen types of gushing springs.

IL: How do these waters taste?

YuA: There is generally no taste, although occasionally one does taste a little

bitter. I went to the springs morning, noon, and night.

IL: Was the Ministry of Foreign Trade so organized in 1960 that the Co-operative Union was responsible for both internal and external trade?

YuA: Yes. In 1960 the Co-operative Union had complete authority over the transshipment bases, and I was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Trade. At the time, White Lake and Khatgal were the largest transshipment bases and were used to send animals to the Soviet Union. In Dornod *aimag*, there was a central goods base from which the Co-operative Union was in charge of trade inside Mongolia. The Co-operative Union was abolished when the Ministry of Foreign Trade took over and became responsible for all issues of trade and economic preparation.

IL: At that time, who was responsible for different sorts of foreign trade?

YuA: Our Ministry of Foreign Trade was under the jurisdiction of the leader of the trade department, Navaan-Yunden who had recently graduated from a German university and spoke German very well. I handled places for imports in the Ministry. There was also a good youngster, whose name I cannot recall, who was a specialist in the wool from our herds at our “Mongol Export” corporation. So there were three of us engaged in business with the western capitalist countries at that time.

Sandoz was a big Swiss company with many large industries near the German border. It processed skins and hides that were important to the chemical industry because chemicals were essential in the processing of skins in enterprises all over the world. Three of us went to this company, met the director, and drew up an agreement to procure the necessary chemicals to process our skins and hides. Thus, for the first time through this agreement, we bought 200 tons of chemicals. And the Mongolian State skin and hide industry has up until now continued to buy its chemicals from this firm and another Swiss firm. Our Ministry of Foreign Trade does business with more than thirty countries worldwide. At that time, we did have foreign trade relations with the capitalist countries.

We exported cashmere and sheep’s wool to the capitalist countries where our cashmere was prized because the western countries liked to mix it with chemically synthetic materials in their own knitting mills to produce a new type of thread. My work in Hungary entailed combining this synthetic material with the sheep’s wool to make good thread that was used to produce men’s suits. This material could be sold to western countries for foreign currency.

IL: Now there is no place to sell sheep’s wool so the herder has almost abandoned it, although the Chinese traders will buy it for a very low price.

YuA: Actually, the export of sheep’s wool was organized through the Industrial Trade Ministry, and there were many companies in Mongolia involved in

selling sheep's wool. After 1990, our herds were privatized and maybe that is why selling them is now more difficult.

The Ministry of Foreign Trade controlled three imports and one export, and they were all united into one large industrial *negdel* called “The Mongolian Export *Negdel*” that handled good products for export. “The Skin, Hides, and Wool *Negdel*” was very large and “The Mongolian Technical Import *Negdel*” was extremely powerful since it was responsible for the technical necessities and equipment needed in Mongolia. The issue of the need for imported goods was framed by the “Material Impex” (import-export) as it was called. This *negdel* was responsible for the importation of fuel. However, by the 1990s, these industrial trade *negdels* did very little.

I was working as the trade representative in Hungary, and once I organized a reception at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Trade and had a moment to talk with a specialist whose words I heeded carefully. He asked:

“Have you eaten your fill of those numerous foreign plans?”

“Yes—I do wish this would all work out, but there doesn't seem that there is much hope for our products” I said to him. He answered:

“I know someone to introduce you to. This person, Mr. Stoin, is expert in intestinal products, and he will be interested in the issues you raise. He actually comes from Switzerland.”

I answered: “I have to meet that person. Is he coming to Budapest?” He told me: “He comes here twice a month.” So ended our talk. I phoned the man and was told that he would come to a hotel atop the Geles Mountain and was told to go and meet him.

Our ministry in Hungary was located near Geles Mountain and the hotel. Since I knew he would come from Switzerland near our embassy, one afternoon at tea time I went to his hotel with a German translator. So we talked over lunch, and he said that he was very interested in going to Mongolia with its many intestinal products. So we had a meeting at the Ministry where Mr. Ganjuurjav handled the issues of foreign trade. He hoped that this expert could come to Mongolia soon, with the Ministry covering his expenses. He wanted to know immediately, so I contacted the Swiss Mr. Stoin who said he could go to Mongolia any time. Thus I quickly organized his trip from Budapest and Moscow to Ulaan Baatar where I showed him the meat Kombinat. He had advice for our specialists, and a productive meeting was held on how to sort out the intestinal products. This man continued to visit Mongolia, and we co-operated with him from 1964 to 2000. Thus we began to export many intestinal goods.

The first time we supplied 50,000 intestinal items, which grew to 300,000 items. Western countries used these intestinal products for sutures in surgery,

which is why they bought only sheep's guts. The guts of goats were not suitable for medical needs. By 2000, we had exported many, many of these sheep's guts to Western Europe for hard currency and medicine from West Germany.

## **6. Foreign Trade is My Specialty**

IL: At that time was it difficult to trade with capitalist nations because of different ideologies?

YuA: Our ideology did cause difficulties that I did not fully understand. But in the 1960s, we did begin to trade with the capitalist countries.

YK: What were the trade relations like between Hungary and Mongolia?

YuA: I was the Mongolian trade representative to Hungary for five years. Hungary sold stamps for foreign currency, and we sold our stamps to the Hungarians, and we were paid 30% in hard currency.

I had the idea of settling these accounts again when I went to Hungary, but there seemed to be a great loss in government trade. Sometimes the Hungarians did not pay the 30% hard currency completely, so we decided to sell these stamps ourselves to make a greater profit. The Ministry of Foreign Trade and our embassy agreed to this plan. I listened to the Hungarian side since there are always two sides of an issue. There was a discussion between our deputy minister and our ambassador and the Hungarians which dragged on for three days before an agreement was reached.

This agreement stated that the Hungarians would sell all the Mongolian stamps they could handle. The remaining stamps were returned to us, and we quickly carried them to Mongolia and sold them ourselves.

Mongolian stamps are very nice with good themes and designs. Famous people living in over twenty countries abroad collect Mongolian stamps.

There will soon be an event at which an American businessman will announce a plan to produce a golden stamp. We invited the deputy director of his company to come to Mongolia, and he did come and talk about his project to the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, which is how we came to know the Americans involved. We needed him to come to get the answers to our questions so we did not follow the rules, and I, as the Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Trade, invited him directly. This man was interested in various types of stamps with the specific theme of such wild animals as the tiger, snow leopard, stag, wild sheep, and mountain goat. We showed him our stamps with this theme.

He said that "we will produce golden stamps! We will use twenty ounces of gold and wealthy Americans will buy these stamps. You can also buy a few of them. We will take orders and give you the money!" The man then ordered

thirty stamps that we made and gave to him, but we had a good laugh because we had not confirmed the agreement with him, and the issue had to be handled by the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the deputy leader of the Soviets for the Socialist Council of Mutual Economic Assistance in Moscow.<sup>3)</sup> Thus, the agreement with this man was never confirmed.

IL: At that time, did regulations state that the Ministry of Foreign Trade had to act with the approval of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party?

YuA: Yes, of course. We had to know in advance about payments, and we had to meet many demands and requirements concerning any agreement, some of which I did not even know. The man did not know all of the issues that I had to deal with concerning the golden stamp.

Mr. Maidar, the deputy minister to the Soviet Embassy, heard the news although he had not gone to the meeting in Moscow. At the time, he was involved in environmental issues concerning wild animals, so I went to meet him and told him about the golden stamp. Then our Ministry of Foreign Trade had to draw up its accounts regarding the stamp that were then reviewed by D. Maidar who said that he could not decide this issue and said that we had to speak to Yu. Tsendenbal. So all the paper work was collected and shown to Tsendenbal, while I waited outside my older brother's office. Then the first secretary's phone rang, and we were told that Mr. Yu. Tsendenbal had invited us in. So we went to my older brother's office where we showed him all the paper work and he asked: "What is this all about? I read in the press that you wish to make golden stamps to sell in America. How much profit will you earn?" I told him that the Ministry of Foreign Trade thought well of our calculations, and he asked where were the Americans and if they planned to come to Mongolia. I told him that they had already come to Ulaan Baatar, but that no one wished to confirm the agreement and that all the people involved in the project were in Moscow. Tsendenbal said that the Americans should be well received and that the agreement should be confirmed which I was happy to hear.

YK: Did you often talk with your brother on issues of foreign trade?

YuA: Not generally. My older brother worked alone and followed the regulations that did not permit receiving me in his office.

This trade in golden stamps was very advantageous, and the American company that we dealt with could be a model for us although at the moment there are some conflicts. Mongolian stamps are actually profitable, and now we are trading in these stamps.

## **7. I am Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Trade**

YK: Did all the issues dealing with trade with foreign countries pass through you at that time?

YuA: Yes, because our industries and places of work could not be organized or used by foreigners. Therefore everything having to do with issues of foreign trade passed through me, including work practices, equipment, goods and demands, for materials from abroad, as well as the orders for the goods that we, ourselves, made here. Another ministry handled the issues of domestic trade.

YK: Where did you work after you were the trade representative in Hungary?

YuA: I worked in Hungary for five years until my term ended. I then returned to Mongolia and was appointed trade counselor to Moscow where I worked for seven years and served as the Mongolian Foreign Trade Deputy Minister. I dealt with the trade in golden stamps that I had learned a lot about while working in Hungary. There was a famous Hungarian professor with whom I worked on these stamps, and I heard him lecture on the subject at the embassy. At that time, our ambassador to Hungary was Mr. Byamba Renchin and his daughter worked there as well. She spoke Hungarian very well and translated the Professor's lecture so all could read it.

IL: How many years have the Mongolians made stamps?

YuA: For a long time. Didn't the manufacture of stamps begin in the time of the Bogd Khan? Yes—making stamps began a long time ago. After the 1921 People's Revolution Prime Minister D. Tserendorj made Mongolian stamps. A stamp was created then from a photograph of the head and shoulders of Kh. Choibalsan. There was a good deal of interest in each stamp and collectors asked "what is being said in the Mongolian mail?" Some wondered what was meant by writing the word "money" on the stamps. Am I talking nonsense?

YK: No. You speak about all of this in an interesting way.

YuA: The work of the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade was very difficult. I had to clock in and out all the people who worked there, and it was my responsibility if a person was late to work.

There was also the problem of dealing with the gossip among the embassy workers, and their disputes and quarrels had to be settled. Women were the hardest to deal with, but the Minister could not get involved in all the problems inside the embassy.

At the time, it was urgent to reach decisions on questions involving imports. Sometimes, goods which were ordered did not arrive on time, and this was most serious when the delay pertained to imports of fuel. A chart was kept noting when the domestic user was in danger of running out of fuel. If this happened all transport would stop, and the country would lose its profits

from foreign trade. Money demanded by the Ministry of Finance from the Ministry of Foreign Trade was then used to deal with any problems of foreign trade. Private companies dealt directly with foreigners.

There was a meeting in Bulgaria for the Mongolian Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Representatives from personnel from the Central Committee Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party confirmed this. Our representative was appointed the leader, and so I went to the meeting. The Deputy Ministers of Foreign Trade came from five countries—Bulgaria, East Germany, Yugoslavia, Mongolia, and Poland. The meeting was organized by the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the sponsors of the trade prize "Mercury." I was working for the Ministry of Foreign Trade when it became an issue to trade with the western capitalist countries, including England, France, West Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, and Sweden.

IL: How would you describe trade with Finland and Sweden?

YuA: Our medical equipment was bought from the Finns. Our famous doctor, the Professor of Heart Surgery D. Shagdarsuren, bought all his medical equipment from Finland, and I was in Moscow when the Finnish trade representative was there.

Once I met with our trade representative S. Gongor and the representative from West Germany who wished to sell high quality paper. An agreement was drawn with the company manager who was an old man whose name I cannot remember. After arranging this agreement, we went to a restaurant for dinner, and S. Gongor asked what everyone liked to drink. He put out three cups of spirits, and the old man opted for the strongest that was the cup of whiskey. I drank a cup of red wine, and then was compelled to drink the other spirits as well. As we talked, we asked what was so great about us Mongols and he answered: "You are the future Chinggis Khan and Batu Khan<sup>4</sup>) who were the most famous people in the world." However, we believed that all of us were born and all of us would die without ever reaching the peak of fame. I remember this person very well.

People in Europe know a lot about Chinggis and his grandson Batu, but we do not know as much. Even though I had been a student at the Technicum, I had heard little about them. Mother and father and some of their friends had learned about Chinggis Khan from people they knew. One reads in the history books that Chinggis Khan used great force and violence in creating the Mongol world state, that his military moved south to India, and that Batu Khan governed all of Eastern Europe. Amazing! I went to organize a meeting in Delhi when I was the deputy Minister of Foreign Trade. As a youth, our ambassador had worked in Delhi and spoke Hindi well, so he was the



translator at the meeting where I spoke English. Now I have almost forgotten my English, which is easy to forget if not spoken very often.

After the meeting, we went to see the famous Taj Majal which is a mausoleum as well as a temple and one of the seven wonders of the world. It is registered by UNESCO as a world heritage site. The Taj Mahal is covered with red and green marble, and the artistry and intelligence of the builders have created a monument wondrous to behold.

I had heard of the Taj Mahal and had read about its history from which I learned that a Mongolian was connected to it. The temple was built by a Khan of Mongolian origin whose wife died after giving birth to thirteen children. The story goes that the Khan loved her so much that he had this monument built for her to be interred in.

We have nothing like this today even though we created and were the masters of the world state and set up powerful governments over a vast area and in many countries. People back home, however, longed for lives of luxury, and how could any country manage all of this? One scholar has written: “Chinggis Khan built up the Great Mongolian State as a leader in world trade and furthered the development of culture!” In this great Mongolian State, many religions co-existed peacefully within a huge area with no fixed borders. One administration took care of many people who were free to travel and engage in trade and commercial activity. In fact, we changed the historical development of the world. We, however, did not know much about our past. What do we think about all of this? I don’t know. We know very little about our history.

IL: Was the “Gobi” Kombinat set up to export cashmere?<sup>5)</sup>

YuA: We exported to the Soviet Union and Switzerland and sometimes to West Germany. At the time, “The Mongol Export” *negdel* sold cashmere abroad and Mr. D. Gombojav from the Ministry of Foreign Trade worked to increase commerce with foreign countries. This Minister was a specialist in commerce and could answer all sorts of questions. Since some of our people had foreign appointments we were acquainted with the regulations. Finally, our Minister was a member of the CC/MPRP and had worked for many years with issues of foreign trade.

## **8. Our Family**

YK: Please tell me now about your personal life. When were you married?

YuA: In 1940, I followed my older brother Tsendenbal to Ulaan Baatar, and I lived on the second floor of the Mongol Bank. My older brother often went to the countryside, and I was left to live alone so I spent time with the family of Mr. Olziitin Badrakh who had shared a water source with my family in our

home area. In 1930, Mr. O. Badrakh was the secretary of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, but was dismissed as a "Leftist deviationist." Mr. O. Badrakh lived in an irregularly patterned tent and was like an older brother. He also rode in an elegant car when visiting us herders in the countryside, which was the first time I saw a car. Usually, all of us children had to go to town to see a car. Once I went to watch the sheep with a friend and in the morning saw something soft and white that we understood was edible. There was also something that was a polished green and looked nice and was good to eat. When I tasted the white stuff, however, I exclaimed that "it had no salt and maybe that is why it tastes so bad." Nevertheless, I ate a bit of the white stuff but don't remember if I gave it to anyone else or threw it away. Come to think of it, I was eating some bread which was then unknown in our area! In 1938, Mr. O. Badrakh "was forbidden to serve on the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party" because of his mistakes as a "Leftist deviationist."

When I was living with my brother on the second floor of the Mongol Bank, Mr. O. Badrakh came over sometimes with his young daughter. He was sometimes joined by Mr. D. Yelee and his daughter, who came from our *Uvs aimag*, *Naranbulag sum*, and who was the leader of Mongolian labor on the Central Committee. In 1938, the government slandered and framed him, and he was executed. Mr. S. Shijay, who came from my area and had served as Secretary of the Central Committee, was also killed in 1938.

The wives of O. Badrakh and D. Yelee were great friends, so Mrs. D. Yelee came over with her daughter. I had finished the Technicum when Mrs. O. Badrakh came to visit to talk about her daughter attending the Soviet Upper School which was controlled by the State Planning Committee. Mrs. O. Badrakh told me to "keep running the Lenin Club with its dances. Lots of people meet there, and you must go and sit with this nice girl." So I did just that and found my wife. We married, and now we have three daughters and one son.

In 1938, Mr. O. Badrakh and D. Yelee were executed, and their wives suffered greatly. At the time, all the property of those executed was confiscated, causing those who lost their belongings to become homeless. Once there was an opportunity to speak to Mr. Choibalsan since I knew him well, and he gave these women a *ger* to live in which was set up on the far side of what is now the Teacher's College. So the two families lived in this *ger*.

I attended the Technicum in Ulaan Baatar and during the summer vacationed in my home area. I returned when school began in the fall when the Mongol *deel* was worn. But for children studying at the Technicum, the Director gave us our *deels* in a bag of things that had been confiscated and

stored in a warehouse. In the spring, I put these clothes in a bag when I returned home by car. In 1950, my wife and her mother came to Ulaan Baatar and lived with a woman whose husband had died.

YK: What was life like for your mother when she came to Ulaan Baatar?

YuA: Mother lived in my brother's apartment behind a Mongol *ger*. My brother was married at the time and lived in a very large building with a *khashaa* with surveillance everywhere and official protection. There was a small gate on the north side of the *khashaa*, and on the south side there was a big gate with many soldiers. In addition, permission was required to talk on the phone. Our mother said that the building had no air and was stuffy and that the wooden floors were noisy!

Our brother read many books and worked constantly rarely going to bed before 3 or 4 in the morning and then arising early. He wrote all sorts of things in Russian and acted as the translator for the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. He would read something himself, and then he would translate it into Mongolian. I am not familiar with the intricacies the commissars discussed with him.

Now and again he would call his wife who would say: "Let's go to the movies!" We only asked him for one thing—to borrow his car to take the children to the doctor, and he let us use it. We were asked if my brother had a lot of money, but I did not know.

My brother's wife did not work because my brother had a livable salary. When I was asked questions, I answered that "from time to time older brother loans me the car for going to the doctor." Was I believed? Who knows? I learned much later that brother's wife was the director of a children's fund. My brother's Russian wife worked and was paid a salary. In 1974, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party, L.I. Brezhnev, visited Mongolia and came to the wedding palace in Ulaan Baatar to offer funds to build kindergartens.

## **9. Older Brother's Wife A. I. Filatova**

YK: When did you meet your brother's wife, A. I. Filatova?

YuA: I was in the Soviet Union when I met her. At the time, my brother planned to be there for five years. He had been in Moscow for about five months, and I went to the Metropol Hotel to meet him.

One evening a commissar phoned my brother and said: "Tonight we will have dinner with another family." Then a Russian man named I.V. Vazhnov came on the phone, and we went off to dine with this Russian family who lived near the hotel. A Russian woman sat with him and across the table sat two younger Russian women. I went in search of an empty chair while the

commissar became acquainted with my brother. I shook hands with everyone but did not catch their names. While people talked, I went outside with my brother. Then we all sat down for dinner along with three Russian young ladies who were sisters, one of whom would be my brother's wife. The three women were joined by Mr. I.V. Vazhnov and his friend, a Colonel, whom he knew from working in the Kremlin where he was an advisor to the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and where he had met Stalin. It was I.V. Vazhnov who arranged the marriage between my brother and Filatova, but my brother did not speak to us about it, and I only heard the news later. When the dinner was over, I returned directly to my school building, having met my brother's future wife for the first time before she came to Ulaan Baatar in 1947.

YK: Did you visit your brother at home?

YuA: We did visit him, and sometimes his wife would call us to go to the movies—most of them Russian—some on agriculture or medicine. Our home in which we lived for a long time is now located on the south side of the Officers' Palace, which now houses the Co-operative Building. We moved to the center of the city when I began to work at the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Our brother has two children: the oldest is Vladislav, and the youngest is Zorig who nearly died at birth but managed to survive. Ts. Zorig was a youngster when we met him in Moscow and is now back in Ulaan Baatar. Vladislav died in 1999.

YK: Now A. Buyantogs (Ayush's youngest daughter) will you speak a bit?

A Buyantogs: I stayed in Ulaan Baatar with my grandparents while my father worked in Hungary. I also spent time with my father's older brother, and since there were no children in the family and we were like their children, they taught us many things.

In 1984, we all moved in with my father's brother's family but I didn't stay very long. In 1986 - 1989, I went to study as an aspirant in Moscow and was glad to see them later on.

IL: I read a book by Tsendenbal's son, Zorig, entitled "The Last Seven Years" in which he emphatically stated that there was a conspiracy to remove his father from his post. He further wrote that he was on a holiday with his parents in July, 1984 in the Soviet Union where his family had vacationed for many years. He said that when they left Mongolia, his father was healthy and displayed no ill symptoms. Then, however, the Secret Police [or KGB] made a house arrest, and the Kremlin doctors averred that his father was not well and had to stop working because he had to be treated right away. However, no clear diagnosis was offered. While they were all in Moscow, the Eighth All Khural and the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party were meeting, and his father was relieved of his post. This was all

written in so many words. How do you respond?

YuA: I have been listening to all of this and point out that I met with my brother before the Khural, but we didn't talk about much though I did, now and again, ask him how things were going. My brother was a very silent individual. Some people like to talk a lot, but my brother was not like that. He was generally not a talkative man but would answer questions asked of him. He seldom initiated a conversation and did not talk about the government, the nation, or his work in the government. We didn't pay much attention to all the talk from high ranking people. Tsedenbal loved to read, and once he began a book he had to finish it.

My sister-in-law called us just after Tsedenbal died. At the time, I was the trade representative from the Ministry of Foreign Trade in Bulgaria. When I had gone to see my brother in Moscow, he had liver disease and was in rather poor condition. The course of his illness was set, and I stayed with him for several days during his hospital treatment.

At 11 in the morning, he received an injection. I do not know the name of the medication, but I do know it was not suitable. He did not look well and forgot things, though generally my brother had a good memory. He had become old, was very weak, and remained in bed. Before Tsedenbal was sick, he read 74 Soviet publications and took notes in red and green pencil. I had heard the commissars say that this was how he memorized the contents of the journals. In addition, he had collected a good library from all his visitors, which should have been shared.

YK: Where is the library now?

YuA: It doesn't exist anymore. Who knows if some of the books are in the Central State Library. I really do not know what happened to all his belongings and where they were dispersed after he was relieved from his post. I don't even know who was responsible for organizing all of this. It is a pity that the leaders of the Mongolian government acted so irresponsibly in getting rid of all those things. My brother kept daily records, awards, maps, and kitchen equipment that the State Procurator knew about.

And where are his many star medals and government awards? I don't know. Where are the souvenirs and things that the Mongolian people gave him? Who knows. And where are the many guns that foreigners gave him when they met him even though my brother did not hunt? The Ministry of the Interior now has my brother's guns, and perhaps they will be given to a museum, but this was not discussed at the All Khural meeting of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in 1984.

Many generals from the Russian military were private acquaintances of my brother and kept in touch with him by telephone from Moscow. He held

the title of lieutenant general from the 1939 War of Khalkhin Gol.<sup>6</sup>

IL: Could you talk about losses in foreign trade when you worked at the Ministry?

YuA: There were losses and the cost of foreign goods was reduced. We also produced our own goods rather than relying solely on other producers. Because there was a reduction in prices, there was a diminution of foreign trade because these products yielded a higher profit on the world market. There were major differences between blouses made from cashmere and from wool. The Soviet Union was the major buyer for all the raw materials from our herds, while our industries were devoted to manufacturing the finished product.

The pricing department at the Ministry of Foreign Trade was very renowned and had the opportunity to purchase goods based on the fluctuations of prices on the world market. Mongolia bought all its consumer goods from the Soviet Union and directly paid money for them. Certainly its government was our central trading partner.

The Soviet market also created a demand from our own workers, promoted the building industry, and gained great wealth. Live herds, however, could be an economic loss. The Soviet Union was very strict in its demands concerning these animals that were sent via the Khatgal transfer station, and all of them were inspected for contagion. Even if an animal was not ill, it would not be sold if one animal in the herd was a bit sick. We had a veterinarian who worked at the Ministry of Agriculture, so the Soviet professionals knew about the health of our herds and settled other issues before accepting them.

I went several times to the Khatgal transfer station to work out any problems, and D. Ganjurav, S. Tsagaandorj, and B. Tserendev were all good workers at our Ministry of Foreign Trade who knew Russian well and were experienced, intelligent people with fine minds. They all were central Khalkh people from Övörkhongai and Arkhangai.

A national committee set the prices for products on the internal market, and at that time the prices held steady and did not change for many years. New products, however, were priced according to the most recent prices. Thus, trading with the socialist countries was easy because the prices did not generally increase. Trading with the capitalist countries was more difficult because there had to be agreement on the prices of goods.

Transport to foreign countries was a serious problem because there were no waterways in Mongolia. There were rail lines through Siberia, and even an airplane for sending goods to Europe, but the route from Mongolia was very long. In addition, Mongolia had to pay for the transport of goods to the Soviet Union. There was limited air freight through Moscow for light products.

YK: We must now bring our conversation to a close. Do you wish to add anything to what we have talked about in this brief period?

YuA: Well, I have told you about my work, and you have heard many things. I can't add much.

YK: So, many thanks for this interesting conversation.

## Notes

- 1) Russian for country house.
- 2) In the summer of 1939, Soviet and Mongolian troops joined together to defeat a Japanese army seeking to encroach on Mongolian lands. On the ensuing battle, see Alvin Coox, *Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2 vols., 1985).
- 3) The Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was the trade association supported by the Soviet bloc. Mongolia joined the organization in June of 1962.
- 4) Batu Khan was the real founder of the Golden Horde, the Mongolian Khanate in Russia. On him, see Charles Halperin, *Russia and the Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History: Golden Horde* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). For the latest work on Mongol influence on Russia, see Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 5) On the Gobi Kombinat and the development of the cashmere industry in Mongolia, see the Yuki Konagaya and I. Lkhagvasuren interviews, Mary Rossabi's translation, and Morris Rossabi's edited and compiled book *Socialist Devotees and Dissenters: Three Twentieth-Century Mongolian Leaders* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2011), pp. 276-283.
- 6) See footnote 2.