

みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

Interviews

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Interviews

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I Badamkhand

B: Badamkhand

D: Lkhagvademchig

1 Origins or Past History

B: Let's use this desk to write on.

D: Alright.

B: Religion in our day was poorly understood.

D: You must sit down. Where would you like to sit?

B: Never mind — it doesn't matter.

D: Aren't you cold?

B: I'm fine.

D: Sit right here and tell me your name.

B: Badamkhand.

D: Your last name?

B: Dambin.

D: Where are you from?

B: You mean now?

D: Yes.

B: From this general area, but I was born near the far eastern side of the Khandjamts stupa.

D: In which year were you born?

B: 1943.

D: Have you been living here since you were born?

B: I have always lived here. I now live in the countryside where I retired after working in a factory. I live on a pension and am now 68 years old. My mother and father still live there, as did my ancestors, among whom was a *taij* (or nobleman). One of my father's relatives was a Buddhist lama. There was a monastery on a hillock and the lama there was my father's relative, and he was my great uncle. He was a doctor of Buddhist medicine and this relative of mine was talked about all over. But lamas were taken away.

D: Did you go to school when you were young?

B: No. In my time, there were hardly any primary schools for five year olds. Kids who didn't go to school became "street smart" and cunning, as did those taken

out of school by their parents.

D: How many children were in your family?

B: There were two of us. My younger brother lives in the city and is now an old man. He was in the military for many years and now is on a pension.

D: Did your brother go to school?

B: My brother did and from school he went straightaway into the military and now is pensioned.

D: Are your parents alive?

B: Yes, they tend their herds and there are many animals for them. I was a herder for a long time. But life goes on. As of now I can say I never learned much — I didn't go to school.

2 Building the Kharkhorin State Farm

D: Had the *negdel* movement started in your time?

B: It started in 1958, and everyone joined in 1959. For example, my area became Shankhain *negdel*, and I think it was named "Peace" but I am an old woman and so I forgot. In 60 and 61 and even in 58, 59 and 60 the Virgin Lands Plan started, and ploughing began. In the 1960s, the State Farm took over, and this area became the Kharkhorin State Farm. Most of our *negdel* herds were given over, and those animals that remained with us were looted. Finally, the State Farm came to control the herds, and people were left without their own animals. Herding was the main occupation in the countryside, but by 1978 our State Farm had cleared out everything, and nothing was left — not even ten head of cattle. But only our State Farm suffered in this way.

D: Did the animals return?

B: Yes — as we tried to replenish our herds, but only one hundred remained.

D: What happened to the herds?

B: All the herds were sold to the *negdel*.

D: The State Farm herds?

B: The State Farm herds were sold to the *negdels*. But the *negdels* sold them so, really, our State Farm was looted. Looking back now, I can see there was no accountability. The *negdel* farmers had many more animals than most private herders — even more than the herding families on the State Farms who had few of their own herds.

D: Did people generally like the *negdel* movement? How was it received?

B: Some liked it and some really hated it. I was 16 or 17 at the time of this *negdel* movement, and I was quite mature. Many people just followed along with the majority, but others hated the *negdels*. Others disliked communal things, and that was the general feeling.

D: Did your parents have herds when they were on the State Farm?

B: Yes, they were given them by the State Farm.

D: Did your younger brother attend school?

B: My younger brother went to school and finished the fourth class at Shankhad, and then went to a school in Khujirt. There were seven grades in the school in Khujirt, but he only completed, maybe, fifth or sixth grade. He drove a tractor or a combine in the countryside for several years on the State Farm, and then he joined the military.

D: What did children generally do after getting up in the morning?

B: After getting up, the kids milked the herds and took care of them. It was around three o'clock.

D: Really that early?

B: Yes, the stars were still out. Even before the *negdel* movement, we had a milk factory, and the milk was collected. What a shame to be up so early, the stars glittering everywhere as the children gathered up the cows for their milking. Here and there you could hear the noises from the cows that were being milked. Nowadays, the children don't get up so early, and if they do, they say they will die!

D: When did you go to bed?

B: We went to sleep when it was very dark because all day long we were busy milking the cows and chasing the young calves out with the herds, and the day seemed like a year. So it was only in the evening that we had a little free time. In the summer, the evening was cool, and we could play. We did not go to bed until after the sun went down way after dusk. But it seemed to me that as soon as I fell asleep, it was time to get up again. Now I have my own children, but since I was little, I woke up to milk the cows. I worked for the State but if a person has only his or her own cow one doesn't get too tired, and it isn't too much. People cannot manage with more than six, but if there is an early winter those six may decrease to one by the summer (an early winter could lead to death for many animals).

D: What did you do for fun, and how did the children play?

B: Us? We used to play along the river banks with the rocks and the bones.

D: Did you use the stones to play the game of *ger*?¹⁾

B: Yes, and we built things from animal bones, and that is how we played.

D: Did the boys also play *ger*?

B: Yes, and the girls and the boys played together, and the girls would also herd the animals. Sometimes we would find a brightly colored and beautiful piece of china. Such was how we played. Today, however, children see beautiful things but pay them no attention.

D: At that time, did the old people, in the evening, tell stories about famous events?

B: They spoke from the heart and also played many games, which included flicking

the ankle bones as well as the game of *alagh melkhii*²⁾ Today young and old also play games with ankle bones, and at Tsaagan Sar (New Year) in both the city and small towns everyone gathers, and a rug is spread out to sit on when everyone plays that game. All the generations play together and sometimes games are played with precious stones.

D: Precious stones and wood?

B: Wooden animal figures are played with, as are dominoes. We also play with squares of wood with animals carved on the tops.

D: Did you play cards?

B: No — I have never seen them.

3 Food in Socialist Times

D: What sort of food did you eat then? Did you eat vegetables as we do now?

B: No. Generally eating vegetables was unknown. At that time, only flour was produced from things that were planted. The norm for one family was three kilograms of white flour and two kilograms of coarse grain. Bran flour looked pitch black. The flour would arrive at the center and we would pick up our share —if we were lucky we would get two kilograms and we would eat it with “white fat”, *aruul* or *eezgii*³⁾. In the evening we could eat meat and, in the morning we drank butter tea with some meat. The children put their *aruul* and *eezgii* in their pockets. In the evening we might have blood pudding sausage or the meat from a head or shin.

D: Were there potatoes and other vegetables?

B: We knew about potatoes. The *negdel* movement had been victorious by 1962, and there were some vegetables planted — especially potatoes. But in 1958-9 we had no idea how to eat potatoes. Actually, in 59, 60 and 61, the State Farms were raising what seemed like these strange potatoes which now are strangely beautiful when they have turned yellow and their skins are new. And when cabbages were unloaded on the ground, few were even given away since most of us did not know how to eat them. The animals wouldn't even eat them, so they just rolled around. I didn't know how to eat the potatoes, cabbages, and other vegetables which I eat now. In the past, the potatoes were sliced and mixed with other food, but since they were never cooked through, no one ate them. Later in 1963, we moved to the [village] center, and the children began from 1965-1970 to eat their vegetables. Funnily enough, I now enjoy vegetables and use them in making soup.

D: Did you have many grains?

B: We had some millet. Rice was extremely rare so only a few people ate it. There wasn't much white rice. Now I am grown up and am alone with my parents who are brother and sister. My father had two children; my brother was raised by my

father, and I was raised by my mother who is my father's sister. So my brother and I grew up separately. We had very little rice but when a child caught cold or had a cough, he or she would be given boiled rice. But millet was also scarce.

D: What else do you give a child with a cold or cough?

B: We give light food, including millet.

D: Do you offer the child sugary fruit?

B: If we can find it. When I was small, we had a little pot which held big white sugar cubes — like crystalized sugar. We didn't have wrapped candy. Every so often, a person could find "marrow candy," which was long and narrow, but recently it is hard to find. Now we have sugar all the time. A pot of sugar was a big deal since it was helpful in getting a sick person to drink. Sugar is best in cubes.

D: Russian?

B: Russian cubes. Children gather around the sugar bowl and grovel as they divide it up, pounding it with a hammer or a knife.

D: Did you get any?

B: The children gave me some, but adults got their sugar in the city and divided it up. You never saw granulated sugar. We rarely saw raisins, but at the end of the 1960s the lamas gave us Chinese Nanjing plums, which were delicious. Now we have similar things which the overseas Chinese bring here. When there is no war threatening us, things are pretty good, and we can buy things. There is technology in the field of transportation as well. So that is how we grew up. We do eat and drink more, and we eat a lot of blood pudding sausage as well as the inner stomach, the head and shins of animals.

D: What about sausage and tea?

B: We weren't allowed to drink much tea.

D: Why?

B: Children do not generally drink tea, which is believed to make them sick.

D: I have heard that tea was not given to children.

B: They drank a mixture of water and milk, not tea. In the spring and summer you could not yet drink the new batch of *airagh*⁴⁾ and fatten up and get satisfaction.

D: Is meat generally eaten during the summer?

B: No — and *bortz* (strips of dried meat) isn't even made. Spring is the time for ploughing and planting vegetables. The animals need to migrate, so it is not the time to slaughter the animals and, anyway, the meat could spoil. If some animals were slaughtered, their meat was cooked with hot stones or boiled and eaten. But in summer, little meat is eaten.

D: Did you want to eat meat in summer?

B: Not in summer. In spring after Tsaagan Sar⁵⁾ when there still is snow, all is beginning anew, and the herds start to calve and give birth in places spotted with

snow. We then have milk with our grain, which with their protein can substitute for meat. When it is very cold and rainy, we enjoy this milk and grain, and if this weather continues for several days we eat lungs. I don't know why we didn't make *bortz*, but at such times one should make a gruel and slice fat into it — so delicious. So you didn't see that much meat then.

D: Did you have barley flour or parched barley?

B: No barley flour, but there is parched barley flour in the Gobi. We really didn't have barley flour then, but it can now be found in the south Gobi area.

D: Did your work with the herds include industrial work?

B: Yes, I worked with the herds on the State Farm for two years taking care of the sheep, and then I worked in a factory for thirty years. I got my pension after these thirty years.

D: What sort of factory?

B: I worked in a flour factory for many years, which had been built about the same time as the State Farm. After it was built, people came from the distant Guchin and Bogd *sums* (or districts) by truck to work there. Herders, tractor drivers, and workers all labored in this factory.

D: Were most of them young people?

B: Nothing but young people, only about twenty, during my time.

4 Festivals and Religion in Socialist Times

D: When you were young, what festivals did you enjoy?

B: There weren't many other than Naadam⁶⁾, which had its faults. Let me think what there was besides Naadam. There was an election in a *ger*, or one went to the Erdene Zuu lamasery for several days. And we played chess, draughts, and if things were bad perhaps we listened to the radio station, which had a board game connected to it. It was nice when it was decided to hold horse races or chess or draughts matches. Naadam did have wrestling as well, which our children now have. We got up early in the morning to milk the cows, and then we went to the town of Shankh, galloping on our horses. We returned to milk the cows in the evening and did the same the next day. But the *ger* Naadam was a great two days for the children, while fathers and mothers enjoyed three days of drinking spirits and *airagh*. That is what I call Naadam.

D: Tsagaan Sar?

B: Yes, Tsagaan Sar. We were not allowed to celebrate Tsagaan Sar. We could not greet people or give Buddhist offerings and, in fact, we would hide them in a chest. We could have no festivities, nor could we arrange the table. In the evening, however, we would take the *deel* (or Mongolian robe) from the chest and lay it out by the lapels.

D: So this went on during Tsagaan Sar?

- B: Yes. When I was young, things were hard during that time. Now I remember the agitator who would come by and check that we were not celebrating and would check our table.
- D: When was that?
- B: In the 60s and in 57, 58 and 59 we couldn't even greet people. In the 50s, only the State herders could celebrate Tsagaan Sar, which we could only celebrate much later.
- D: In those days, could you do much at Tsagaan Sar?
- B: No, as a worker, I couldn't.
- D: Did you celebrate December 25th?
- B: We didn't know about Christmas. I only heard that many other countries celebrated this holiday. I was not a pious woman and knew little about this.
- D: Were you a Buddhist when you were young?
- B: We had to hide my Buddhism. If we were open, we were punished. That is how it was. But the religion remained. We were considered remnants of feudalism if we were believers. When I was young, we hid many small statues of the Buddha in the cliffs.
- D: Did you light a Buddhist incense lamp in the evening?
- B: Yes. We took the lamp out of the chest and saw the image.
- D: Just in the evening?
- B: In the evening. That was the best time. Later it was quickly locked away.
- D: Was this true of all families?
- B: My family always did this, and I don't know about what other families did.
- D: Did your children wear protective amulets?
- B: Yes. Some small leather images of Buddha were made to be pinned onto clothing.
- D: Were you taught the Buddhist incantations during those oppressive times?
- B: We recited these in times of distress out in the countryside.
- D: Did your parents teach you these?
- B: Yes, they gave us a demonstration.
- D: At that time, did you come across many lamas?
- B: No, one did not generally see a lama in his costume, although there were a few lamas, always dressed in black, here and there.
- D: Were they involved in animal husbandry?
- B: They worked in herding and if they didn't, they would have been arrested as remnants of feudalism.
- D: Does your husband have children?
- B: Yes — we have children together and have built a *khüree* (or lamasery). Later they left for the city before returning to the country and had their *khüree* once their religion was permitted. They were “people of the book.”

D: Did people read the sacred texts?

B: Yes, at night. An old man — (and certainly during Tsagaan Sar) led the reading of the books at night to the family that had formed a circle and all were silent.

D: Did the lama speak and ask questions?

B: Yes, in a secretive sort of way, and there were questions foretelling the future. A fortune teller could tell who would fail. Things got better later.

D: Were there periods when things were going quite well? Did families generally accept Buddhism?

B: By the 1970s things were better, and the fear of worshipping Buddha had lessened compared with earlier times. People were less afraid to read the scriptures and give blessings.

D: Did the Dalai Lama visit Mongolia and did you see him? Had it been about sixty years since he visited?

B: I worked in the capital at that time.

D: Did you and many other Mongols hear him?

B: We heard him. He rode into the city on a special bus in the 1970s and went to the Gandan Monastery⁷⁾. The road was closed, incantations were said, and people gathered.

D: How are people doing nowadays? Did the Party leaders promote atheism?

B: Yes, some did.

D: Did some people preach against religion?

B: Ah, frequently, frequently. Religion is often spoken of badly. They would say that there has been deception and oppression caused by religion for two hundred years. By the 1980s, things were not as bad and finally almost alright. Some people were exonerated, one could talk about what was bad, and there was less fear.

D: Do you have a sutra book?

B: I had a sutra book but didn't know how to read it.

D: Is it alright if the lamas read the sutras for you?

B: The book wasn't read very often — just now and then. Once a year it was read, and then the family put it away. I don't know what happened to the sutras. There are no books now. My mother said they were not essential but respected the Buddha.

D: What did you think of the Buddhist religion when you were young?

B: I didn't really believe in the religion and thought it was all a lie. Now I can talk about what is false. Now we do not need to be ignorant, and we can talk about the feudal era and all sorts of things.

D: Is there an artel (or workshop) in existence?

B: Artel? There is the "Khujirt artel" in the "Shankhad Lower center," which produces elegant Mongolian boots.

D: Do the lamas work in the artel?

B: The older ones do. Several remained and worked for Shankh, but I really don't know about the Khujirt artel in Khujirt. There are quite a few artels in Khujirt, where there is a spa for holiday makers near the big *oboo*⁸⁾ in the *sum*.

D: Was there a sort of “cultural revolution?” (The reference is really to a “hygienic revolution”)

B: Yes, when I was no longer a child, and it was exciting. It really was a requirement of “The Three Ministries” that everyone had to have a blanket, and each bed had to have two sheets made from washable cotton.

5 The Course of the “Cultural Revolution”

D: What happened in this “cultural revolution?”

B: You couldn't sleep well because you were told that the officials would check on you at night, and if you didn't meet their demands, you could go to prison. But as a result of this “cultural revolution,” children were given a play area, a library with a reading room, and sanitary facilities. There was a notebook pinned on a post showing which leader or committeeman was in charge for a week or two. There was improvement thanks to the introduction of the notebook and cotton bedclothes, which were intelligent additions. Grease could be wiped off the cotton curtain.

D: Do you know which curtain I am referring to?

B: Yes, it is hung in front of the bed, and they are decorated but not every *ger* is painted, and most are grey-brown and without color. Cleaning the wood and rafters and roof rings in the *gers* requires scraping them back to their base. The “cultural revolution” was very demanding.

D: During this “cultural revolution” did people use the sheets or stow them away and save them?

B: They were used and a big family would use them many times over. But they had to be kept clean in case of a random inspection.

D: Do you have a metal frame bed or a wooden bed?

B: Wooden beds — the blue and the green beds (referring here to the headboards) were the nicest. Metal beds came in later, and we got a new one with an elegant blue head board when we moved to the *aimag* (or province) center. We still have that bed, which is now coated with smoke. But there are no such beds in the countryside. A bright colored bed is elegant and can also serve as a bench, which can need to have its feet repaired.

D: Were you supposed to be a member of the Party?

B: I was in the factory union and if you were in that union, most people joined the Party.

D: You didn't have to be a Party member?

- B: No. There were strict requirements, and only those with a good education and good job could be Party members. One had to “shadow” or be under the guidance of a Party member for three years before becoming a member.
- D: Was your salary at the time enough for you to live on?
- B: Yes. My salary at the time was good. Back then money was really money. A guard was paid 100 to 200 (*tugriks*), and a cleaner earned 120. Those who had worked for a long time in a factory received 180. Those who worked with grains got 350 to 400 and certainly 400 to 350 wasn’t bad — it was good money. My husband and I each fulfilled our norms and so we had two salaries which gave us enough
- D: Were goods sufficiently plentiful?
- B: Yes—plentiful enough. We had cotton cloth and calico and satin twill, which are now also available.
- D: And Chinese goods?
- B: We had Chinese 18 and 30 *tugrik* silk — elegant silk and very precious silk. Russian silks are poor — the Russians don’t have good silk, and their best silk is soft and costs 22 *tugriks*. But there are all sorts of Russian satin, as well as rather coarser goods. Now there are a lot of luxury products. In our day we didn’t dress up as much as the children do today. We used to make our everyday *deels* out of calico and cotton. The nice decorated silk we grown-ups used to make our fancy *deels*. Ready- made clothes were rare.
- D: Were there Russian specialists in your factory?
- B: There were two or three Hungarians from Hungary.
- D: How did they fare?
- B: As if they lived here. They taught in the industry night and day.
- D: With a translator?
- B: Yes there was a translator — we couldn’t manage without one. and could only use some sort of sign language. After working beside us for a while, they studied and spoke our language. So that was the Hungarians. Poles did some work on the electric station, and we came to depend on them. They also were involved in the spirit industry.
- D: Did the children join the Young Pioneers?
- B: Everyone joined the Pioneers.
- D: Was it important to go to school?
- B: It was important to go to school, and it was also important to join the Young Pioneers and wear a red scarf with your *deel*.
- D: Did you wear one?
- B: We didn’t have a uniform then, so we wore the scarves with our *deels*.

6 The Changes in Religion and the Present Way of Life in Democratic Times

D: Who was the famous lama in your area and what was his story?

B: These people were by and large hidden so I did not know them, but there is a story about this rather isolated old man called “the Orkhon teacher” who lived near the source of the river.

D: Have you been interested in Buddhism for long?

B: We didn’t have a Buddhist altar until recently — in the 1990s.

D: Who was this lama?

B: Which lama?

D: The one on the far side in the photograph.

B: That man is my children’s father.

D: Oh, yes.

D: Maybe I am that lama.

B: You are not a lama.

D: Later, did you display the Buddha?

B: Yes, later, I don’t know the name of the Buddha — it’s from the children.

D: Did you have a book of sutras that is the guide to everything?

B: No — we didn’t have one. The one I have now is from my son. Those two little ones came from the children in the lamasery.

D: Are there novices at the lamasery? Are any of your children lamas?

B: One of our sons-in-law is a lama — a Buddhist lama. The family has no sutra book, but the lama has a rather large one. He is called Gombo, and our son’s child is a Buddhist lama.

D: Do you approve of your grandson?

B: Well, The little one is my grandson, and the bigger one is our son-in-law. How can one not approve since they are doing what they like to do?

D: As a Buddhist, do you offer the choicest food and a lamp as prayer offerings?

B: Yes. I do pray from time to time although I sometimes have to remind myself to do so.

D: When is the Shankhin Monastery open?

B: The Shankhin Monastery has now been restored and reopened not long ago — maybe in 1992 or 1993.

Daughter : My father passed away in 1994, and we went to have prayers read at the Shankhin Monastery.

B: I am sure that many elderly people were there when prayers were read and since the monastery had just opened it must have been in 1992-3.

D: Are there still older lamas at the Lamasery?

B: Yes. though most of the elderly have died. So there are mostly children.

D: What is happening to the elderly lamas at Erdene Zuu lamasery?

B: There are only a few who are very old. There are always younger lamas but few who are really old.

D: Were there many lamas your age?

B: One or two here and there. Not many any more. Back then, very few lamas at the Shankhin Monastery were appointed by the government. We didn't see many Buddhists, but there were many elderly people including lamas in our time. Later, many children were becoming lamas. The abbots of our monastery were youths in their twenties and thirties. Purevee (Head Lama at Erdene Zuu) was about 40, wasn't he?

Daughter : 42.

B: Oh, he's my age. The assistant or junior abbot was a bit younger.

D: At this monastery.

B: Yes, they were all very young.

D: Both are abbots. Are there two abbots?

B: Yes, two. The health of the chief abbot is not so good. Sometimes they work — sometimes they don't.

D: Do you go to the lamasery?

B: I do.

D: Do you have prayers read?

B: I am not too healthy, but I have them read when I can. My son-in-law is a proctor in this lamasery.

D: What is his name?

B: Erdenechuluun. He goes to the city a lot.

D: Is he there now?

B: Yes. he is now.

D: Is Basansüren the other abbot?

B: Yes.

D: Is he also in the city?

B: Yes. Basansüren and my son-in-law are about the same age, maybe one is a year older. Now they are in the city, but I heard that recently they were in the south at Utaagumben.

D: Did he become a lama there?

B: Yes. He had been there since he was young.

D: After the 1990s, did all the children want to become lamas?

B: Yes, they did. I like to learn about the great lamas.

D: Why did the children all wish to become lamas?

B: Who knows? Even now children talk about that.

D: Children do feel that way.

B: Yes. It is thought that a lama's life is very comfortable. Our children joined a small group of novices to later become lamas. One of our grandsons is a

Buddhist lama at Erdene Zuu, and another is at the lamasery.

D: And after the 1990s, were there other religions than Buddhism?

B: There is Jesus.

D: Ah, I see.

B: Jesus was introduced to us a while ago and is still here, and the followers are always singing.

D: Did many young people turn to him?

B: Plenty did. I don't really know what they do, but many youngsters joined, and some became leaders. Some hand out pamphlets on the street to the children and offer food.

D: Is there a religious school here?

B: Yes, there is a religious high school here where my son-in-law is the head teacher. The lama there works double time for no salary, just the offerings people leave.

D: Was religion oppressed during socialist times?

B: Frequently. There was oppression in socialist times. One could not ask questions. Children should be able to ask about things and not cause a furor when asking. They should not have to hide in the evening. Democracy permits free and frank discussions. Everything was in secret before.

Daughter : I know about that. In the 1980s my mother and father were told by the leader Tserennadmid to keep their Buddhism a secret, and so they did.

B: In the 1980s, they did not abandon their beliefs, but they had to conceal them. When Dabaasüren got sick, I went at night, because we were so afraid, to the lama at Shankh for advice on his health. I asked my questions of the lama, who was well known locally. If this feudal business had been openly known, there would have been difficulties.

D: Did anyone worship at the *oboo*?

B: No, there was no worshipping at the *oboo* and placing anything there was discouraged. Now in our democracy, it is permitted to worship at the *oboo*. There was no private ownership at that time, so we were afraid we could lose our jobs.

D: At the time, was juniper incense burned?

B: Yes, a lot of juniper incense was burned, but there had to be a 100 meter distance, so the air could be clear of the juniper. That's how it was burned.

D: Do you now purify yourself with this ritual incense?

B: Ritual? I used it when my children were in the hospital even though it was forbidden. The person on duty would not permit incense, so we used a candle. They claimed that if we used incense we believed in the Shankh lama.

D: You had the chance to burn the incense?

B: Yes — for the smoke. Later, in democratic times the lamas were not afraid to worship Buddha.

D: Was there a religious organization after the 1990s?
B: Yes.
D: Did this organization support the lamas?
B: Yes, I guess so, but I don't really know.
D: Do you follow the customs of having a small sutra book and the practice of circumambulation?
B: Yes. We agreed to circumambulate with the sutra book in the evening.
D: Did children or only grown-ups do this?
B: We ourselves circumambulated, wearing a special belt and a hat. We took several turns reciting the incantations but we were all muffled up to stay quiet.
Daughter : Were there lamas at Erdene Zuu?
B: No, the temple had fallen into ruins. The tops of the stupas were all gone but it was not in complete ruin. After the 1970s, they began to renovate the parapet and fix the place up like a museum. Then lamas did come.
D: Did the lamas and the children come from here?
B: Generally everyone did. In the fall, many lamas assembled at the lamasery.
D: Back then, did one powerful lama give a child his name or were they named by others?
B: For the most part, an older person gave them their name. However, they say –or perhaps it was a lama who said — secretly that I was named for a dead relative. The lama and my late mother said go and see Anjaa in secret. It was quite late in 1962. I asked his name and the color of the blanket. He was known to be a powerful person. The name given was Davaasüren and was given by a lama who lived in the first district and was said over a yellow blanket. Then he said: “You will name the next child and don't ask me about naming anymore. Just add ‘süren’ to the name of the week.”
D: When someone died, was the Golden Box secretly opened. (The Golden Box was a figurative term referring to the rites offered the deceased) What used to happen?
B: Yes, we would open it, but it was hard to find a lama to do so. There was only one person at Shankh who could open the Golden Box. Sometimes we would not open the Golden Box out of fear because if we were found out we would be in trouble.
D: When a person dies now, do you look up the burial date in the sutras?
B: We pick the best day ourselves.
D: Yourself?
B: We reckon on the day from Monday to Friday. Things were much simpler then and an ox cart carried the dead.
D: Was it left open?
B: Yes. Few people were needed. Only one person, either the son or someone special, led the ox cart away.

- D: Is a lamp then lit?
- B: Yes, a lamp is lit, and the scripture book is read.
- D: Are there fewer restrictions?
- B: I don't know. Everything was so secret, and there are few details.
- D: When did the Mongols first celebrate New Year?
- B: It was a while ago. When the first State Farms began, New Year celebrations began but I don't know when it started in the city.
- D: How did people celebrate New Year's? Was it like in the movies with Father Frost?
- B: Oh yes. Now little snow girls do a dance around Father Frost who has a long beard and uses a white cane. There are all sorts of decorations for the New Year. We stretched a string which was covered with cotton and made to look like snow balls. Cut paper painted snowflakes and paper chains were also made. There were no fancy ornaments like nowadays.
- D: Did you have a New Year's tree?
- B: We brought the tree down from the mountain but now we have fake trees.
- D: Does every family do this?
- B: They do, but there are not big trees and since the 1990s, children have put up the trees. I was pretty bad and didn't think much about having a tree.
- D: At that time were there Russians in Kharkhorin?
- B: No, there were few Russians.
- D: Chinese?
- B: No, the Chinese finished building a channel and one or two remained in the south as well as in the Shankh. They were revolutionaries who distributed hand-outs, but I heard they were swept away during the Revolution.
- D: A long time ago?
- B: Yes.
- D: In the twenties?
- B: So then there were almost no Chinese. In the 1950s, there were some but I don't remember well. The city seemed full of Chinese, and they stuck together, and then they were deported so none remained. Now the Chinese are plentiful and are everywhere. They are not good people (and she says a prayer).
- D: Were there good Russians at that time?
- B: Oh, yes. The Russians were good and praiseworthy. All sorts of praise goes to the Russians. Russia is our elder brother.
- D: People nowadays generally drink a lot of spirits. Did they then?
- B: We didn't have many spirits. They were rare, especially vodka, although we occasionally did see "Monopol" vodka, and a family enjoyed one or two bottles of this Monopol vodka during a celebration. Mongolian spirits included *airagh*, and on Tsagaan Sar there were a few Russian spirits, which were hard to find,

so that a family could have only about two liters. *Airagh* was drunk, but things were not disorderly. The seating order ran from the oldest person down to the youngest child at the farthest seat. Nobody under thirty drank although those at the *older* end of the table drank together.

D: Was there drinking at the factory?

B: There was some drinking of strong spirits on holidays. Today, however, alcohol and money are plentiful, and though the money is often hard to come by it is easily spent. In addition, no attention is paid to discipline, and things are out of control.

D: Did men in their thirties and forties who wished to find a lama have to ask around to find one?

B: Ah. Mostly you asked your father and mother, but not your friends. I am not involved. People of thirty or forty watch their elders during a celebration and drink from time to time when everybody drinks a bowl of spirits. They are more disciplined, but today's youth has no limits and they drink too much. Now there is even drinking in a Korean film which can lead to youthful drinking. Thus the Koreans have these little girls who get drunk from drinking spirits, stumble about, and then are picked up by someone or other.

D: Did your father and mother introduce you (to your husband) or did you meet on your own?

B: No, no. People were afraid and kept their acquaintances secret.

D: Did your father and mother ask about your compatibility?

B: I don't know. They might have but I think they kept quiet.

D: Did your late husband name all your children?

B: Yes.

D: Did you ask other people?

B: No, we would be afraid to ask others, even mother and father. We were very shy and scared in front of other people.

D: How does a man ask for a bride?

B: There are certain things that are done. It is one thing for a rich lord to continue his line but that didn't happen in my day. In our day, I prepared what I needed and waited, at a certain time of night, outside my *ger* where two horses were brought to the ravine. All of this was done in secret, so I wouldn't have to leave with just the clothes on my back. That is what happened to me.

D: Did the woman then go off with her man?

B: They then go off on the horses.

D: Is that how you got married?

B: Secretly, and then father and mother came after us.

D: Your father and mother must have known what was going on.

B: Perhaps they knew, and certainly must have checked carefully when they came

after me.

D: Was there a wedding feast then?

B: In summer, yes, but I didn't have a wedding feast. I eloped in the winter, and my late husband did not tell his mother — he just took two horses and left. When we returned, there was a dish of boiled meat ready. Later in the evening, two saddled horses arrived. I am sure my husband's mother wondered what was going on until we arrived, and she prepared tea for us. But I was young then and don't remember much.

D: Was there a *ger* all set up for you?

B: We had to put up the small *ger* ourselves.

D: Did the factory workers stay in the dormitory?

B: There was no dormitory so we had to remain in our *gers*. A dorm was built, but we couldn't get used to the building and nobody liked living there permanently.

D: Was there enough heat to keep it warm?

B: It was very cold, the heating was very bad, and in winter you could freeze to death. Later a two story building for the factory workers was built. There were several families living there, but the doors and the heat were bad, so it was very cold. During democratic times it was privatized, and we were not allowed to live there anymore. People were forced out carrying their bundles, with nowhere to live.

D: Were there shares given out during privatization?

B: We were given shares or blue tickets.

D: Were there blue tickets with a flag?

B: We were sold the little pink tickets and were told that they would never expire and could be handed on to our children. They were like bonds and would only rise in value. We have six or seven of these, and I can't figure them out. They tell us now that this stock is coming back, and I think that I might like to sell these pink tickets.

D: What were people's reactions when democracy started?

B: Many reactions. There were no big battles and, in fact, things turned out well for us. Some say that our government will last seventy years — ten more than expected.

D: What kind of people talked about all of this?

B: I have talked to those who are older between fifty and sixty. First, in 1921 the Revolution destroyed the lamas who said that a government usually lasted six years. Now it has been here for seventy. Of course people spoke about the good and the bad times.

D: What do things seem like to you?

B: Now things are good — I don't remember the bad times. But I am not sure what to think since the government keeps a lot from us so we don't worry.

D: Were the herders allowed to keep sheep for their own eating?
B: Yes, they were permitted to do so in order to feed themselves.
D: And milk?
B: And milk as well. In summer, there was a norm for milk production, and if you reached that norm, you had no more debt. And there was also a norm for wool and hair. In fact, there was a norm for almost everything except poop! In summer, we achieved those norms or even went beyond them, so we had no debt.
D: Did you have enough milk to put in your tea?
B: Yes, enough for tea and for yoghurt. But not sheep's milk — only cow's milk.
Daughter: Later, was sheep's milk used for tea?
B: Yes.
Daughter: We didn't milk the sheep very much when we were young.
B: We didn't have much sheep's milk, maybe because of the poor distribution.
Daughter: Was that because of the State Farm or the company?
B: The company took the sheep's milk.
Daughter: Did the State Farm become a company?
B: Yes. The State Farm was broken up, and a company took over and controlled the sheep's milk. The State Farm would never have milked the merino sheep.
D: Was the trend toward meat or wool/hair production?
B: Some wool and meat, but mostly sheep's wool. Sheep had a lot of wool — upwards of five kilos from each sheep, as is seen on TV. The herders are not trained to care for the merino sheep, which is very difficult.
D: Compared to Mongolian sheep?
B: The young merinos are very fragile compared to Mongolian sheep.
D: Were they pastured?
B: We gave them fodder.
D: Did you retire from the company?
B: Yes, and since I worked in the factory, I can receive a pension.
D: Were the herds of the *negdel* herders privatized?
B: Yes, they were privatized.
D: And the herds on the State Farm?
B: They were privatized later. There is now one company, and if you work as a herder for this company, you may have a few private herds, but they are not so good.
D: Do people who continue to work in the factory get anything?
B: No, people who work in the factory or hold public office have no herds. Those who held official positions in a factory or on a State Farm kept sixteen sheep and ten remained for us.
D: Do you have any herds now?
B: I have several in the countryside, and the children do the herding, but I am lucky

if I have enough for soup.

D: Do you have a place there?

B: Yes, although I live here I used to live in the countryside. Last year I wasn't too well, and the children said it was warmer in the city, but maybe in the summer I will go there if I am well. My youngest daughter takes care of me and took a leave of absence from her school to do so.

D: Now I must move along. Thanks a lot.

Notes

- 1) *Gers* refers to the Mongolian tents.
- 2) Charles Bawden, *Mongolian-English Dictionary*. London: Kegan Paul, 1997, p. 10.
- 3) *Aaruul* is a type of cheese made by drying the residue left after straining the whey from boiled, fermented milk. *Eezgii* is made by boiling most of the whey in the curdled milk of sheep, goats, or cows and setting the residue to dry on a screen. See Bawden, pp. 1, 575.
- 4) Fermented mare's milk.
- 5) Mongolian New Year.
- 6) A festival held in July that emphasized the sports of archery, horse-back riding, and wrestling.
- 7) The Gandan in the capital of Ulaanbaatar was one of the very few monasteries permitted to survive after the Buddhist purges of the late 1930s.
- 8) A pile of stones and other objects usually in hills or mountains or other elevated locales that play a role in both shamanism and Buddhism.

II Badamregzen

B: Badamregzen

D: Lkhagyademchig

1 Family: From the Field to the Monastery

D: What is your name?

B: I am called Badamregzen. I am from Övörkhangai *aimag*, Zuunbogd *sum*, which today is called the Övörkhangai *aimag*, Bogd *sum*. I am a local man, but I have an historic background because I saw the original Gegeen¹⁾ Lama who came to the great and little mountains or the Bayankhongor Baruun Bogd, Övörkhangai *aimag*, Zuun Bogd. The Zuun Bogd, or Eastern Mountain, is also called the Juniper Mountain and is in Övörkhangai. I am from this Juniper Mountain, as is my clan, and I can trace my father's side back to the eighth Bogd Shav *khoshuu*²⁾. This *khoshuu* was in Sainnoyankhan *aimag* and did not fall directly under the jurisdiction of the Bogd Shav *khoshuu* as it was an ecclesiastical estate. Now, however, this ecclesiastical estate is an administrative unit in the Övörkhangai Bogd *sum*, where I was born. The Guchin-uus *sum*, Toghrogh, Baruunbayan-Ulaan and Khairkhardulaan *sums* are now found in Nariintel.

A book has been written by a student about the Artzbogd Gegeen of the Dund Bogdiin ecclesiastical estate. He is now the eighth Bogd of Bogds who the Buddhist lama Purevbat has written about. The Artz (Juniper) Bogd Gegeen and the lama Gegeen are the two Gegeens. The Artz Gegeen and the other Gegeens are on my father's side, so I am called Dashpeljeeiin Badamregzen. I was named Dashpeljee after Tsembeliin Dashpeljee. This man was called Tsembel and became what is called a senior attendant to a high lama, and he is now in attendance on the Gegeens. Our Bogd Gegeen who was called Bayardin Sonomtseren was the Merciful Teacher among our Gobi people. In 1937, this Merciful Teacher was arrested in July, 1937, and he became a victim. His holy name is known throughout the Gobi. Now the honorable men are Nasantogtokh and Damdinsharav, whose father was Chimidbazar, not Chimidorj. So there were Chimidbazar, Nasantogtokh and Damdinsharav. The elderly brother of Chimidbazar was the Merciful Teacher who was called the Bogd Sonomtseren. In my genealogy, Tsembel is the grandchild of the senior attendant to the lama.

I am now seventy-four years old and was born in 1936 in the area of Bogd *sum* near the Merciful Teacher and the lamasery near Davaa Mountain. It wasn't until I was seventy that a lama at Erdene Zuu lamasery offered me a chance at Buddhism. For thirty-seven years during socialist times I had worked as a professional agronomist in the agricultural industry. Now as a lama, I no longer work, and even now as a lama I have planted about two hectares of vegetables

in an area that I am permitted to use. I grew all sorts of things on this one hectare. This sort of work never ends. Two or three nights ago, there was a celebration honoring the third phase of the Virgin Lands program in an area which had been only wilderness.

People talked about the socialist period. Back then, I had tried three or four times to join the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (hereafter, MPRP)³⁾, but now, having joined the monastery, I look back and see it was destiny. In those times, we couldn't introduce the idea of destiny but now I am becoming enlightened through studying the sutras and have come to understand them. Back then, people were under a lot of scrutiny, especially religious people, and could not speak up. More democratically inclined people were looked at askance and were oppressed for speaking out openly at meetings, especially in regard to the Buddhist texts. In fact, in the past, people were punished for having the Buddhist sutras, and we could not talk or read about all sorts of things like divination nor were families allowed to worship Buddha.

In the 1970s, I was a *negdel* agronomist and the leader of my *sum* committee of the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League for the MPRP. I had served as a military leader from 1964 to 1969 and had tried to join the Party two or three times but I wasn't accepted. I was, by nature, rather a sharp character, and I saw all things honestly and followed the correct and true path. Even now when I read my sutras, I do so to help others. When I make mistakes or say something wrong, I always believe from the bottom of my soul that the prayers from my books will help others who are in need. At times, this point of view did not sit well with the leaders or the Party.

In my lifetime I have been falsely accused by both the MPRP and the Övörkhangai *aimag* Party Committee. In 1969, I had advanced in my profession, and having been at the Agricultural University, became an agro-technician. In 1962, I worked in Matad *sum* in Dornod *aimag*, having finished Dornod's agricultural technicum, and in the fall I went to the Arvai area in Övörkhangai *aimag* where I worked as an agronomist on the first Virgin Lands planting area⁴⁾. In October, 1969, I went to study at the Agricultural University again. The First Secretary of the Övörkhangai *aimag* Party Committee was Lkhamkhoo, and he sent a signed telegram to the head teacher at the Agricultural University Jamianjav, and it said that I had been transferred to the Law Department and was told to take two weeks to decide about this. I decided to get ready for this and bought a suit and pea jacket, so I could be an elegant student, but I had to sell them to cover the sixty *tugriks* for my travel expenses, and then my situation came up before the *aimag* Party committee, and I went into irrigation in Övörkhangai *aimag* and on to do research into wells and electricity. So, for a year, I erected wells and became used to this work. There was a Russian nearby

for a while but, there were people in the Gobi who spoke Russian. I heard Russian words spoken for a while, so I began to understand the language. Thanks to working with water and talking a bit of Russian, I got the position. Thus, in 1969, I completed, in a hurry, the Agricultural University and moved up in my profession.

After the University in the spring, I was dismissed by the leader of the *aimag* Party Committee for working on the wells. In the fall in the 1970s, I got to know the famous agronomist Ayour, and he pulled some strings for me, and I found myself in the second production unit of a State Farm and moving upon a path as I worked the sidewalk. In 1975, I was told by Renzen, known as vague Renzen, and who has since died, to go to the State Farm Party Committee, which said that “A professional is needed for the spa, and its waters at Khujirt. You are a good man and are suitable for the job, so go there.” This Renzen was the Second Party Secretary, and a letter was found in his desk from Lokhuuz, so he was removed, and another leader was appointed to the Party Committee⁵). So in 1975, I went to the spa in Khujirt, and in 1978 the waters were at 65 degrees and the bubbles rose five meters. I built a greenhouse for tomatoes and cucumbers, and I wore a white lab coat. The leader of the Central Committee, Mr. Dүgersүren, and the *aimag* Party Committee leader, Guchin, came there, as did the Ulaan Baatar Party Committee, which came in secret. Altangerel came to the Khujirt spa for a rest, along with the Minister and the Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Agriculture. So, like a doctor, I wore a white coat and tended the tomatoes, which were delivered to the spa when they ripened. I talked with them about further building. This was the time for the Central Committee’s Fourth Khural, where a food program was being promoted. Although there were more herds, meat production decreased, while more greens were planted and eaten. Toghtuun was a leader of the *aimag* agricultural ministry and he supported this plan. He is now dead — let us say a prayer for him. This leader, Toghtuun, brought me to Övörkhangai *aimag* Toghrog *sum*, which is now the Mazrin *khoshuu* (in this case, a cooperative). There are two Mazrin cooperatives, and recently people have come to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary of the Virgin Lands. They came from far away and stayed three nights.

I was in Mazrin in 1978 and worked there until 1985, when the goals of the food program had been achieved. Now there is really no institutional support for all sorts of vegetables. In August, 1985, I worked as an agronomist with 1,200 prisoners who were confined at Kharkhorin. So there I was at the Kharkhorin confinement center with 1200 prisoners who did not even know about eating potatoes. Many were unloaded, and then thrown away, but for us on pensions they would be good to eat. There was a place in the prison area selected for a greenhouse to start growing vegetables. I retired in 1993, and since then I have

grown my own vegetables. At seventy, I began to study at the lamasery in order to become a lama. So that is the summary of my life, and for the past four years I have been studying the scriptures, and now I can divine the future. I also spent a year with Dashtseren, and we thought things out together and told fortunes for people, trying not to make things up. That is first. Second — I now read the sutras, and I make translations. A person can fare poorly as he moves into the 60s and 70s. I cannot do my translations as well as other teachers who do them. The reading is in the Tibetan language, as well as in Mongolian, and they are studied and memorized. There are prayers to the White Tārā, the Green Tārā, and the Wind Horse Flag Incense all offered to lift peoples' spirits⁶. These are very important prayers, and I read them in Mongolian and then in Tibetan.

D: I see.

B: Now you need to hear more. My teacher is, of course, Soninbayar with whom you are acquainted. Now as a lama and a teacher I do what is right — not wrong. It was said that I must not be lazy and that I must not get tired as we read the prayers. One gets a foundation for the Tibetan by reading the Mongolian patterns. Since I now know the Mongolian patterns, I have begun to sit and read the Tibetan, and I can do the translations. I did this in my prayer sessions.

D: Oh, yes.

B: I can read right here in this room the prayer of blessing for the journey or the wind horse flag incense prayer in English.

D: Oh, yes.

B: This wind horse incense flag offering had to be translated into English, so I had an English person read it to me, and thus I learned to read it quite well myself. Recently, however, there has been no one to read this prayer in English — no one permanently here. So maybe I will forget it. This is the sort of thing a lama goes after. Now, since I have briefly introduced you to some significant things, you can ask me about others.

2 My Childhood

D: Where did you live when you were young up to 1945?

B: There was the first primary school in our Bogd *sum* Övörkhongai *aimag* in 1945 — the first primary school in Bogd *sum*. My childhood friend, Janchivin Radnaabazaar, who knows eight languages and has written forty-two books, is doing research on maternal and child health at the Pediatric Hospital. He has done a lot of work trying to maintain health. He was also the doctor to both Y. Tsendenbal and J. Batmünkh⁷. The second hospital was built in the south near where another of my friends, Dr. Guntevin Gaitav, is now living. I phoned Sanchirov, who was the first engineer at the Agricultural Ministry and now is in the newest Bayan-Ulaan *aimag* area. I recently met the chap in the city at the

Dragon as he planned to go onto Övörkhongai. We had arranged our get together on the phone. We hadn't met for many years, and it is good to see those classmates who are still alive.

From 1945 to 1949, I was involved in finishing primary school. In 1949, Övörkhongai *aimag* was waiting for a Postal Car, and since there was no such thing, all the mail was delivered by the relay. There were two hundred and ten kilometers to the Bogd *sum*, Övörkhongai *aimag* center on the relay with a station every thirty kilometers. On the way to school, we rode our horses past seven stops. Even as a little kid, I would gallop on the horse, but we don't have a picture of that. It was rare in those days, not like now, that a family had the money to spend on such things. Someone would have to herd the sheep for a week to get enough money. For a week or two of work, a person earned one *tugrik* a day. By the time I had graduated from primary school, I had saved up money for two weeks to buy a school book, but I fell off my horse, my boot stuck in the stirrup, and I was injured, so I could not go on to high school, which all my friends did. I did not, therefore, leave the countryside for three years from 1949 to 1951.

We were poor — just imagine — the *negdels* hadn't started yet, so I herded yak or horned cows for a rich family. For three years, I wintered them in pasturage on the Bogd ridge. Now there are other ways for a family to make money, and one does not have to be a servant or work for others. But I took care of seven hundred yaks or horned cows, together with my mother always along the Bogd ridge. I liked one particular hill and can picture it in my head like it could be in the movies. I would like to visit this area before I die. The Tsogchin temple is there, and it had a rare painting now in a museum. It was not known or esteemed, but now it is, and we need a fund to maintain it in the *aimag* museum.

Let me add that I have written four or five books of poetry, the first in 1997. Tsedmediin Gaitav and I were in the same class in our area, and he became the State Poet. Ten years ago, he had his seventieth birthday, and this year was his eightieth birthday. I gave him my first book of collected poems called "Sleeping Under the Moon," and I went to his eightieth birthday party this year on September 19th where we placed a statue at the *ger* I used to live in. Mongolian writers from the *aimag* co-operated on celebrating his eightieth birthday and a documentary was made. Here is one of Gaitaviin's books — my next book was not written in 1995, but in the twenty-first century and for the fiftieth anniversary of Kharkhorin, and it is called "Full Moon."

I also wrote a brief history of the Orkhon Valley from the fourteenth century way before the State Farm, and it is called "The Legend of the Womb of Life." I have also written a history of the State Farm at Kharkhorin, which is now fifty

years old. This history is in three parts and includes the “Full Moon.” So I have written poetry, the history of Kharkhorin, and the short history of the Orkhon Valley with the third part entitled “The Story of Planting in Övörkhongai.” My next book is called “A Historical Memento of the Orkhon Valley.” I had a publisher in the MPRP building that would print a thousand copies of this book and at a cost of 1,320,000 *tugriks*. But how could an old man like me on a pension of 84,000 *tugriks* find 1,320,000 *tugriks*. So I asked eight people at the Great Khural but had to go to Landeejantsan for help. I finally was promised money after the election from the democratic four including Chinzorig from the MPRP. But no money came, and the Parliament building burned down in July. Fortunately I had held on to three copies, and I took one to the Mongolian Writers’ Association to get it printed. Finally, I sent a copy to Naigald in my native area and asked him for money.

The Mongolian Writers’ Association celebrated its eightieth anniversary to which I was invited, and I was honored for my book “The Sky Heritage.” “The Memento from the Orkhon Hollow” now includes passages on the ancient city of Khar, Tsaidan *khoshuu* and north to Arkhangai city and Doitin knoll. The cave of the Red Cliffs is near the Doitin knoll and should be studied, and there should be pictures. The Orkhon Hollow was part of our cultural history, and the book is very good in every way. “Full Moon” is another good book. Recently, I went to the Virgin Lands’ fiftieth birthday celebration with four books for Gaitaviin’s eightieth birthday, where my book “The Agronomist of the Sacred Juniper Barley Planting” was honored. It has just recently gone to press. My daughter took it in, and the editor will look at it, revise it, and return it. Then parts of it can be printed after the money has been worked out. Yesterday our daughter went to the city, and she will return today.

I went to the main lamasery hall at Erdene Zuu just now, and my book on the Orkhon Hollow includes Erdene Zuu where there was a reincarnation of a high lama, which began most forcibly in the Arkhangai *aimag*, Lun *sum* where it has been spoken about and looked for. By the side of Erdene Uul is the area of Lun *sum*, which has some quicksand. The mountain bulges out of the knoll, but they say that the area has changed. A nice stupa has been constructed on Lun knoll this spring by the local people. I single out Erdene Uul because the seventh reincarnation of Tsorj Dagvadarjaa, who was the reincarnation of the Khutukhtu, was born at Erdene Uul. My studies of the history of the lamasery run from 1500 to 1700. There is a building for worship at Erdene Zuu, which is as famous as our Parliament building. The seventh King of the Law, Dagvadarjaagiin, built it in 1770 as the main meeting hall of the lamasery within a five year period from 1770 to 1775. There was a gathering of one hundred and eight *tsam* dancers who were unique to that place and were not found elsewhere in Mongolia⁸). They

jumped about performing the temple dance “The Magic Good Khan.” 1937 was the end of such dances, but they have come back recently. A Russian also made a movie about them. Such is the history of the lamasery hall. After the death of the seventh “King of the Law,” Dagvadarjaa, his birthplace in Khogshin Gol, Khotant *sum* area, Arkhangai *aimag* has been talked about. In the historical biography of Gonchigjaltsan the lama’s *oboo* is mentioned in “The Orkhon Hollow.” The very great Lungiin is now creating art, and Mr. Chuvammid lives in Bayangol mountain range where the lama comes from.

This Gonchigjaltsan is the final incarnation of the high lama and was shot on December 3, 1937 when he was over seventy years old. He was born in what later became Bayangol where there was the lama’s *oboo* for worship and offerings. There are several stupas on one side as well as many caves and places named for Gonchigjaltsan and the Dalai Lama. Now that Natsagdorj is the leader in Ulaan Baatar, there is a medical college in the lamasery near Avtai Khan Lake near a corner of evergreens. There are four lamaseries that have planted what is needed for their pharmacies as well as planting trees and vegetables including red, green, and white potatoes and even red flowering potatoes. In addition, there were further ecological changes. Gossip is prevented. The *khonin zergen* (Sheep Ephedra or Eastern Przewalskii) is on the corner of the eastern side, grows in the semi-desert, and is now raised as an opiate. Goat ephedra and sheep ephedra both grow in the semi-desert. All sorts of tasty red fruit is also there. There are stories behind everything grown here, and I write them down so they will not be lost. I get no money from all of this. Maybe I see things differently, but I keep my thoughts to myself because I could be despised. Now is the time to build the lamasery, and I wish to leave my mark on history.

D: Did you stay in the dormitory at your primary school?

B: Yes, I did stay in the dormitory in 1945 when it was not a five walled or sectioned *ger* but a four walled *ger*. Two *gers* were set up — one for the kitchen for cooking the food and the other for the children where single mattresses were spread out. There were no bed clothes then, so we covered ourselves with our wool *deels* and wore fur trousers, which were full of lice. Then the *deel* was full of lice so even if we were cold, we took off our trousers and slept on those long thin mattresses, which we rolled up so we could put our notebooks on them. We had no pencils or notebooks. There was a long hollow tree named *tavila* that grew near Bogd Ridge, and we would pick off some of its branches and find coal or graphite. We dissolved the latter and stuffed it in the centers of the sticks and in that way made our sharpened pencils. There were a lot of earthquakes in our area, but there has not been one since 1957. However, now the *sum* is in ruins, and there is so much mud that there are mud houses.

There is an ochre colored-reddish earth found near the mountain where there

was a lot of water, and a Buddhist sacrificial cup was found on the lower slope of the mountain about thirty kilometers from us. There were also a lot of tea cups with no bottoms made of white metal, and one had a seal on it. Red earth had been put in these bottomless cups, and they were wired together, and we made ink from the red earth and used a bit of metal for a pen. Radnaabazaar and Gaitaviin can tell you the same stories.

Tsookhor Bavuu was the lama who was our teacher, and he read the prayers every day. His monk's name was Badmaaregjin which means lotus flower. The Juniper Ridge was 180 kilometers long, and it was to the south of Baga Bogdinkhuu in the Gobi-Altai mountains. Juniper ridge and Artzbogdin (the Juniper God) were like weather forecasters. Our Merciful Teacher was hidden at Juniper Ridge at Shar Khuls in the south. The lamas at the lamasery were nearly arrested, but they fled and hid. They received the blessing and much later gave the blessing and selected names for children. I was the last person they named, and I was called Badmaaregjin. That was in 1949, and I had been only Regjin which was not so difficult to say, but my parents and brothers called me Badmaa. "Hey, Badmaa," they would call. At school, I was called Badmaaregjin which I couldn't write. There was a pock-marked Lama called Bavuu who was a teacher. There was a new script that had to be taught — not the ancient script. We could play around with the old script but had to get used to the new one. Teacher Bavuu told me that my name was too long, so he changed the last part of my name from Regjin to Regzen and I became Badamregzen. So for all official purposes like military accounting, diplomas, or passports, it was written Regzen. So the name, my merciful teacher, gave me — Badamregzen — is what I am called. When I was in my seventies, I became a monk, and I went to my monk-teacher Purevdavaa in Bayankhongor. He is now an abbot at Bayankhongor Erdene. For fifteen years he had worked on a book in the Stalin Library and then served on the Central Committee, and now he is at Bayankhongor. I took my vows with him, and my name in the book of vows is Badmaaregzen. However, despite this throw of the dice, I was given another name, Badmaadorj, so it certainly was my destiny to have a name with Badmaa in it.

D: What classes did you have at primary school?

B: Oh, at that time we studied numbers and the Mongolian language. In the third class we began to study the ancient Mongolian Uyghur script. We learned about the environment and history and we studied the Xiongnu⁹). There were several teachers in the third and fourth classes including Sambuu from Arkhangai *aimag*, Arkhangai Khairkhan *sum*. Our fourth class teacher was Demchigiin Gonchisüren who became the procurator for the military and finally was in charge of checking the MPRP. Although I did my lessons, I also pursued my hobby, which was literature. I also liked to memorize poetry, including the poem "There was a

Foal” written by Dasheevgin Sengeegin. I remember everything else that he wrote and haven’t forgotten all the poems that I memorized. I am always reading poetry. In the middle school, I remember “The White Basket of Buddha” and “The Rainbow of Fate.” They were elegant poems. Even though I was an agronomist on a State Farm, I liked art. The writer Garvaagiin was selected as the champion reader from the State Farm for his poem “My Brother Sūkhbaatar.” Even though this poem was about the partisans, it is studied today and is not forgotten.

As one gets older, one is more forgetful, but one’s intelligence remains and not everything is forgotten. I was very interested in history, art, and literature as well as movies and the theater. I write poetry and write about the movies for news magazines and the radio. I even tried to write a movie script as many now do. We can write criticism now even if it is regarded with some disdain.

Now we can go to the museum. In 2007, the paper “Zindaa” number 7 wrote that the Erdene Zuu monastery had been reopened as a museum. There was a lot of criticism about the restoration of this museum that had such a reputation. A lot had been done, but in one year three golden Buddhas had been stolen by train, but the thieves were given two years and four months in prison. That is just an example, Strange.

D: How and what did you eat and drink at your primary school?

B: We needed to use firewood to cook our food at school and those with money brought their own fuel and ate meat. In the Gobi desert area, saxaul (tumble weed) was used as fuel, and we burned it a lot. We gathered armfuls of saxaul and dropped them in a pile near the west building.

D: What sort of food did you have? Were there vegetables?

B: At that time, green things meant death. Nothing was known about vegetables. Now at Bogd Ridge, we both grow and eat vegetables. Wild onions grow everywhere, and since vitamins are rare in Mongolia we had our wild onions in the Bogd area. They used to grow wild, and maybe they still do, but I don’t know. But in many places the wild onion is still gathered in sacks and is very good in *buuz* (steamed meat dumplings) or foods with flour. At that time, the Mongolian gazelle was plentiful in the Gobi along with the black-tailed Persian gazelle, the goitered gazelle, and there was no ban on hunting them. There were mountain goat and wild sheep on the Bogd Ridge, and they became food for the school children. A variety of soups was available, and a yak or a cow could have been prepared. So, there was a lot of food, so no one could complain. In addition, there were dried cheeses and curds and white fat. There was no *negdel* at the time, so everything was privately made.

3 The Lamas Own the Private Fate

D: There were no lamas, right?

B: Not for all. Some lamas had been punished for ten years. Some lamas were not oppressed and remained, and there were many in my area. Now I am such a lama, and I have my own lama name. I know a very religious lama called Sengeravdan who was my father's brother, but I do not know how he got the title of cleric. Maybe he had gone to India. My father said that he was hidden to avoid arrest so he survived this from time to time. Some lamas had no home or children and would hop from one family to another. There was an old man called Balkhaanvannchig, and the teacher Gonchiguren, now an old man, has moved. Demchigiin Vaanchig is nicknamed Balkhaan. Demchigiin Vaanchig is a strong and religious old man who is now an example of a true democrat. In 1951, there was a small *Khural*¹⁰. There was a guy who worked on a building for ten years under the jurisdiction of the builder Gesrengiin Shar in Övörkhongai *aimag*, Guchin-Uur *sum*. In 1951 after finishing school I went to the countryside for two years. There was this agitator in a ten man family unit. In this election, Gesrengiin Shar was elected to be the agitator in this ten man unit and to agitate for the Party. I didn't quite know what was going on. Then Mr. Vaanchig was so passionate about the elections and the Constitution and talked so much that the dogs chased him away. But Mr. Vaanchig thought that the Deputy to the People's Great Khural was ignorant and that even the children derided him. Finally, the Party said that he was guilty of slander and so, to serve as an example, Mr. Vannchig was sent away for ten years. There were many lamas in my area and many, poor souls, did good and important things but were often victimized.

Forgive me, Merciful Teacher. Finally only Natsagdorj remained in Uriangiin Khüree who said he will stay here until I die¹¹. Natsagdorj was made proctor. Balchin was the father of Natsagdorj and was the director of services at the lamasery. The elder Natsagdorj was an important lama and our Holy Man with the rank and title of Gunga Getzel. He had served a ten-year sentence, and his older brother, the Lovon Senge, had died in our Kharkhorin. He was the teacher and Khutukhtu¹² and Lovon in our lamasery. Senge was the first government leader at our Bogd *sum*, and he was called Lovon Senge. As things were, to remain free from arrest these men had to be faithful to the MPRP and become "black" or non-religious or non-believing. That is what the leader did.

Now the sutras might be at our Khutukhtu's lamasery and could be among the seventeen chests of books of Natsagdorj. Now at the Khutukhtu's lamasery is the offering of a mandala and a coral and pearl bell, which are all preserved in storage. The Lovon Mr. Senge and this Gunga Getzel were the two brothers. There is a cave in our holy warm merciful mountain. This year is the eightieth anniversary, and the author was brought to see the treasures. Before going to

prison, the Gungaa wrapped the treasure in two bundles of felt and left them in the cave. He was in prison for eight years and seven months and when he returned he found that the sutra books had been eaten away on the outside but were fine on the inside. Finally, not long ago, Mr. Senge went to Kharkhorin to work in the grain industry where the base was located. The proctor who saved these books had worked in the grain industry. We had got to the monk Khishigt, the son of Davaa from the Shankh Western Khüree. Khishigt was the abbot at the lamasery hall. There was news from a teacher that a temple was being built for an ancient sutra and that the government would provide a fund for a museum to keep the sutra safe. Since the sutra was State property, the monastery had no power to keep it. Natsagdorj knew where some of these books, including perhaps the coral and pearl sutra books, were hidden but some did not know. In all likelihood, these were the Choir books¹³⁾. However, I am not sure because I have never opened them, and they need to be studied. There are seventeen sutra chests.

D: Did people actually speak with you about the destruction of the lamas?

B: Frequently, even though I was young. I may have forgotten some things. That's the way things were, but there is a sad story as well. When the Merciful Teacher was arrested in July for a year and seven months, he stayed with a family, and the father's name was pig-tailed Sengedorj, who is now dead. He had a yellow bamboo ring, and there were two men with horses and guns who went after him. It was a rainy year with ten days of rain, thunder, and terror. The elders ascribed this to the arrest of the Merciful Teacher, which angered the local nature deities. All this has been talked about by the old people, and now I know the truth.

The Merciful Teacher had a previous incarnation and was born twice in our land. I travelled to find the picture of his previous incarnation, and I found a picture of his last incarnation. With the same reverence that I placed the national flag on a point 3,000 and several meters above sea level, I have now reached the summit for an incarnation portrait. That is how it is for this simple seventy-four year old man. I know that I am the man to reach the top of Bogd Mountain because I have been led to the path of righteousness. At home, I can tell a lot of stories about all of these things. All the photographs have been developed. Now our son works at TV-9 for Ariunbold, and he heads the marketing there. There are two Ariunbolds. My son works for B. Ariunbold who is the leader of the marketing firm. The father Ariunbold has these photographs and will put them on a disk. In his previous incarnation, he was a man called Tserenvanchig, and I found Mr. Tserenvanchig's Buddha. I do not know what kind of stone was made into a dragon, which was carried by yak, to the Urandoshiin Ridge. The Urandoshiin Ridge and the Bogd Ridge were 3,796 meters above sea level, and there was a large area to build a lamasery 269 meters in front of the mountain. So the dragon was placed on top of the Urandoshiin Ridge. Tserenvanchig, the

Merciful Teacher, worshipped at the *oboo* at Urandoshiin Rudge. There were four colonels climbing with him, and one of these was a man from Baruunbayan and was a red hat Buddhist. This person was related to the last incarnation of Tserenvanchig, and his family worshipped Tserenvanchig, and they all wore silver Buddhist amulets. To make the dragon, a yak had to be sent to the high Bokhiin Ridge where the load was roped onto the yak who bucked so much that the load fell off and got stuck in the valley where it lies to this day. In fact, the dragon is wedged in to the rocks, but its beautiful design is still clear. I wonder what kind of rock was used and how it was made. So that is the story of the dragon. Recently, all the *khadaghs*, paper money and fat *aruul* have been removed, which were destroying the dragon, and it has been restored¹⁴.

Everything has been fixed, and a glass case has been put out for the paper money and a flat stone platform for offerings of rice and four trees have been set up for the *khadaghs*. A local council was formed to preserve all of this, which included Bayasgalan, the secretary of the environment for Övörkhongai *aimag*, who was a religious man. Now the Khüree cliff springs is a place where people can relax and Bayasgalan, himself, was resting there when he met the four colonels, and they rode with him. Our younger brothers paid for the horse, which cost 20,000 *tugriks*, and they camped in the southern hollow. In addition, it cost 15,000 *tugriks*, not 20,000 *tugriks*, to eat a marmot cooked with hot stones. This must be the free market economy. Now a trader, Baruunbayan, also a Red Hat¹⁵, has set up a *ger* camp with eight *gers*, to see the dragon and wishes, with Bayasgalan, to build a coalition to protect the area. Last August he came and talked to us at the *sum* office. The monastery had been robbed, and in the rubble inside a broken prayer wheel had been found. The bell had been smashed and broken and all that remained was the ritual thunderbolt, a clay marvel now kept in our *ger*.

This beautiful thing was created from nothing but clay or mud and was decorated with an earthen paint as well. We cannot figure out how the main hall, built in 1770, was made. The United Nations is now involved in figuring out what the paint was made of, but it is hard to understand what sort of paint was used. Now even the varnish is up for discussion. We talked about this past construction of this lamasery which was built in secret.

- D: When you were little, was there talk about how the lamas were arrested and how the lamasery fell into ruin?
- B: Yes, there was talk. The Khututkhu lamasery is on the eastern side of the Airgiin mountain pass, and it must have been the big, black ZIS-5 with the wooden seat covered in cotton cloth that arrived with men with guns who took four or five lamas from the lamasery. At least, that is what people said. The eastern side of the Airgiin mountain pass was famous for a rock with a horse footprint called

Horse Rock Near Stone Horse Pass. On the rock were footprints of a horse and a colt, and their treads were stamped in the mud. In fact, you can tell different animals' foot prints — for example, a pig from a horse. There was a lot of talk about what went on in all that trouble from which the “big” lamas fled. The Buddhist novices, wondering where they should go, were arrested. All this was very interesting but, at that time, going to the Airgiin Pass on horseback was very difficult, and it seemed impossible for a car to make it. Now a powerful car or motorcycle can go on the road if it is not too rocky. Because of the earthquake in 1957, there was little traffic on the road and many breakdowns.

D: When you were young did the lamas who had been arrested look normal when they returned?

B: Yes, and their lives were ordinary. There was one old man called Perleeguntev who had been arrested and was given a ten-year sentence, which he served by the Dalan Tuppu River. When he returned, he lived in east Goyo where he hobbled his camel. But we did not know if Mr. Perleeguntev was alive or dead. At the time, the school was the only cultural institution in our area. In 1969, I went off to agriculture school for a while, and then I came back to the area. However, by 1978, I went to Togrogt or the Mazrin zone and came on to Kharkhorin.

D: Were there ordinary lamas here?

B: I was young and did not know the elders.

D: Did the ordinary lamas take wives and have children?

B: Generally, as far as I know, most of the lamas did not have wives or children — certainly not Mr. Vaanchig. They usually lived with their younger siblings, as did Demchig Vaanchig who was the eldest in his family. Mr. Perlee was a younger brother who had no wife, but the teacher Bazarkhuu had a wife and children. Sainnyambuu was an important lama and a Party leader. He became the Holy Lama, and now his son is also the Holy Lama who is called Amartogtokh Sainnyambuu. He moved up from Khovd *sum* where he had been a Party leader for several years. For forty-two years, he was our first Party leader and remained the Holy Lama until he died. His brother Duger was also a famous lama who was called Dugerau. He was a holy lama who took a wife as did teacher Bavuu. There was an old man lama called Galsandargiin who was a major lama at the Khututkhu monastery. He was the older brother of my wife and the younger brother of Radnabazariin. Now Khalzan Sengetuv is the leader of the State Planning Commission who was later replaced by Ragchaa in the Bayankhosoo area. Along with Khalzan Sengetuv and Radnaabazaar, there was also Galsanjambaa who had neither wife nor children. Finally, at 64 to 69 he worked with me raising vegetables for the Department of Agriculture. The lamas did well with vegetables. I shall now speak of Ajinmonkh, the teacher. He taught at my

school and participated in our games. With Galsandargia and Ajinmonkh were lamas who either read the prayer books or later learned them. Green Dandar was an old man who lived in Kharkhorin with his wife and children. His wife died, and now he and his children remain here. There is also Mr. Green Banzar who is in the group of lamas who read the prayers and played. And it was jokingly said to them that if they were so holy they should get us some rain for our vegetables! I now realize that I should have been more serious learning the Tibetan script. I wrote about all of this in my book of history which includes photographs.

D: Did the lamas secretly read the prayers together?

B: Yes, they would gather and read the prayers. In those days, the old man Galsansengay had a little *ger*. He dressed in a skirt and wore no trousers and was reprimanded for such dress. But he read the prayers.

D: Did the local people secretly come for these prayer readings? Did they ask questions?

B: Certainly. There was a Holy Center, and there were several lamas at the Darkhan camp, including Dugeya, who pictured his own destiny. Mr. Khentiidorj was another old lama, and the elder Vaanchig was a Buddhist lama and the Merciful Teacher. There was also an old man called Choisengay, a revered lama, and his son, Bodgereliin, was my tractor driver. Mr. Choisengay was deaf, sadly, and so wrote notes on paper as we travelled rapidly to Guchingiin and Togrogt by motorcycle for two or three days. Now people say the prayer “Yanbidaljir.” In 1978, Mr. Choisuren called to say that he heard the “Yanbidaljir” midst the laughter (Because the prayer was so long).

D: Was this prayer read in Tibetan or Mongolian?

B: It was read in Tibetan, but it was written down in Cyrillic. I listened to the monk read the prayer, even though I did not know Tibetan, and I would write in Cyrillic. Then I began to read and memorize the poems “The One With the White Parasol,” “Pure Things,” and “The Wind Horse Flag.”

4 Astrology in Socialist Times

B: I was thirteen years old and interested in divination, and the Merciful Teacher was an astrologer and a diviner along with the Yellow lama, Adaya, who was rather undisciplined, curious, and intrusive, and he sort of flapped around. It was 1949, and I was thirteen when he taught me. When my primary school was over, I went to Bayantsariin hill in the countryside where there were a few families. In the rain and under the cloudy sky, I looked after the sheep at the southeastern cliff called Shuvuubast where there were many wolves. I knew that in the rain the wolves go after the herds, so my mother told me to look after myself. There was a strong, old woman named Baljin who was a good herder, and she said

“Badam, if you go to sleep you will lose your herds, so you must learn this prayer or incantation. You are a clever child, and I will teach you this prayer which will keep the wolves away.” So I recited this prayer to myself as I looked after the herds every noon. As the day wore on and began to grow dark, the sheep filed along and did not clump up. There was a ditch for corpses called the Altantevsh burial ground which I had to avoid, but I was afraid as I was too close to it.

Then it began to rain, and a dog barked at someone in a raincoat, and a Red Hat who went into Lady Baljin’s home, and I ran after him. Soon a divination was arranged which was very strange, and Lady Baljin, in a white blouse and short trousers, unusual dress at the time, began to make tea. In those days, we were not supposed to run around naked, and we respected our elders and did what we were told. We had to endure a difficult upbringing. Then Lady Baljin hit me with a ladle and said: “Bad, Badam, leave now.” Mother, father, and I were sure that this woman had lost her reason, and we were afraid. If she found that you were sleeping instead of caring for the animals, she would beat you. I ran out of there and found Nasantoghtokh who was in school with me. But Lady Baljin always carried a stick, and I took off running with my ten sheep, goats, and the other animals, but I had not yet seen a wolf. Then I got on my horse and was so scared that the hair on my head stood up on end; there was no sound in my throat, and there were tears in my eyes. Then I saw the wolf which resembled a dog or a snake. Then I heard “hui hui” as the dogs were set loose. Lady Baljin had gone. I chased the wolf and saw that the herds were alright because the wolf’s jaws had clamped shut. Maybe the prayer worked or... his jaws were just stuck shut. Anyway, he didn’t bite.

I thought that I should go to Mr. Adaya who was a good diviner. My mother had the nine cards (used in divination). My father was a cattle drover for thirty-seven years before he died. Mother and father asked Adaya for a divination, and mother held the nine coins and told me that she would give them to Adaya who would teach her. So I took the coins to and quietly gave them to Mr. Adaya. Mother said: “Here is my son, Badam. He is an intelligent boy and has come to study divination with you, oh Mr. Adaya.” The teacher was acting arrogantly and said he did not want to meet us that day saying “you can’t just walk in and expect to be taught any old time.” I asked him what I should do, and he told me that I had to find the best day and bring an offering. But we could not do that, and Mother was upset as she had brought a simple *khadagh* and ten *tugriks*, so she knelt down before Mr. Adaya and gave him her offerings and received a blessing on her head. He told me to sit down and that the coins we had brought could be used to help us. There was talk about the nine names of the coins, and I was told to say the name of each one three times. He said that if the head coin was first, then it was yours. I had to be taught to recognize all these coins, and as he taught

me and spoke simply in our first lesson. I was told that this was not something to guess at and that I needed to understand all of it. Guessing would not explain what was best. Looking back, I know that I was taught the rules of divination and was given all that Mr. Adaya knew. So at thirteen, I began telling fortunes, thanks to Mr. Adaya and, as time went by, I got better at it. Under socialism, I later gave my coins to my mother and left her in 1964, but I lie, it was in 1961. Then, when I became an agronomist, I brought my mother and my *ger* to Burd *sum*, and she brought the coins. However, I had to keep my divination secret. When I was the leader of the youth, I was especially secretive about this. And in 1990, with the arrival of democracy and the rebirth of Lamaism I went on pension and began to raise vegetables. The State Farm had an excellent mechanic named Tserennadmid who was also the State Farm leader and who raised garlic, but that was years ago. However, you can grow garlic in the desert or the *khangai*¹⁶. I grew more than 50 *sot* (or an old measure) on one half an acre.

A while ago a plane disappeared, and there was a one million dollar reward. So, I turned to divination to try to find the plane. When the State Farms were privatized and shares were given out, I got a mare and a colt, and they disappeared. So, as a diviner, people told me to use my divination skills to find them. I tried my hand at divination and was only told that everything was where it should be, so I figured that I was just being tested. Then I was told to use the 69 car to find my horses. After that, I moved to the city and planted my vegetables near my cabin. Tsend was the caretaker and looked after them as well as saying the prayers. He is now dead. But, in those days, the leader summoned Tsend as the accountants had come to the *aimag* center to go over the books, but there was snow and maybe there had been an accident. I said I would call them as soon as the accountants arrived. Then I changed my clothes and called again to say that they had arrived, and indeed they had. So this was my second successful divination! Later we were eating, and the leader came by, and we all started making idle talk, and we chatted about the plane that had disappeared, I was made the head diviner of the company and was told to try and find that plane. Dashtsereng Ochirbat was another diviner who had tested me twice, and I told him that I was right and that I should be the company's lead diviner. However, the coins could not turn up any living people, and as the plane had come down in a foreign land in a mountainous area with lots of ice, I did not know where it was. The plane was soon found in such a place, and I again made clear that I should be the company diviner. However, this was really just a game, and we all laughed a lot. So it was. In 1990 I was seventy years old. It is now 2004, and I became a lama in 1999.

D: Were you taught by the diviner Adaya, and is he a lama now?

B: He is a lama leader and the astrologer for the Merciful Teacher, along with the

lama Choisengee who recites the “Yambiidaljir.”

D: When you were young, were there Buddhas at your home?

B: We didn't have Buddhas, but my mother had a small Green Tara Goddess, about which I had some confusion and whose picture was replaced by a very handsome Marshal Choibalsan¹⁷⁾ in a frame.

D: Did you have diviner's coins?

B: Yes.

D: What happened to them?

B: My poor mother stowed away the coins from my teacher. Last year I went to China to both Wutai Shan and Beijing. I returned to Ulaan Baatar, and I visited my relatives in the fourth district, and they had money problems. When I took the bus, I gave the conductor 5000 *tugriks* and received no change. Then I left my purse with another 5000 *tugriks* and a snuff pipe in it.

D: Did you hide the Green Tara and replace it with the picture of Marshal Choibalsan?

B: With a lot of upset. But Buddha has set things right.

D: Where did you put it?

B: I put it on the top of the chest.

D: Was it alright to keep things there?

B: With all those paper folds to get the picture in the frame, it was not alright but I was young. At the time, there was a fear of religious doctrine. I finished school in 1949-50, and then I made a mistake. I lost my 19-year old daughter, and I turned to divination which attributed her death to God. Now my oldest daughter's boy is mentally ill. He is twenty one or twenty two and a beautiful boy and was normal until the fifth grade. In the sixth grade, he disappeared in Ulaan Baatar and lived as a street child for a month. After searching for him for several weeks, we found him and brought him home.

5 Changing the Culture

D: Did you have to conceal your Buddhist worship?

B: Oh yes, in the past — especially during the cultural attack against the Buddhist sutras. There was also destruction aimed at the distillery barrels and the pots for making *airagh*. In our Bogd *sum*, the *negdel* leader was Sharavchogdon, who had been the secretary to the Mongolian Embassy in Korea. Finally, a deputy from the Bogd Great Khural came to our party, but it was Sharavchogdon who was in charge of destroying the barrels. So I was the leader of the young people who destroyed the wooden pots. If, however, they insisted that we keep breaking them we would have to use rubber barrels for making *airagh*. But this Sharavchogdon and I did not get along, and he kept me out of the Party.

D: Did you wish to join the Party?

B: I was rather interested in joining the Party and since I did work for the Party I wished to be a member but probably it was for the best that I did not join.

D: Do you generally pray to Buddha?

B: Oh, I am very pious. The prayers are written in Cyrillic.

D: Were you young when all this was going on?

B: Of course, I was young.

D: How old?

B: About thirty years old. In 1964, I was the Youth leader on the Bogd *Sum* League for six years.

D: Were you the leader when you reread all the prayers in Tibetan?

B: It was later when my “older brother” Vaanchig was out under the open sky with a wind horse flag incense offering.

D: Were you interested in these prayers at that time?

B: Back then, I did learn the basic prayers like the wind horse flag sutra and later I began to read other texts.

D: Did the sutras interest you?

B: I must have been destined to read them since such an interest runs in my family. The Merciful Teacher gave my father the name for me. In addition, my father was an interesting fellow, and he had horses for his hobby. The Merciful Teacher owned an ambler that was as precious to him as a sandalwood throne, and in fact was worth fifty sheep with their lambs and ten yaks and their young. At that time, one was lucky to get a horse for five sheep, so there really must have been an abundance of herds then. My grandfather, Tsembel, was the Merciful Teacher’s yak herder and was involved in the festival to the God Maidar¹⁸⁾ and when there was a celebration, my grandfather, who was not a Buddhist, led out this horse with the white patch on his forehead as was the custom. This is both an interesting and true story. I even went to this place and took a picture. Now my Uncle, Bandakhain, had a curse placed on him and was poisoned. Previously, he had repaired the statues at Erdene Zuu, and he was then invited to work along with the artist Rentsendorj and Unkh and Sharav at Kharkhorin. Rentsendorj’s brother has two sons who were lamas in India where they had studied for seven years and then returned home to teach. Their teacher was a lesser disciple of the Merciful Teacher, and they, both well educated, were then the directors of lamasery services in the *dugan* (lamasery hall). They had both studied the sutras with the Merciful Teacher, but there were some differences between their teaching and ours. There is one sutra which contained a certain exorcism which involved these two men and a teacher who follows the Choir school of Buddhist philosophy and is either at Tsogchin and now mostly follows the Bogd Shav Khutukhtu.

Thus there was a kind of secret rivalry between these two schools of philosophy

with the prize being a higher ranking position in the Buddhist hierarchy. In our lamasery, there were discussions between the religious and the secular, and there was one teacher aside from the Merciful Teacher who was oppressive about following the right path and imposed some sort of curse on those who did not agree with him. This curse made clear that, as in a family's household, so too at the lamasery there was a crazy dog and a rabid wolf. The dog would scratch on the door of the Merciful Teacher's dwelling so all the lamas were afraid of getting bitten. There are, indeed, some lamas who can inflict curses like in witchcraft. When bad things began to happen they went to the two men, and the monk Perlayguntev took the brothers prisoner and put them in a torture box and threw some sand on top of them. He then asked them "whom did you curse at?" This happened a day before the Maidar celebration where my Grandfather, Tsembel, arrived on a black horse. He stayed in the *ger* next to the Merciful Teacher, but died the next day from the curse of the two lamas who were in the sand box. Oh no! Tsembel died during the festival for Maidar. I went there as well and took a picture of the remains of the house. Then the two men in the sand box were put into prison where some people who did not confess were killed. Now there is a wooden chest that still holds the bones. The soul of those two men became two earless and tailless wolves. Then a Mr. Maant came to our lamasery and made up a prayer for them. Now, on the east side of the Burgast ravine, there is a monument to them, with Mr. Maant's prayer engraved on the stone. There is also a historical legend connected to the fertility stone or Phallus that even had stone genitals. In 1947, I was in school in Bogd *sum* where a person entitled "Kharlaan Toghooch" still lives and is about seventy. There was also a man named Surengaa who was killed by a bull. These two men tried to cut down some aspen trees and sell them for firewood, though some of the wood was given to the school. I don't really remember the details since I was young at the time, but I do remember an odd tree. But at about this time, the two tailless wolves came to the Burgast Valley where two young monks had brought some girls to the Valley, but they were eaten by the wolves. Because of this calamity, the monks performed exorcisms on the wolves and placed the fertility stone or Phallus Statue in plain sight. Then the two wolves, reincarnated as terrifying monsters, had to be destroyed. This horrifying series of events began with grandfather Tsembel and the curse and all that witchery.

D: Those two men must have placed a curse on the whole area.

B: Yes, that is true. I went to my home locale last year and talked with an eighty-year old woman who told me the whole story. This year I went back there by motorcycle to further investigate and met with several lamas and Gegeens, including the lama Gegeens of West and East Bogd. I became an historian and examined signs and symbols and took pictures for my study. I do not have any

more elderly relatives or acquaintances to talk to now about the old days, and I have only one sister left.

D: During socialist times, did practicing Buddhism get any easier?

B: It was easier in the nineties. Before that, it wasn't allowed. Especially, in the Gobi area there were Buddhist practices, although families did not have the sutras. Party and League members were checked for the sutras and were oppressed if they were found. I know this well because I was the leader of the Youth League Committee.

6 The Buddhist Religion After Democracy

D: Are Buddhist objects confiscated?

B: There has been almost no confiscation, but I do not display these objects publically. Perhaps Tsagaan Sar¹⁹⁾ is the right time to display the sacred omens. In the past, sacred objects were put in the bottom of a chest and were not mixed in with clothes and shoes. The chest could have a tray or shelf for the Buddhist offerings and paraphernalia, and everything else would be put below them. Traditionally, for the Gobi people, when a family moves, the first camel is loaded up with the most important things including the “toiron” or tent ring, and the Buddhist artifacts and the children and the clothes would go on the second camel. The *negdels* were given rubber barrels for distilling that we use to this day. In the Gobi and the *khangai*, people kept some of their animals and those that were left over were collectivized. The service and government workers, however, were not permitted to have animals and in addition, there was a tax imposed on milk and meat. So although I was the leader of the League Committee and had served the government I had no animals. One horse per year was the allotment, which made it difficult for me as I wandered all over the place.

D: Is Buddhism changing and flourishing in Mongolia today?

B: It is doing well. During the National Assembly, Batkhoo presented a discussion of religion, and I sent my views on this to the newspaper, but my piece was not published. The issue of religion was raised in the fall, but it was passed over in silence. I could not follow this up because I recently had to go for a week's treatment and had to rest for twelve days. No thoughtful lama has brought up religious issues, so for now it is clear that there is little free and frank religious discussion. Nor has a group been set up to pursue such talk or the connections between different religions. Any such conversation is important to me because since I wished to build a temple, I had to talk to the *aimag* leader Dembereliin Erdenbileg, who is now the ambassador to Russia. But back then, he came over with five friends for drinks. Then I went to the Övörkhongai Ministry, which wasn't set up, so I then went to talk with a writer for the paper “Zindaa” to find out about a religious organization that would support my temple. I also met with

the lama Choijamts. At the Gandategchilen lamasery, the Gandan abbot was a key figure in Mongolian religion, and he did assume the leadership of all Mongolian religion. Every *sum* and *aimag* should have a small temple lamasery. The real issue is not just talk of the sutras but of establishing a fund for the high lamas and the devout. I am also concerned about educating folks in the religion so that they understand it. I go to the teacher Soninbayar when I am worried about these issues. I took him my book "Full Moon" and a yellow *khadagh* (indicating he wished Soninbayar to be his teacher) on our first meeting. Later I met the very learned L. Khurelbaatar who was a Tibetan translator. I went to his living area called "Moskva," and I also gave him a yellow *khadagh* and my book and told him what I was doing. The teacher said that there are thirteen different reincarnations and that we are one of them because we have two seals of the Merciful Teacher from the Dalai Lama. One is the seal of the Bogd lama and, in addition, we also have a blessing rod. But this is not known to many people. I do not know Tibetan well enough so I am lost on how to pursue these matters further. I was given a book from Khurelbaatar about the Dilav or Dundgov Khutukhtu who was Mongolia's first Prime Minister during the time of Manchu domination and was told to read it so I could learn about my teacher²⁰. The year before last, after the death of my uncle, I met briefly with my elder sister in the countryside to further study what Khurelbaatar had presented to me. There was a lot of talk about all the things from the temple.

D: Are they now discovering a reincarnation of the Khutukhtu?

B: Yes.

D: Is it alright to find the reincarnation?

B: Of course. There are scientific sources that confirm the existence of the soul. There is a scientific specialty which focuses on the study of the soul, and there have been great scientific discoveries. This is really true. The soul and the intellect are bound together. The wind horse prayer assures good fortune and while you are alive your soul is intertwined with your fate or destiny. When the body dies, the soul lives on in the people's consciousness. Women have human shaped souls, and men have snake shaped souls. In making a baby, the female egg and the male sperm unite to make the baby. In the same way, your soul and intellect unite and are one.

Take Mozart as proof. At the age of four, he was considered to be a renowned musician and wrote music at that young age. I have studied this as have scientists around the world who also connect the soul to genius. We know that Mozart's father and mother, a singer, were great musicians, so their child was made up of both of their souls. His father's soul was in Mozart's compositions, and his mother's soul was in his songs. Their child incorporated both their souls and their intellects into his music and combined with the music he had started listening to

at the age of four, he went on to write world famous music himself. Thus many people study this great musician.

Now let's talk about incarnation. The soul leaves the body, and old people offer legends about this for the children. For example, there was the fierce Khutukhtu Danzanravjaa who was the fifth reincarnation, while the sixth, seventh, and eighth reincarnations were of Tserenvanchig²¹⁾. Danzanravjaa saw his fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth reincarnations killed by the Manchu Khans, so then Tserenvanchig, the Merciful Teacher, was the seventh and eighth reincarnations. The next reincarnations were all self-appointed. There is, nonetheless, a great story about the sixth reincarnation, which tells about a boy who was born in a *ger* to a poor single mother who was always exhausted, and his name was Tserenvanchig. He then grew up at our lamasery, and at five years old it was discovered that he was an incarnation, so off he went to India. At ten years old, he became our Khutukhtu at our Bogd lamasery the day it opened. So this Tserenvanchig studied how to discover an incarnation, but soon died and became the Merciful Teacher in his next incarnation in our Övorkhangai *aimag*, Bogd *sum*, second *bag*²²⁾ at Khurkhreegiin where his tent still remains.

D: So is the Merciful Teacher the later incarnation?

B: Umm — yes. That is so.

D: How is this legend significant?

B: I am not sure if the story is about the sixth or seventh incarnation — I had to guess- but it is certainly a fairy tale. The fifth incarnation was dropped, so this sixth incarnation was in the Gobi area.

There was another *khoshuu* (or Banner) in the Gobi which is now a *bag*, and its leader was called a *zangi* and this *zangi* Tsedev had a servant girl over twenty years old and worked as the *zangi's* herder²³⁾. She became pregnant, bore a son and died leaving this little three-year old boy who remained with Tseved who forced this little child to herd his animals. One day while watching the sheep on the steppe a wolf hurried after the “consecrated” animals²⁴⁾. The wolf also went after the child and then took off. Mr Tsedev's wife, who was in her twenties and wore her native headdress, was an overbearing and nasty woman who scolded and beat the little boy. She yelled at him and demanded that he either pay for the lost sheep, which especially horrified her because they were consecrated or holy, or leave their home. So, in tears, the child left. At the same time, Tsedev was herding his camels and lived in a *ger* with an open fireplace for cooking and a kettle for boiling water. Nor did the family have a wooden door with only a piece of hanging felt. Then the child showed up, holding the wolf and said “take this creature which ate your sheep.”

D: The 3 year old?

B: Yes, and soon Tsedev realized that the three-year old was amazing, and he toned

down his reaction to the boy's earlier bad behavior. Since he wasn't an entirely bad man, he made an offering of incense, but his wife threw the ashes on the child and told him never to cross their threshold again. She must have been possessed by the devil because throwing ashes at someone is a terrible thing to do and was a bad omen. Then the child, weeping, left their home, wearing his little fur *deel* and his Mongol boots in which he looked after the animals in the spring. He found shelter for the night near a dense forest of saxsaul (a kind of poplar) trees where he came across a wandering mendicant lama who was afraid of this child but still passed the night with him. The lama wondered about this little boy with the boots and the white Mongolian *deel* who became frightened when evening approached. Then the child told the monk his story about the sheep and how the wolf went after the "consecrated" sheep. He mentioned that he took the wolf back to his father's *ger* but also asked what he was to do now as he had neither parents nor a place to go. The lama said that the little boy was now his son and that they would go to the Toson Prince lamasery where the boy would be taught. We talked about Tserenvanchig and of the Tserenvanchig lamasery before. I know a legend about Tserenvanchig and a lama and a little boy, and I think it might well be a story of him as a little boy.

Anyway, back to the story. The lama told the boy that he had a cup of rice in his pack and then instructed the child to gather firewood, and he would get water to boil the rice. There was water from the snow and a pot and a small plate waiting, but the little boy did not break up the firewood, which was most unusual for a child. When asked why, the little fellow answered that it was fine not to break the firewood which the lama landed up doing. At that moment, the boy's face became strange, and he told the lama never to let his fingers break another piece of wood. As much as the lama tried to break up the wood, the little boy did not let him, so they both went to sleep on empty stomachs. Later, the child told the lama to get water for the rice and when he returned there was a fire started from burning feather grass, which the boy had collected. The rice thickened and the bowls were filled. The lama had no idea that feather grass grew nearby and when he tasted his rice he realized it had been sweetened with brown sugar. Not only was this mendicant lama not such a bad man, but the child was no ordinary child. The story goes on to point out that the lama was well aware that this child was unusual and made him his son. So, after the rice, they went to sleep, but the mendicant lama had lice, so he apologized to the boy. However, in spite of the lice and the cold, they both went to sleep. When they awoke, they were conscious of intense heat, and the lama noticed that a sable lined cloak had been draped over him and the boy. From this sable cloak, which had disappeared in the morning, and the feather grass fuel which was, in fact, incense, the lama came to the realization that the little boy was a reincarnation. Then the lama and

the boy arose to find a greenish turquoise stone emerging from the ground, which was like a big, marvelous ball that the boy kicked with his Mongolian boots. The lama said greedily that they should put the large stone in their sack, but the little boy warned him not to do so, saying “enough, enough — leave it there.” So the lama listened to the child, but wondered what was really happening, since he wasn’t allowed to hold on to the sable cloak nor pick up the precious stone.

Then the two of them went to a market where a woman was frying a chicken. The boy asked a nearby family for some salt and gave it to the woman. The child was afraid, and his face took on a strange look as he urged them to get out of there, so Mr. Gonchig, the mendicant lama, and the boy hurried off. Mr. Gonchig’s premonition became a reality as they passed a black dog, who was running off with the chicken, which was cursed and struck on the foot by the woman. Yelping and with its sore foot dangling, the dog could not find a place to hide. This was not the first time something like this had happened, and the lama and the boy moved fast to the lower slopes of the valley, which were so cold they almost froze to death. But they found a sort of blind alley in the tumbleweed where they spent the night in the shelter of their sable *deels*. Before they knew it, it was morning, and they saw on the hillside a cloth tent and a horse carriage. They figured that several people they hadn’t noticed had arrived during the night, but they did not want to be seen by them. However, they had to reach the hillside area, so they walked rapidly to a low ravine and up to the mountain pass, and they were not caught. That’s what happened. The child tried to get beyond the mountain pass, but heard a lot of noise from people on horses so he remained hidden in the tumbleweed. Gonchig, however, was captured and taken away up the pass on a horse to a brightly colored tent, where there was a large prideful lama, whose student told him that the mendicant lama, poor soul, had been lost in the mountain pass and was captured. Gonchig was told to sit down and was asked why he was there, and he only answered that he had been in the south. He did not mention the boy. But the arrogant lama questioned him about travelling, a month ago, with a little boy and wondered where he was, since he was their Khutukhtu or reincarnation. The large lama demanded if Gonchig had lost him or killed him. In spite of being threatened, the mendicant lama replied that he had never seen the child nor did he know where he was. He added that such a boy would never stay with a poor lama like himself. But Gonchig was accused of lying because he had been seen talking with someone and was again accused of either abandoning the boy or killing him. Thus, he was going to be tortured with the nine punishments²⁵. Evening came, and the mendicant lama excused himself to go see the horses (to urinate).

Since it was clear the poor lama could not go very far without a horse, he was let outside where the child was waiting for him. The lama told the boy to go

inside the tent, and that he would enter after him. Thus this child, born in the Gobi, had come to a lamasery where people realized he was the true reincarnation. The sutras were read, and it became clear why that steppe animal, the wolf, went after the consecrated sheep in the first place. The little boy adjusted to life in the lamasery, and Gonchig became the major lama of the right hand with the name of Khutukhtu Tserenvanchig. There were three things to find out about. The first was that you should not cut down the trees for firewood because, in revenge, the local deities would blind your eyes. The second thing related to picking up the turquoise stone. That should not be done because in so doing one stepped on the roof of the underworld temple. And the third related to the woman frying the chicken, which represented her own child whom she was about to eat. The dog was, in fact, the spirit of this woman's mother who was trying to prevent her daughter from devouring her own child. But the woman in breaking the dog's leg actually broke her mother's leg, all of which led the little boy to leave the scene as fast as he could. Every other reincarnation had been self-proclaimed, but this sixth reincarnation tells us how Tserenvanchig became the Khutukhtu. The seventh reincarnation was that of our Merciful Teacher Sonomtseren. So this is what I have learned. Next year, I will go to Khamrin lamasery and then to Demchin lamasery. Yes, I will certainly go there.

D: Is the fifth reincarnation the Princely Khutukhtu?

B: The fifth reincarnation was destroyed by the Manchus. It had started in Erdene Zuu, but moved about. The Living Womb and the Stone Phallus are both inscribed with the letter "om," thanks to the fifth reincarnation of Ravjaa who went to Tövkhön for thirteen or fourteen days, almost one half a month, for a rest. While he was there, he saw the stupas of the first reincarnation at the Tövkön mountain pass, and he saw Ochirvaan and the Tara Mother Goddess at the place where the first incarnation was seen, which was wonderful. This was the place that inspired the song "Ulemjiin Chanar." Luvsandanzan was the lama who came to Erdene Zuu with four young people and performed the one hundred and eight *tsam* dance. The first Danshig Naadam honored the Jetsamdamba²⁶⁾ and there were horse races at the area where the Phallus stone monument has been placed. This Mongolian Great Naadam²⁷⁾ was first begun by Danzanravjaa, and for the past four years, the Danshig Naadam with its horse races has been held in Kharkhorin. Danzanravjaa also wrote the song "Ulemjiin Chanar" and selected wine to serve people but he turned it into water so there was no intoxication, which the eighth Bogd (or Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu) was unable to do²⁸⁾. He and Danzanravjaa came to hate each other and sought revenge on each other and with the Manchu Khan, it was decided to kill the fifth reincarnation. They went to Tövkhön and on to Khujirt.

To get back to the story, the fifth reincarnation found a good woman companion,

Dr. Baljidmaa, but she was not permitted to go on to Khujirt, so she went to her home in the Tuul River area. She had been called all sorts of names midst the drunkenness of the eighth Bogd. But they went on to Taraght and the rocky mountain area and then to the Dundgov Ongiin lamasery, which is, I guess, where Baljidmaa went, and so the place was considered to be unclean. It is interesting how such a powerful woman could be seen as defiled. But the fifth reincarnation was cursed, and so he began to drink and became involved with the lama Luvsandanzan, and he killed him. Two scholars have written about all of this. Mr. Damdinsüren described the six-year drought at Erdene Zuu and how the mice overran and destroyed the temple hall²⁹. The mice scampered all over the sutra books of Dagvadarjaa. At the time, there was a measles outbreak in the south side of the yellow hollow, which killed many children for whom the doctor could do nothing. The eighth Bogd set up the stone phallus and offered fifty “oms.” But this did nothing to lift the curse, and the drought continued. Then Danzanravjaa was invited to perform at the Naadam with his one hundred and eight *tsam* dancers who performed a rain dance, which along with the power of the Merciful Teacher did, indeed, bring rain, and the dead mice were swept away in the rushing waters. So, things got better. Another scholar, Altangerel, wrote that on his return Danzanravjaa drank a great deal and killed a lama³⁰. According to the television, Mr. Damdinsüren pointed out there was a frightening Devil figure on a brown horse seen near the lamasery. He also said that Danzanravjaa ordered Luvsandanzan to destroy the devil, which he did, but he died in the process. Then the eighth Bogd reported to the Manchu Khan that Danzanravjaa was a drunk who had killed a fellow lama so the Manchu Khan ordered the death of Danzanravjaa who was then arrested. His four extremities were pulled and stretched until he died, and his body was left to the black vultures³¹.

D: In which *aimag* or *sum* is the Khutukhtu’s lamasery?

B: Ours. Our Khutukhtu lamasery? In Bogd *sum*.

D: Övörkhantai?

B: Yes, Övörkhantai, Bogd *sum*. Last summer a few lamas were at Demchig lamasery in Bayankhongor. Ömnögov is Khankhongor or Khanbogd — maybe. There are twelve lamas there and a lamp has been consecrated. I put a *khadagh* at the home of “The Merciful Teacher” near the lamasery hall. I firmly believe that the last reincarnation did happen.

D: Did all these incarnations include that of Tserenvanchig, the Princely Khutukhtu and “The Merciful Teacher?”

B: The sixth reincarnation is from the Demchig lamasery, and the seventh is from here and it, along with the eighth, has not yet been discovered. So I must go to the Demchig lamasery and from there on to the Khamrin lamasery which has been built up and where I know Baatar and Altangerel. I also want to meet Mr.

Khurelbaatar, the historian. So now I have spoken. I pay for all my expenses on my pension of 92,400 *tugriks*, but I can't afford to publish a book. This is all just a hobby. Everything is stored away in my brain, but a book is necessary for the next generations. Here then, child, is my story.

D: Thank you.

Notes

- 1) Gegeen is the title of an incarnated lama with great merit.
- 2) *Khoshuu* or Banner, was an administrative unit during the Qing dynasty rule over Mongolia. See Jigjidiin Boldbaatar and David Sneath, "Ordering Subjects: Mongolian Civil and Military Administration (Seventeenth to Twentieth Centuries)" in David Sneath, ed. *Imperial Statecraft: Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia: Sixth-Twentieth Centuries*. Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 2006, pp.296-303.
- 3) The Communist Party that was the only legal political party from 1924 to 1990.
- 4) On this Virgin Lands policy that originated in the Soviet Union, see Morris Rossabi, "Introduction" in Yuki Konagaya and I. Lkhagvasuren, *Socialist Devotees and Dissenters: Three Twentieth-Century Mongolian Leaders*. (SER96) Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2011, pp.10-11.
- 5) In 1964, Tsogt-Ochiriin Lookhuuz, who had been Director of the State Farms, was purged in a struggle with Y. Tsendenbal, the Head of State. Labeled as part of an Anti-Party clique, he was exiled and later imprisoned. In this atmosphere, a letter from him could be used to portray the one addressed as "subversive" and could lead to dismissal. See Konagaya and Lkhagvasuren, pp.129-151.
- 6) Tārā represents the female aspect of Avalokitesvara (known to the Chinese as Guanyin and to the Japanese as Kannon), a Bodhisattva. The White Tārā symbolized compassion, healing, and longevity while the Green Tārā symbolized enlightenment. See Stephen Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. For visual representations of Tārā, see Terese Tse Bartholomew and Patricia Berger, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1995, pp.291-293.
- 7) Y. Tsendenbal was Head of State and Secretary of the MPRP from 1952 to 1984, and J. Batmunkh held the same posts from 1984 to 1990.
- 8) For interesting descriptions of the *tsam* dances, which were not originally part of Buddhist rituals, and the masks used during the performances, see Aleksei Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in Late 19th-Century Mongolia* (trans. by Alo Raun and Linda Raun; ed. by John Krueger). Bloomington: The Mongolia Society, 1978, pp.505-521 and Henning Haslund, *Men and Gods in Mongolia*. London: Kegan Paul, 1935, pp.43-48. Bartholomew and Berger, pp.155-171 include photographs of the masks and the associated regalia.
- 9) The Uyghur script for Mongolian was developed early in the thirteenth century and was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet in the 1940s. The latest work on the Xiongnu people who inhabited Mongolia from about the third century, BCE to the third century, CE is Ursula Brosseden and Bryan Miller, eds. *Xiongnu Archaeology: Multidisciplinary*

Perspectives of the First Steppes Empires in Inner Asia. Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie Rheinische Friedriche-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2011. The Xiongnu were not Mongolians, but modern Mongolians frequently refer to them as their ancestors.

- 10) Usually referring to a Parliament, but in this case, a local Congress in his region.
- 11) Khüree was a monastery.
- 12) A reincarnated lama.
- 13) Choir is a site along the Sino-Mongolian border, adjacent to the border-crossing town of Zamyn-Üüd.
- 14) A *khadagh* is a ceremonial scarf. For its uses, Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1979, pp.85-86 and 132-133. *Aruul* is a type of cheese. Many objects were placed on these statues, rocks, and other sacred sites to ensure good fortune.
- 15) Refers to the Red Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism.
- 16) A mountainous and forested steppe region.
- 17) Marshall Choibalsan (b. 1895), often labeled as Mongolia's Stalin, was the Head of the country and the Secretary of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party until his death in 1952. Ironically, a statue of him is in front of the National Mongolian University.
- 18) The Mongolian name for the Maitreya or Future Buddha.
- 19) The Mongolian New Year.
- 20) On this remarkable figure and his real activities, see Owen Lattimore and Fujiko Isono, *The Diluv Khutagt: Memoirs and Autobiography of a Mongol Buddhist Reincarnation in Religion and Revolution*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982.
- 21) On this figure, see the popularized account of Danzan Ravjaa (1803-1856) in Michael Kohn, *Lama of the Gobi*. Hong Kong: Blacksmith Books, 2010.
- 22) An administrative unit below a *sum*.
- 23) On the role of *zangis* as heads of *sums* during Qing (1644-1911) China's domination over Mongolia, see Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*. New York: Frederick Praeger, 1968, pp.175 and 178.
- 24) Charles Bawden, *Mongolian-English Dictionary*. London: Kegan Paul, 1997, p.322. These animals were distinguished by ribbons around their necks and thus could not be used.
- 25) On punishments during the Qing dynasty, see Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Local Government in China Under the Ch'ing*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962, pp.117-118, 126-128 and Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in Imperial China*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967, throughout.
- 26) The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu or the leader of the Buddhists in Mongolia. See Charles Bawden, *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus of Urga*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961.
- 27) An annual festival held in July emphasizing the three traditional sports, archery, wrestling, and horseback racing.
- 28) On this reputed skill, see Kohn, p.83.
- 29) Tsendiin Damdinsüren (1908-1986) was a distinguished linguist, poet, editor, and literary critic. He was Editor of the MPRP newspaper *Ünen (Truth)*, produced the first Russian-Mongolian dictionary, and was the Head of the Institute of Languages and Literatures at the National Mongolian University. He was imprisoned in the 1930s for so-called unorthodox views and was criticized once again in the 1960s for bringing to light and championing pre-Communist Mongolian literature. On him, see Bawden, *Modern*

Mongolia, pp.413-415; Kohn, pp.203-210; Robert Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964, p.287; and *Through the Ocean Waves: The Autobiography of Bazaryn Shirendev* (trans. by Temujin Onon. Bellingham: Western Washington University), 1997, pp. 106, 124, and 213.

30) Altangerel is the Curator of the Danzanravjaa Museum. On him, see Kohn.

31) There are quite a few legends about his death. See Kohn, pp.186-190.

III Borjigon

B: Borjigon

D: Lkhagvademchig

1 Early Years

D: So what is your name and what area do you come from?

B: I am a local man and come from around here, from Shankh *sum*. In fact, my home is 10-20 kilometers from here. I am called Borjigon.

D: When were you born?

B: 1941.

D: Just as the war began.

B: As the war began. I was born at the beginning of the war.

D: Is this your locale?

B: Yes — around Kharkhorin and our *sum*.

D: How many brothers did you have as you grew up?

B: There were three or four of us, but my parents were not around when I was young. In 1959, I had just finished the first grade when my oldest brother died. So now there are three of us, and my two youngest brothers are in the city, and I am here.

D: Did your father and mother live near here?

B: They were from this general area.

D: Did you go to primary school when you were young?

B: From 1949 to 1953 I went to the school near where I lived. When it ended, I was living with my grandfather and grandmother who had grown old and who died around 70 — about my age now. They did not like me going far but while Grandma was drinking the waters at Mogoitin Spa, which was a fourteen day trip by horse or camel, I registered for school. When August 25th came around, Grandma was not there so I could not start school. Thus, I did not go so my education lagged behind.

D: What grade did you finish?

B: The 4th grade. I have a 4th grade education.

D: Is there now a central school to go to?

B: Yes. There is a school in Shankh center in our Shankh *sum*. There is also a lamasery and a place that has pretty good things. I attended an artel¹⁾ or craft co-operative which was the main institution there. Lamas from the old Shankhin lamasery worked at this artel where quite a few metal goods, carpentry products, and boots were made. The artel made essential goods like Mongolian boots, saddle cloths, chests, dishes for the home, and felt. Generally factories are large, but I am talking about a small factory which later moved to Khujirt *sum*, and we

set up the joint “Khadni artel.”

So that is what went on in our *sum*. In 1956 the State Farm was organized in two years, and Shankh *sum* was abolished and was united with the Kharkhorin State Farm. Thus Kharkhorin *sum* no longer existed. I was young at the time, around fifteen, and I lived with my mother and father who were herders for the *negdel*²⁾ and later the State Farm. Then I was drafted into the military and joined the 7th battalion, the building of which later became a meat and flour Kombinat. I helped build part of this Kombinat – #24. The meat Kombinat grew larger when I worked there from March to July. I then worked at an auto repair factory, and then a flour factory from which only the ruins now remain. Most everyone discharged from the military worked in construction all over the country. I was thus delighted to find work in the flour factory in Kharkhorin, which has been opened for twenty years, and I have worked there twenty-two. But wait a minute. After 1988, I was the assistant herder at the factory. My father died, so I helped my mother with the herds, and since 1988, I have been herding my parents’ fifty or so sheep, twenty odd cows and horses, but then the factory lost all of its animals. So since 1988 I have been a one thousand herder (a competent herder) with my own animals. So that is how I have lived my life. Now I try to make a better life for my children as my wife and I live out our lives with our herds.

D: Did you live in a dormitory when you were little?

B: If you knew someone near the school, you stayed with them and not in the school dormitories. In the first year, there was an old man who was my grandfather’s brother and some of us stayed there, then we stayed with Grandpa, and then we stayed in the dormitory for three years. However, if I had gone to several schools, I would be better educated.

D: Where did the children come from?

B: From Shankh.

D: Yes.

B: Of course all school age children came from their *sum*. But some ran away.

D: Like in the movies.

B: Like in a movie. Such was our life. We would run away, and the teachers would follow us. We tried to escape on the red horse., but the teachers would catch us and bring us back to school. Some of course really did flee, but I never did. On vacation, I slept for two or three days.

D: When did children begin school?

B: At eight years old and we finished the fourth grade at twelve. We did not have a middle school then but now there is one in Khujirt that goes through the seventh grade. Later it became a high school for our *sum*, which is convenient for many but a bit far for those in the countryside. People did not like to send their children to school, so only a few children attended from our area — maybe

three or four. The rest are from the countryside.

D: Did the teacher come from the city or the country?

B: In the beginning they were local, but when I attended they came from the city, from teaching in Khujirt. The teacher was well trained for the children in the seventh grade, and I finished the fourth grade with a young teacher from Zunbayan-Ulaan. That teacher finished high school and then became a teacher and after some difficulty, came to our area. He was a tall young man. There was a short, light-skinned teacher from Uvs before him who had come from the city. The school started in October or November, but he was moved to the Khasagdal *aimag* where there must have been a teacher shortage. He wrote to us, and we wrote back. However, he had, in the beginning, been very strict, and he was hard to get used to but when he left, we all crowded around him and did not want him to go, and we even followed him. He understood kids very well. I wonder where he is now.

D: Was he a young man?

B: He was a youth just over twenty who had, I think, finished school at fifteen or eighteen. Generally, though, the teachers came from a school in Khujirt where many of them went. We didn't have a high school.

D: How many teachers were there?

B: There were four or five teachers — one for each group, and there were two groups per class. The head teacher had no more than five or six classes.

D: Generally four classes?

B: Yes, four classes.

D: How many students were in a class?

B: Thirty children.

D: That is quite a lot.

B: Yes, quite a lot, but by the end of the fourth grade only twenty remained.

D: Male and female?

B: Boys and girls, but I can't tell how many of each.

D: Were there separate classes for boys and girls?

B: No, we didn't have the resources for that. Later, a small building was set up and used for the second and third year.

D: Did the children live together in the dormitories?

B: No, there was separate housing.

D: Ahh, in a *ger*?

B: There was a *ger* with heat and a caretaker who attended the fires and lit the wood burning stoves at night in two or three *gers*.

D: How many children in one *ger*?

B: Over ten children — or almost ten. They might study in another area but my lessons were all in that *ger*, which could get very dirty, but I went to others for

different lessons.

D: I see.

B: In the first grade, we craned our necks to see the writing on the blackboard which we copied.

D: In the school *ger*?

B: Since the first grade did not have many classes, we stayed in one *ger*. In the second grade, we slept and had classes in the new building.

D: Was there Cyrillic writing then?

B: No. In 1949, I used the Cyrillic and the fourth class was taught the Mongolian script. Then that stopped, and we used the Cyrillic, so the Mongolian script was cut back.

D: The Mongolian script?

B: Yes.

D: So then the Cyrillic script was taught.

B: Yes. Then we were taught the Cyrillic script. I am not sure but I think that Cyrillic has been taught since the sixties.

D: Your food is getting cold.

B: The seven and eight year olds knew the Mongolian script before the Cyrillic was introduced.

D: Did families at that time like their children to go to school?

B: Clearly, some did not, but I don't know about everyone.

D: My brother said that some people did not like their children going off to school.

B: Since the herds were private then, the children were needed.

D: What lessons were there then?

B: Geology and world geography in the fourth grade along with Mongolian literature, gymnastics, and cycling.

D: What was taught in Mongolian literature?

B: There were not too many writers, then so fairy tales and riddles. Sometimes there were stories by Tarvaagiin and Baastiin in the children's readers. I think those authors wrote them, but I am not sure if they were understood. I would answer the teachers' questions.

D: Did you wear the little red scarf or tie?

B: Of course, and the boys wore blue cotton *deels*, and I think that the girls wore green *deels*. That was the uniform along with a cotton knapsack for books.

D: Did boys wear a special *deel*?

B: Blue cotton, and green for the girls.

D: Did the parents make these *deels*?

B: Yes. We did not have clothing in Shankh, so fathers and mothers made them.

D: Was the food and drink prepared by parents or the government?

B: The state provided meals and sent the food. There usually was meat for the

children, but there was no flour or rice. However, I do not know about the money and everything that went on.

D: Were there three meals a day?

B: There was tea in the morning, a meal during the day, and one at night.

D: What sort of food was served throughout the day?

B: In the morning there was *mantuu* or steamed bread — generally *mantuu*. Other types of bread had not yet been introduced — same for rice. Sometimes there were boiled joints of meat, and there were cabbage and potatoes. We didn't like the cabbage, but the potatoes were edible. One cook cut the cabbage into thick slices which no one wanted to eat, so the cabbage just sat there.

D: Did you eat soup or *khoorga* (chopped meat and vegetables in fat)?

B: We generally did not eat them. Since there were forty or fifty children, it would have been hard to make the *khoorga*. Now, at Shankh, there are three halls and two smaller ones on the side. The meals were cooked on one side, and the classes were held in front, so we marched off to eat and then returned to classes.

D: Did you ever taste the cabbage and the potatoes at school?

B: The potatoes were alright. An old uncle and my grandparents lived in one *ger*, and the old man brought in several potatoes, but we didn't know what to do with them, even though we were told they were good to eat. The artel had planted potatoes and a few vegetables. But one hectare or even less was not enough, though a *khashaa*³⁾ was square, and some vegetables and cabbage and potatoes were planted by ten old Chinese who had settled in the area amongst the Mongols and Kazakhs. The school children helped with the plowing, which was good for them. Old Mr. Namsrai gave each child a big moon cake the size of a potato for working the land. We loved the moon cakes.

D: Was Mr. Namsrai Chinese or Mongolian?

B: He worked in the artel, but I don't know if he was there when he was giving out the moon cakes.

D: What sort of work did all of you do?

B: The work was hard. In the spring, we plowed the field and had to remove and gather up all the old roots and stones under our feet.

D: Were the children satisfied with the food in the dormitory? Was it enough?

B: They were always hungry, though sometimes more so than others. Sometimes, we were given dried curds (*ezgii* or *aaruul*) and two buns, which were wolfed down.

D: Did lessons run from morning until evening? How many hours did they last?

B: A long day — from nine in the morning until four.

D: That was quite long.

B: Yes. Now the Shankh lower region is “the lower center,” and it is called the West Khüree. Many families and children came from there, and they went home after

the sun had set in the dark of night. Then the children played outside on the road and horsed around with their friends.

D: Were there blackboards?

B: There was a blackboard the size of a picture which hung on the wall.

D: Was the blackboard placed in the honored part of the *ger*?

B: It was alright to put it anywhere because the teacher had to follow the light.

D: Did you sit on beds in the *ger*?

B: Yes, we settled down, and the blackboard was set up.

D: Did the teacher use chalk?

B: Yes.

D: Now students have paper, pencils, and notebooks.

B: The teacher gave us what we needed. Students in the first grade used lead pencils and in second grade they used ink. The glass ink bottle had a cone shaped hole for the ink. Have you seen these?

D: No, I am not familiar with them.

B: It is round, and the tip of the pen can be dipped into the ink in a glass ink bottle. One has to be careful not to spill the ink, which can't be rinsed off. It is easy to turn the cone shaped bottle around, it does not break if it falls and it can be washed with a cloth. When the ink ran out, the teacher refilled the bottle. Later, there were different colored inks that dissolved in water and turned pink. Now the black ink is pink.

D: Back then, what was the grading?

B: It was based on 5, 4, 3, and 2.

D: I have heard that children, in those days, were very afraid of their elders.

B: We were. We wanted to appear dignified so tried to be good and not fight in front of them. On occasion, the elders could become upset and would scold a child no matter whose child he was. They might be admonished: "You are a rogue! Why? What has become of you?" The children were frightened. When everyone told the child that he was doing something wrong, he was frightened and stopped being offensive. A child had to be raised calmly, had to greet people politely, and needed to say "thank you" and "excuse me," no matter how busy he was.

D: Now, their "excuse me" or "thank you" was based on a Russian or foreign tradition.

B: Whatever happened, one needed to say thank you.

D: In the old days one said *gialailaa* and now *bayarlaa* is said for "thank you."

B: *Gialaila* means "more peaceful." People also say *saikhan bollo*. Any of these is an expression of happiness, and some people even say *basiba* or *bashiba* or *bashila*. I wonder if all of these evolved from *spacibo*.

D: Did you learn Russian in primary school?

B: Not in the primary school — in middle school.

D: Were there Russians in your area?

B: There were Russians on horseback who carried big sticks and could have been “mappers.”

D: Were they frightening?

B: We ran away from them.

D: Did they look foreign to you?

B: We had never seen Russians before, and their faces were different and we were not accustomed to them.

D: What sort of people were the Russians?

B: They were alright. They were not bad people, and the Mongolians, generally, think very highly of them. And all of us came to regard the Russians as good people. And the men with the sticks must have been cartographers who climbed to the summit of hills and put their sticks in the ground. I remember them well.

D: At the time, did you have ample money to go to the store?

B: As a child?

D: Yes.

B: Rarely. We would only go to the store when we had three or five *tugriks*, so I saved every last precious penny for fruit candy or juju plums and for one...moon cake which cost twenty *mung* and five moon cakes for one *tugrik*.

D: Did all the candy come from Russia?

B: Yes. We could not afford a kilo of candy. But foreign guests would bring us some which did not fill us up like the moon cakes or a *tanzuu*.

D: Did the Russians have a vodka called “Monopoly?”

B: People did talk about this “Monopoly” but I don’t know about it. Sorry.

D: From what I have heard, *manakhual* or “white spirits” was supposed to be good for your health, and people would buy it as soon as they got their paychecks. There was a lot of talk about this “white spirits.”

B: This could happen to city people who have salaries but not in the countryside. There is this “white spirits” in the liquor stores which costs fifteen *tugriks*.

D: That is quite expensive.

B: Yes, that is pricey. By the 1960s and 1970s, it cost it cost twenty seven or twenty eight and even more than thirty. Now it costs over four or five thousand.

2 Religious Beliefs in Socialist Times

D: When you went to primary school, did your parents say prayers for you?

B: No. Generally people were afraid to do that. But my father could not do that anyway as he was a Party member. Party members would be criticized if their children wore a guardian spirit amulet. So we did not do that.

D: Did other children in your area wear them?

B: I do not know. I did not really see them. It has been several years since the

lamaseries which were scattered all over were closed. At that time, though, people were afraid to practice the Buddhist religion.

D: Were there Buddhas in your area?

B: Yes there were Buddhas. Every family had them; some were displayed and some were hidden.

D: Did you put out twenty-five lamps for the Buddhist feast day?

B: Of course, in the *ger*. It is said that we are masters in our own homes. There were no officials around on feast days so the lamps could be lit while the elders silently read the prayers.

D: Did the lamas wear lamas' clothing?

B: A lama did not wear his lama *deel*.

D: Were the lamas who worked at the artel bald or did they get their hair cut?

B: They shaved their heads and did not let their hair grow out.

D: Did the lamas have wives and children?

B: Generally, the black lamas (or those who were laicized).

D: When the Buddhists were worshipping, were people invited to read the sutras?

B: You were asked to do so in secret. If things were not going well for you, you might turn to a trusted person for guidance. Everyone held some sort of belief.

D: Was there *oboo* worship?

B: Not generally. That began later, and now there is a little more praying than when I was young. We didn't understand when the older people talked so happily about the *oboo*, Naadam, and going to wrestling matches. At the frequent Naadam festivals for the *oboo*, there are memories of the wrestling and the race horses. But when I was young, worshipping at the *oboo* wasn't known by everyone.

D: Were there other people besides the lamas and the Chinese who worked at the artel?

B: There were women who made the basic white soled boots and later light sewing was done but not at the Shankh artel. The seam work was as tough as wood or metal, and people from Khujirt joined in the sewing.

D: Were there artels just for lamas?

B: I don't know. There was organized coercion at the Shankh artel, so when the lamas' artel was organized, people left. Actually, this was the first lama artel, and many lamas were forced to join but it was so small, it was not paid much attention.

D: Did you have an idea of what a lama looked like when you were young?

B: Certainly. I knew that two elderly lamas were my ancestors, and one found the Bogd's elephant.

D: Elephant?

B: Yes.

D: Oh, at the khüree or lamasery.

B: At the Bogd khüree. Now the elephant has died, and nobody really cared. They say that a man came here, but no one knows who he was. Maybe he was a lama from Odgoi who lived in a three walled *ger*. There was also a woman there, but they lived separately, although the lama would show up from time to time. Now I live near the *aimag* settlement where this man came from, and everyone knows that he was a devout and serious man and a good fellow. But he came and went. There was also a senile old lama on the far side of the Orkhon River who moved around to avoid prison, and he is still there.

D: Did your family have Buddhas when you were little?

B: We had all sorts of gilded, yellow or golden, bronze Buddhas and just one or two pictures of a Buddha.

D: Could your parents worship the Buddha since they were Party members?

B: They could. At first we didn't conceal the images that much, but later when people started talking, we put them away in a chest.

D: Was there a prayer lamp?

B: Yes, there were many.

D: A lot?

B: Yes, a lot.

D: Were there sutra books?

B: My father had no sutra books, oh, just a very small one which he got from his brother. I have it now and it is the Mongolian Dorjzodov (Sanskrit:Vajracchedika sutra, The Diamond Cutters' Sutra) I have that now. I also have the small sutra book, *Ish Uzuulsen* (Predictor of the Future) and the *Bogd Lunden* (The Holy Instruction for the Jebtsumdamba Khututhku or The Holy Book Predicting the Future).

D: Could he show his religious beliefs as a Party member?

B: No, he hid them.

D: Did he hold strong beliefs?

B: He didn't know a great deal, but he did secretly read the sutras for the *oboo*, and he could offer the special prayer for the ritual called "The Four Monks' Food Corner" at which four people gathered in someone's home, and prayers were read and special dishes were prepared. We sometimes went to Shankh, but we had to hide all this if there was a Party member around. However, being a Party member did not mean you were a revolutionary.

D: Was your father a leader in the Party?

B: No, he was a herder and also the *bag*⁴⁾ leader after he was discharged from the military, and then he led the Shankh cooperative.

D: Did your mother teach you the incantations?

B: No. We were not instructed even to open the sutra books. Before I attended school when I was around five or six, I lived with my grandparents, and they

taught me about the Goddess Tara and others but I couldn't memorize all the incantations. Still, I know some of them. I was made into a red revolutionary at school, but that is all forgotten now.

D: Did you memorize the Tibetan or the Mongolian?

B: The Tibetan.

D: Were you close to your grandparents?

B: Yes, we were close for fourteen years from when I was born until I returned to my parents at around fourteen or fifteen.

D: Did your grandparents give offerings to the Buddha?

B: Yes, yes. Our *oboo* had a Mongolian inscription where I could offer incense and prayers in Mongolian. Although my grandfather owned two or three Buddhas, he was a secular man and not a monk.

D: From time past?

B: Yes. He was bald in the front with the traditional pigtail composed of three braided strands with the tips knotted and held together by a leather strap — kind of like a tail. He almost reached ninety but passed away at eighty-seven years old after falling from a horse. How he loved his horse, but when he was about seventy his horse fell from a parapet, and my grandfather broke his pelvis, which is not good for someone approaching ninety. He had almost twenty years in bed and had good nursing care.

D: How was his treatment? Was western medicine available or did the lamas care for the sick?

B: Western medicine was available. A young doctor from the *sum* tended to him. Although there may be some Tibetan hospitals, they are not out in the open, and people might say they mislead you.

D: When was bread available to you?

B: For the past ten years, we have eaten bread though even in the fifties at Shankh, there was a small bakery. Then good bread was baked at the artel, but I really don't know much about baking bread or what was made in the artel. Bread also comes from Khujirt.

D: Was it strange to eat bread for the first time?

B: It was really good, and I even tasted a delicious cake, which we have many of now. They are cut into little pieces, so we have a lot of them to eat.

D: Did your school give the message that religion and the lamas were bad?

B: Of course there was some talk about the remains of the feudal opposition, but you were scolded if you asked questions and were told that you were lazy and unproductive. But everything depends on one's character, and it can be frightening if the leader himself has a bad character. It is best if a director has a lot of experience and can evaluate all situations. When someone is accused of having a bad character, he is considered an "enemy of the state" or an "enemy

of the people.”

D: Can you be your own worst enemy?

B: Yes, you can be your own enemy. If you are not doing good work, you hurt the state and are labeled or scolded.

D: When you were young, did you know if the people working at the artel were lamas?

B: Of course, we knew.

D: Did you dislike them because they were accused of being remnants of feudalism?

B: No, no because these lamas had beloved relations throughout the countryside. We didn't hear “he is one of those bad feudal lamas but he is Mr...” They had really stopped being lamas, and they were never hated. Everyone knew them, and they were not regarded as prisoners.

D: Do some lamas live alone?

B: Not very often, but there are some who live on their own.

D: I heard that the sutras were read at night in secret. Did that happen?

B: Yes that is true. The door to the *ger* and the *khashaa* gate were locked, the lamp was lit, the incense smoldered, and the sutras were read. During the day the teacher read books, but there were prayers at night. The lamas had a daily prayer service at Shankhin Lamasery which no one missed, and everyone remembered that after the lamasery was restored. Otherwise, one stayed in one's own *ger* to pray with one's own religious artifacts. We had a lot of such Buddhist things, as did other families. The lamas protected the finest Buddhist things, but when Buddhism revived people assembled their hidden Buddhist treasures. However, many things were ruined.

D: When you were small, was the Shankhin Lamasery in disrepair?

B: Yes. The lower area where the lamasery is now located near the river's edge was called the western lamasery and was the largest and had a *dugan* or lamasery hall. While I was herding I saw the remains of the hall which, when I was in school, had three pointed stupas which were knocked down. Some of the halls disappeared without a trace, and the gilded bronze Buddhas had been destroyed, their limbs and heads broken off. Now one can't even find scraps though recently, in the nineties, there has been some excavation and parts of a lot of clay statues have been found. Now things are being dug up which were buried when there was a fire in the *dugan*, and it is alright to take a little bag for the various things that are found. People are looking through the rubbish and ashes for the buried clay Buddhas. There is one Buddha with no paint on it, and its arms, legs, and other bits were thrown about along with the colored beads that are hung in front of the image of the Buddha. Smashed, crumbled, and broken bits of stone were dug out of holes while other pieces had been blown about. Some with their hidden mystery were buried deep in the earth — or something like that.

Generally, everything was in ruins, and much had been thrown away or abandoned.

D: Did the lamas give children their name when they were born? What usually happened?

B: We would find a suitably revered lama who offered the vows and was a good person. You could not name the child yourself, so mother and father would ask the lama to the naming ceremony which included the offering of incense.

D: When a person died, was it still the custom to consult “The Golden Box” for calculations on the death and the burial?

B: Yes, this custom had not been abolished, but it was consulted in secret. “The Golden Box” gave us the way to start the rituals and the sutra readings. This still continues here at Shankh and in the countryside. On the north side of the Orkhon River there is a maker of Buddhist images who was invited by two lamas to Shankh. But, by and large, one must consult “The Golden Box” about the burial and follow its demands. I really do not know how to consult this “Golden Box,” but there is a lot of talk about it. People, in the past, went to the big lamasery for help in following the traditions.

D: Not long ago people dug a hole to deposit the corpse. Was it traditionally just left on the steppe?

B: It used to be left on the steppe, and no holes were dug, so it was just exposed in the open.

D: When did this practice stop?

B: Generally in the fifties and sixties when more people were buried. I finished school in 1953 when they had begun to stop exposing the body in a faraway area.

D: Did the Tsagaan Sar celebration stop under Marshal Choibalsan?

B: He died on the eve of Tsagaan Sar.

D: I see.

B: He was dead by the day of Tsagaan Sar, so we skipped the celebration because of his death. The teacher collected us from our homes, and we had a meeting and then we were brought home.

D: So was there no Tsagaan Sar celebration?

B: Yes and no. In many households, there was no celebration, but I had done my work and had visited my neighbors, and I would have been sad if I had not done that. Then I left with my teacher so things were not so bad.

D: Did the young enjoy Tsagaan Sar?

B: Yes, we counted the days waiting for it to come. Then it was as nice as it is today. After all, Tsagaan Sar is the Mongolian national holiday which is even bigger than Naadam because it is the first celebration of the year. I think of Naadam all the time where one always enjoys oneself. From the old days, Naadam has been a festival. There were seven local Naadams, or ritual offerings,

for the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu, and the precise day and month was based on the seasons with summer being better than fall. There have been ten national Naadams, and provincial Naadams are held whenever there is free time. Tsagaan Sar has been passed down the generations for many years, but it began with Chinggis Khan and revolved around a kowtowed greeting from Börte, his wife. Or Tsagaan Sar may have started as a celebration of the beginning of spring, with Chinggis personifying the new spring moon. Yes, that was eight hundred years ago. Now Tsagaan Sar begins what is hoped will be a healthy and successful year, and it is a time when siblings meet, greet, and toast each other.

D: Did you have a winter festival with a tree to celebrate the New Year?

B: In the fifties, our school had some sort of New Year's festival and a teacher was Father Frost and a pine tree from the mountains was cut and decorated. But it was many years ago when all of that started.

3 Living Conditions After the War

D: Although you were young during the war, do you recall what people talked about?

B: I was born in 1941, so I had no idea what was happening in 1945. The Mongols did sign a proclamation of independence in 1945 which I vaguely remember. I must have been a little younger than this kid here (pointing to a child who is about 6 years old). Then ink was put on my finger, so I could be fingerprinted which I found very fascinating. (And the kid pressed his fingers on hearing this.) That's about all I remember from those years. I guess that there were some grains back then that we do not have now. Flour was bought in units of five to ten kilograms, no one sold it by the sack and those with more money bought ten kilograms. There was almost no sugar, and we could not get fine and tasty things. Sugar was used mostly for the pastry at Tsagaan Sar. On ordinary days we ate simple food and we missed sweet things.

Back then, a family had a few animals and did not reckon them in the hundreds but by tens or twenty but ten or twenty animals is hardly enough to live on, especially when taxes are included. At that time, allotments of hair, wool, tail and mane hair, antlers, hooves, and wool were demanded, and it was difficult to meet those norms. Calves, lambs, goats, and kids were all needed but, from what I know now, we didn't always have them. These allotments were demanded by the Party during the first Five Year Plan. From the beginning, both sheep and cows were affected because of the demands for their wool and meat. But a fine was levied in spite of the fact that there was not enough of either to meet the norms. Because of the dissension over this plan, there were revisions. Henceforth, people who had many animals would make up for those with fewer, and all the herds would be counted and divided into three groups while the most that would

be asked for was one kilogram of wool and two kilograms for meat. The reason for joining the *negdel* was generally to make sure that there would be more people with herds, and it was up to the officials to manage the wealthier herders which could be difficult. But some people said “let’s get away from all of this” and joined the *negdel*. So that was the first Five Year Plan and here is an example: Five ewes lambed in the spring with five little lambs, so there were ten sheep altogether. The count was taken by September 1, and it included all the young animals, many of whom died, and those with the larger herds made up for those who had fewer animals. Many people had the hard job of being fully responsible for the herds, and the wealthy were unhappy with the way things went. So that is why the *negdels* were started, and this was how the phrase “guilty herds” came into being. (“Guilty herds” refers to the animals of the rich that were taxed while the poorer herders had trouble making ends meet. This situation led to resentment on the part of both — the rich resented the extra tax and the poor were ashamed and angry that the rich had more than they did.) The Party and the government promoted this *negdel* movement with slogans. However, joining the *negdels* was not always voluntary, and there was some victimization. Nevertheless, the yield of wool rose, and there were fewer “guilty herds.” Our lives stand as example: my grandmother had pretty good herds but they did not produce enough wool so she was brought before the court to be heard and judged. She was found guilty and fined three stallions to make up for the small wool output from her sheep.

D: So things evened out.

B: No, they didn’t. For example, a horse in good condition was deemed equal to ten kilograms of wool. So after the first milk, there might be a mare but no stallion. So the resentment continued. Our Shankh *negdel* had not yet been organized, so my grandmother decided to join the Khujirt *negdel* with all her herds. However, the *sum* administration did not permit, at that time, a *negdel* at Khujirt but finally, in 1956, it started, and my grandmother took her animals and joined and finally had a bit of rest. There was work that had to be done because in the beginning there were not many herds. It was also a little dangerous to join a *negdel*, but things were not good if you did not join. I think that in the fifties raw materials were generally taxed at three or four *tugriks* a kilogram and later in the sixties for nine *tugriks*. There was no compensation for cashmere, and one was allotted meat from the officials who were strict about these provisions. In the *khangai*⁵ you had annually to raise fifty animals, in the Gobi zone seventy five and in the middle region sixty per year. In the sixties, we changed from being under the jurisdiction of the *negdel* to that of the State Farm, and you received sixteen animals. Any more had to be returned to the *negdel*, and you had to find a way to manage. Since one could be arrested and given a fine, many people concealed

their herds. Later in the sixties, after I had grown up, the prices of raw materials rose, and the first kilogram of cashmere earned nine *tugriks*, which was a good price but not enough for a brick of tea, which cost ten *tugriks*. But these nine *tugriks* bought nine kilograms of flour. Most of the raw materials were exported to China and Russia where we didn't really get a good price under socialism, but one could make some sort of profit. Then there was the movement to push Mongolia forward. Personally, I think that was a good idea but the money needed to be equalized.

4 Military Life

B: In 1962, I was in the military and in the fall, we gave a gift of sheep to the Vietnamese. I was sent there by army headquarters and directed, with caution, all sorts of tasks. At that time, the Chinese Red Revolution had started and it was the time of the Chinese Indian War, so we had to be vigilant⁶. We were all told to "be alert". China was also rather under developed, weak, and uncivilized. You must acculturate that country but also had to be vigilant. As we loaded our cargo, or sheep, onto the train, we didn't really know what life would be like in this endeavor. Then we came to the border and the station. It was colorful and we saw a young man approach us, and he was a policeman who said that he was a Mongolian. I asked him if he was Chinese, and again he said: "I am a Mongolian, by our Namsrai" (Sanskrit: Vaisravana)⁷ and, in fact, he was a real Mongolian nationalist. We changed our tracks at a place called Zinen, and a soldier in green overalls came to what was the old terminal, and I saw no green tank. There were two other Mongolians with the fellow in green overalls, but they envied my uniform which was made out of good material. The Chinese wear shoulder patches and generally use poles to transport things as they walk along the river where they walk along clapping as they decide what to do. Ten, twenty, thirty forty — all those Chinese just had one style of uniform.

D: Were they blue?

B: Yes, a navy blue cotton jacket and pants. There was nothing else to wear. Then we finished at the train station and went to water the herds, so we carried the water from the well in pails. Two or three strong men helped us. I looked at the people, and I thought they seemed quite poor. We just added water from a well to our tinned dry food, and we put the cans in the bin at the station, and people took them for their own uses. A metal band held the grass that we gave the sheep on the train, and the Chinese used this as they did everything else since they had very little. We delivered the sheep to Dushan and then returned on November 7th to Wuhan, which was a very frightening and big city. Back in Mongolia, flags fly for the October holiday, but there were none in China. It is a communist country, but still one did not see such a flag in China. There was poverty so now

it is strange to see movies of China. I spent three nights in Beijing, and I saw the Royal Palace (Forbidden City) and the zoo. I also went to a store or a market which was underground almost like in Kharkhorin. I walked around Beijing and saw that the people in that city wore nice clothes, and I noticed that life in the countryside was difficult. It was fall and harvest time as crops were gathered in for the winter. So disheveled folks loaded up hand-carts, and they filed along pulling their carts, which were similar to the ox carts in Mongolia. If one of the wheels was broken, the whole line would stop. That's the way it was.

D: How many head of sheep were there in your cargo?

B: One thousand. Over 1000 heads from our country. One compartment in a wagon held seventy two or seventy three animals. There were two locked doors with gratings on both sides, and in the middle of the car the hay reached to the ceiling. There was also a trough in the middle of the car to put the hay into for the sheep. We slept on the top of the hay at night, but as we were young, and in the day time we wanted to see as much as possible so we kept the windows open and stood outside on the platforms between the cars. We saw how people lived as well as many interesting places in the country. Except for when we were scattering hay, we looked out at the passing scenes from dawn until dusk.

D: How many people were with you?

B: Twenty and thirty with the military leaders.

D: Oh, yes.

B: There had been another delivery and convoy the year before. I am not sure for how many years this had gone on, but Leader Tsedenbal presented one hundred thousand sheep to Vietnamese families⁸⁾.

D: Why all these sheep? Were they for food?

B: Just a gift.

D: Did you pass through China on your way to Vietnam?

B: We did not reach Vietnam and followed the Chinese border route. We went to the border, and then returned because it was the year before I had joined the military. My father was a bit of an agitator and held on to a number of newspapers including "Unen" ("Truth"), "Hodolmor" ("Labor"), "Zaluuchuudiin Unen" ("Young Truth") as well as "Ovorkhangai Hodolmoriin Toloo" ("For the Sake of Labor"). I read them all, and it was written on the fourth page of an American paper that one hundred thousand had gone to Vietnam — these free market people are a mean bunch since they are always lying. At home, I talked with my contemporaries about what was written. Later it became clear that people had thought that all those uniformed men were delivering soldiers so they then wore white cotton hats so no one would think they were soldiers. But if they were apprehended they were told to say that they were agricultural students. But all this was kept pretty much secret. The military did not want to be in the papers

again, although I will never forget that I was one of those one hundred thousand soldiers.

D: Yes, most interesting. Were relations with the Chinese quite good at that time?

B: They were good at first, but then began to go awry because we were afraid. At that time, the Chinese came to work on buildings, and then they were sent home by Tsedenbal, which made for an unpleasant situation, and the Chinese proclaimed that Tsedenbal was bad. Two or three Chinese worked on the steel framework, but they said that “Tsedenbal was good and Mao was bad.” Some of the Chinese were in their forties and fifties, and they stayed just a short time in Mongolia.

D: At the height of Mao’s power, did you sing “The Sun Rises in the East” at school?

B: We did sing that song at school concerts, as well as songs about Lenin and Choibalsan⁹⁾. Nowadays, children like to sing love songs.

D: When you lived in the city, did you visit the Gandan?¹⁰⁾

B: Yes, when I was in the military I visited the Gandan. My time there was rather wild, and my battalion was a group of rowdies. In those days, it was not good to brawl, but we were young and liked to go out and enjoy ourselves. Things got sort of boring, so we would go out and walk around. I skipped work for half of Sunday, and I would disappear and return late and look at all the stores in the city. Or I would visit family and friends but I didn’t go very far. That is what a person in the military did. From time to time, we had candy or fruit, but we never enjoyed spirits. “Puushig” cigarettes had become popular, and we smoked to look cool. In fact, I had started smoking again when I was in China. When I was a child, I had tried my father’s tobacco. In the military we had one cigarette a day. And we loved to show off to the Chinese by standing on the platforms between the train cars with a cigarette in our mouths. We also gave some of these cigarettes to the Chinese. Most people smoked “Puushig” cigarettes in those days but now the Russians don’t even smoke them. In those days, if someone asked for a smoke, I just gave him a cigarette, and it was fun and made people happy to peer through the holes (in the smoke rings). Even those who had never smoked easily took it up in the military, like riding on a horse. Everyone smoked if only to keep warm so when it was very cold, we went inside and had a smoke and a chat.

D: Did the tobacco come from Russia?

B: Yes, it came from Russia since the fifties, but the pipe tobacco came from China and was colored and oily. The outside paper wrapping was shiny because it was soaked with the tobacco oil. Long ago, the old people liked this Chinese tobacco, but it became so greasy and oily that the tobacco had to be handled with tongs. Sometimes smoking this red tobacco made one cough, and for many years now

no one smokes the Chinese tobacco. In 1949, the Chinese went through their People's Revolution, so our countries were friends and as trade and barter developed with China, there were all sorts of tobaccos. There were plenty of other goods as well, including Chinese crepe silk for women and children, which was generally of a better quality than the Russian crepe. The Chinese now have innumerable products, and children nowadays don't know about what used to be available to us. In addition, Russian goods are much better today.

D: Is that true?

B: Generally, Russian steel and metal goods are better than the Chinese, which breaks more easily because the temper or hardness is poor.

D: You went to the Gandan lamasery in the city. Have you been to any of the religious services held there?

B: Yes. I was curious. But as an atheist, I did not pray and just went in and left. It hasn't changed. Generally that is how it is now.

D: Were there any young monks reading the prayers?

B: A religious school had been organized for the youth, and there were quite a few elderly lamas. Many young boys studied there.

D: Do the youngsters wear their lama outfits or ordinary clothes?

B: Sometimes their lama outfits which they are known by. So if they wore ordinary clothes, how would we know they were lamas?

D: Did you know about the first visit of the Dalai Lama to Mongolia?

B: I heard about it on the news and saw it on the TV, but I was in the countryside, so I did not see him in person.

D: When you were travelling, how did the Inner Mongolians feel to all of you?

B: They seemed generally devoted, in fact, very devoted. The people I met were very fond of us, even if we are less accepting of them.

D: What did people think about Inner Mongolia?

B: That it was just a fragment of Mongolia. After the Cultural Revolution, these Mongols were oppressed, and they suffered. This situation was written about in several novels, including "A Foot With No Place To Step," by an intellectual from Inner Mongolia who was persecuted, went abroad, and has just returned and now lives here somewhere among our Mongols, perhaps in the Gobi. He wrote "A Foot With No Place To Step" in the seventies, and it is now forgotten. However, in the seventies, I was a young man working in the grain factory, and that is where I read that book. I saw the foreman reading a book and asked what it was. Then I borrowed it, read it all night long, with no sleep, and I finished it by eight in the morning, had breakfast, and returned the novel.

D: Did you read a lot in those days?

B: I am a big reader. I read quite a lot and am pretty good at it. But when I went to the countryside, I left my books behind, and they were destroyed.

5 The Cultural Revolution

D: Had there been a cultural revolution in the past?

B: Yes, like now.

D: What was the reason for this?

B: We were backward and were being left behind. Now we need to wash and paint all that is dirty and dusty in our homes. That is the correct thing for us to do. I think we must do this as we have been a bit crude in some of what we do. This cultural revolution has forced us to clean up and improve our appearance. Such work is necessary for grandmas and grandpas who have not updated their homes and who do not understand the need to do so. Their *gers* have smoky open fires right up to the rafters from which they hang things. Smoke clings to their hands. In addition, the felt covers of the roofs of the *gers* have become stiff with a smoky film and must be taken down and scraped, washed, and painted. Both the inside and the outside of the *gers*, then, must be cleaned, which will make things more comfortable. There must be a white covering both inside and outside and until the level is raised, life will be unpleasant, so we must raise it, and a clean covering is one way to do that. In the *khangai*, we have a canvas cover and we cut a pine board into 1.5 cm for all four walls of the *ger*. This covers the mud and is good for a poor family, and it looks better. These board walls were used in the sixties but not after that.

Thus we see that bit by bit lives do improve, which has been portrayed in the novel “Tungalat Tamir” (The Clear Tamir River), which was made into a movie. In the past the outside of the *ger* was grey, and now it is white. In the past, the elderly were rather coarse and did not even wash in a basin, and now they are beginning to wash, wear underpants and undershirts and use cotton bedclothes. These cultural changes in the sixties were very nice and after these cultural advances people were encouraged to read books, and writers have matured, and their works are studied more critically. When people read, they understand a bit more, and when we look back on the sixties, we see that people learned about hygiene through reading and were encouraged to stop doing bad things. Thus reading can improve peoples’ lives and is good for children. However, bad things like killing were not read about. We used to hear that children tried to imitate the movies and so they committed crimes. Now I don’t know if people care about this or just don’t talk about this. Generally, “things should be nice” but we must expect some missteps even when people are generally quite moral. Some movies and radio shows reflect this, and I think that is the way it is now.

6 The Course of Democracy

D: What were your thoughts in the late eighties and nineties about the coming of democracy?

B: I went to a family in the city who had a TV, and I saw the first discussions of a meeting of the Democratic Union. My factory leader was there, and we thought that there was nothing stranger than the direction we were heading in, but I marveled at all of this. We saw that we were becoming a democratic country. I talked to a young intellectual, a mechanic in our industry, who represented the climate of the times. He had served as an advisor to President Enkhbayar¹¹⁾ who was in office at the time but is now retired. The man said that a person could feel oppressed when everything that he or she believed in or worshipped was denied. When that happened, this person could then turn to worship a leader. He went on to say that such a situation was, in fact, meant to happen. I thought a lot about what he said. People had all sorts of differences, and some supported the revolutionary party which had some good aspects. Other people said: “We do not need a revolutionary party. My ancestors were shot, my herds were confiscated, most were driven away and only a few remained. This was a terrific blow for the herders. Now it is time to return the herds to the herders.” There was a daily wage for *negdel* labor, and I know because I worked on one. However, the salary was very meager — about fifty to sixty *tugriks*, so together one might have a hundred and twenty. Yes, I herded on the *negdel* for many years, and then all the herds were given to the State Farm. One year I was responsible for several lambs, and by the spring they had been generally raised well. Under socialism, the pay was poor for all the work we did taking care of the herds and milking the cows. Three hundred *tugriks* was considered a high salary on the State Farm *negdel*. If you herded a thousand head, you were paid seven or eight hundred *tugriks*. That’s the way it was. I was a fifth level welder at the grain factory and did not make the fourth rank or the sixth degree but only the eighth or ninth, so I went back to herding, and I earned five hundred and thirty *tugriks* until the age of sixty. People with fewer years got four hundred a month, which is not a bad salary. My wife worked for many years as a bookkeeper in a trade organization, and she squeezed out a salary of four hundred *tugriks*, and, certainly, two hundred *tugriks* was not enough. People are sometimes stupid and say all sorts of things. Some months we made nine hundred and some only eight hundred. Now, we both were smart to work in herding and have cattle — three milch cows, which I milk myself and seven or eight cows altogether including the infertile ones. I chat with my cows, and I also have a horse and sheep.

D: Did you take care of the animals on the State Farm?

B: I helped in the grain factory which didn’t seem right for two hundred *tugriks*, or really one hundred to two hundred *tugriks*. My salary did not reflect the productivity of herding my own animals but still, I returned to herding, even though I did not make a great deal of money. Three years later, the winds of

democracy blew and women with children who worked on the farm were given a pension. I could also retire from the State Farm at fifty with a pension, which I wanted to do. Thus I went back to the factory to find out how my salary had been set, so I could start the process of retiring on a pension. These pensions were fixed in 1991 at seven hundred *tugriks*, but since the inflation has doubled one really only receives three hundred *tugriks*. To make sure the pension was under my own name, I had to transfer all the herds to my name. Once I got my pension, I could just focus on herding. Under the twentieth resolution, pensions were adjusted from time to time for inflation. However, perhaps because I had several herds in the countryside, my pension was not adjusted, even though I heard all sorts of excuses about this and ways to manage the problem. I was cheated from a pension of 95,000 to what I have now — 81,000. Initially, the pension was set too high and was not correctly adjusted and really went down. My wife's pension was also lowered to only 81,000.

D: Did you gain more herds during privatization?

B: No.

D: Really? So you really became a 1000 herder on your own.

B: I remember when they divided the herds, and I received one horse and three sheep. Our State Farm, this Kharkhorin State Farm, generally wasn't divided up, and all the sheep went to the Khangai Company. The leader, at the time, started the distribution which proceeded without any quarrels or rebellion. Many of the herders joined one of the several private companies and did not stand up and demand their share. So the herds were divided up, and the herders began to work for the companies. Later, some of the herds were sold — perhaps secretly. That is pretty much what happened in Kharkhorin. The State Farm decided that the herder who had the most children and had been working the longest should receive six head. I had worked at the grain factory, so I got a horse and two or three sheep. That's what happened. So the people of Kharkhorin raised their own herds, and things stayed pretty much as they had been. We are right next to Khujirt *sum*, and I now go to and fro along the border, and I think on that side there are people who have more animals than we do in Kharkhorin.

D: Were the herders on the *negdel* all gone?

B: Yes. Those who were shrewd or were wealthier got more than their share. Some companies bought the herds and divided them up, but I was not included in this deal. So I have told you what happened in the past.

D: I gather that the *negdel* provided you with herds, but the State Farm did not.

B: Our Kharkhorin State Farm did not, and I don't know about the other farms just about Kharkhorin.

D: Is this what happened here?

B: They gave us sixteen animals here and no more.

- D: In socialist times was the pastureland allotted by the State Farms? What is going on with the pastureland now?
- B: There are no State Farm animals, but a few measures have been taken. People like me with a family and from the countryside are better off while those in other places have nothing. Some folks, including parents and siblings, have all their herds in one area, and they don't move faraway.
- D: Are there quarrels over the pasturelands?
- B: There are quarrels because the pasturelands raise very important issues, and they have, in fact, decreased in size while the herds have increased in number, especially the goats.
- D: Are the goats profitable?
- B: Oh yes. But there are many factors involved in herding, particularly the pasturage. I didn't get any animals from privatization and raise only my own herds.
- D: Yes. What kind of animals?
- B: Well, I have a horse, cows, sheep, and goats.
- D: Are the pasturelands a big problem for the herds?
- B: A difficult problem. We need to really beg the sky for rain since there is a drought in the *khangai* area, which means less grass and that is hard. In the nineties, we had, particularly in the north, experienced desertification, which has recently been described in the press. We have less of that here.
- D: Yes, indeed.
- B: I have seen desertification with my own eyes, and I remember when flowers and grass were plentiful. But they are all gone, and now there is in our area a silica plant which fattens up its herds. I haven't seen this but it is an example.
- D: What is going on?
- B: There is no moisture.
- D: And no rain.
- B: There is little rain, so there is desertification. Water is so essential, and now only weeds are growing along with tumbleweed, which the older animals can feed on but not the young ones. There is one plant which grows along with the cowberry with a fine covering, and violets also grow wild about five to ten centimeters apart. We should plant huge areas with these things, but there is so much wind that there are places where the roots of the grass and stumps are exposed, so it is hard to plant and grow things. The wind has blown sand on the eastern and southern slopes which plants cannot penetrate.

7 Life After Democracy

D: When did the Shankhin khüree open?

B: It opened a bit later. At first the Baruunkhüree was opened by the Ondor Gegeen,

who was 11 years old, and later the Noyan lama set about building the *dugan*, as it is located in the lamasery today. Only ruins are left, however.

D: So after the nineties, was the lamasery revived?

B: It was revived, and all four of its halls have been restored. It was really never demolished. There were three two-story *dugans* or halls on the middle steppe, but when I was in school, they were taken down. Later, we built a rounded roof which is now a storage area for the co-op goods and for the storage of raw materials. The third *dugan* is still used by the co-op. Then the *negdel* was dismantled and combined with the State Farm, and Shankh became the *sum* center, as in the days when the brigade was there. Several old lamas lived there, but then their children asked them to come and live with them in the city, so there were fewer left in the *dugan*. Finally, the lamasery became like the center of the brigade. After the renovation began, the two *dugans* at the end were saved, and two small areas were repaired. This is where the religious services started. The third *dugan* was returned to its original style. Back in the days when I was in school, the little *dugan* served as the kitchen, and later became a storage area. Now, nothing remains since so much was moved to Kharkhorin, and the entrance is now where the pedestal stone stood. The *dugan* at Shankhin Lamasery now has a foundation pedestal, and the threshold is where the Shankhin Lamasery used to be. In the seventies and the eighties, the walls were thin and of red brick, and now they are blue brick, and there is a wall of raw brick. Gombo was a great builder but he worked on the destruction of the building since all directives came from the Party, and the propaganda decreed the destruction of the lamaseries. There was a wooden building for the administration in the center, which served as a community center or cultural club or school, but it is now gone, as is the State Farm. Another lamasery was built that served the people quite well as they came and went, and the children could stay there and study. Now there is also an expensive store, and the area is enclosed by a fence, but there are only about twenty some odd families within the *khashaa*. Twenty odd families — that's what is happening there.

D: Is the monastery open for prayers?

B: Yes, it is open, but there are few people there. Twenty lamas registered but actually there are only about ten elderly lamas who have settled there. There was a youngish man, but often when these young lamas grow up, they move to town, where some teach in the religious schools. Some settle in other lamaseries where they hold services. Such is the case. This is a remote area for some lamas, since there is little electricity and no TV. If a monk lives here and says the prayers, where does he get his salary? Well, there is a sort of salary for twenty to thirty thousand, but the young, who have a wife and children, find it hard to manage on that amount and might have to go to the city. Some of the lamas are at the

Geseer lamasery. Some are not badly off.

D: Do you go to a lamasery to have prayers read?

B: Yes.

D: Where do you recite them?

B: At the Shankh lamasery which was called the Baruunkhüree during the time of our ancient ancestors, some of whom lived at the lamasery when I was a pupil there.

D: Your elders?

B: Yes. That is why this lamasery is so important to me. I belong in this area, and it is our family's place.

D: Is religion less restricted than in socialist times?

B: Yes. In those days, if people were doing what they said they were doing it seems they followed the wrong path. Some people do not belong to any lamasery and pursue their own selfish goals and do what they consider is best for them. People should go to a lamasery to have prayers read. That is most important. Maybe it is the market economy.

D: Do the lamas offer classes in the Buddhist religion?

B: No. People have generally been taught to be pious and act virtuously.

D: Do you have an understanding of the Buddhist religion and the prayers?

B: An alright understanding. Most everything about the Buddhist religion is merciful, and nowadays peoples' concerns with science and religion may enter into Buddhism. But this is true for all religions which have as their primary goal the betterment of people. One American Buddhist has written a book on the "Ochir Ogtlogch" or "The Dorjzodov" — "The Diamond Cutter's Sutra," which he translated himself. This "Dorjzodov" is the sutra most followed for a successful life. It is a philosophical book and although it can be read in Mongolian, we do not really understand it. It is only understood when it is practiced. For those of us who are not very important it promises the true religion. All religions, generally, work for the good of the follower, and I think that Buddhism is the best religion for the Mongols. But, there are all sorts of religions, and it is important to learn about Islam, which is not well known here and Christianity.

D: Yes, there are now quite a few religions.

B: Quite a few are spoken about and have ways to attract people. Some religions meet the needs of the homeless and the alcoholics by taking them food. Our Buddhist religion does not offer such services but focuses on the individual's piety and beliefs. Christianity is a very powerful religion for some people. For example, my younger sibling was mute and was taken by his family, who had said they did not need Buddhism, to a Christian church. Somehow Christianity must have entered his parents' heads, so that their son went to a special school

for the deaf in the city which was run by the church (either Christian or Mormon). At his graduation all the girls and boys were laughing, eating, and having a good time without drinking, and I was the only one who could not communicate! We knew that drinking was not so good, but what about liquor for the deaf? However, in ways it is good to follow the straight and narrow, and it is good that these youngsters are in a pleasant environment with no liquor when so often we see those who are educated drinking too much and not knowing the Buddhist scriptures.

D: Are there Christian people in the countryside?

B: No, only in the cities, and there is not much interest in the countryside. There is usually a lamasery in the *sum* but I can't say much since I don't know my own religion all that well.

D: Now there are many religions in Mongolia.

B: Yes, Mongolia has many religions. I can mention Mohammedanism or Islam which along with Christianity are the two that I know. There are four or five religions, but I cannot distinguish between them and don't know much about them. Certainly, Islam is the religion of the Kazakhs¹²).

D: Which is better — many religions or Mongolian Buddhism?

B: Well, as long as there is harmony, no one faith is better than another. It is not good to have religious quarrels and conflicts.

D: Did parents generally arrange a couple getting together or did the young man and woman meet on their own?

B: They met on their own, and their parents were not involved — we are more open now but in the past we made no distinction between the rich and the poor when it came to marriage. In fact, there were few wealthy people, and nothing was fancy. Life was sort of like this: if you had a hat, you had a hat; if you had a little, you had a little; if you had a lot, you had a lot, and if you had nothing, you had nothing. There were few obstacles to marrying whom you wished as long as the couple got along. But in the city this may not be the case as we see in movies like “The Difficult Group,” which must, after all, be based on some sort of reality.

D: Oh, really.

B: So it must be true. Rural children, on the other hand, are ignored because a city person is not intimately connected to the countryside, and the two groups are different. On the other hand, those from the countryside have their heads screwed on the right way and are more genuine and less materialistic. They do not discriminate that much and don't take advantage of people while the youth in the city use any one they can to get ahead.

D: Yes, so it appears.

B: Yes it seems so. Their lives are based on having money and looking elegant but

how do they get the money? I also need money and have to stop for a minute and think about how to get it. Some people today borrow money, but that is not the best way to get it. I am now an old man and don't know how to build up an industry and can only make a leather strap. I like to use my hands to work in stone and make things to sell. I learned to be a pretty good metal smith in the military and became a fifth rank smithy. I also learned about the grain industry and became a pretty good welder, and worked mostly on small window vents. As an old man, I cannot sit outside and sell things. If I was forty or fifty, I would work as a welder or a painter, and I would be quite good. But having reached seventy, I can't do these things which the young people do anyway. Now people think they have to make five to ten *tugriks*, and the youth think they must find easy money to look elegant and drink and smoke. How do they find this money which is not equally divided in our society?

D: Was there a high or reincarnated lama in your locale who spoke to the people?

B: Not near my area. The big lamas spoke at the two lamaseries. One of the lamas was famous, and the other was not. The famous one did the talking, and people had heard of this lama who came to live in the Gandan, but I did not know about all of this. There was no *khutukhtu*, then but there was a legend about the Edgiin monk from our area of Edgiin who led a life of poverty with his wife and only five goats. The story about him was mysterious, maybe because the Bogd called them to his lamasery with their five goats which they milked and then prepared *tarag* (yoghurt), which was put into a small container. They then went on to the Gandan where there was a small *tarag* bag, which always remained full. This Edgiin monk was accused and persecuted, but he then became many monks who scattered everywhere so that the Edgiin monk could not be caught and arrested. Or so the legend goes. It is said that this Edgiin monk's body is resting on a little knoll on a cliff near an *oboo* on the southern slope of the mountain. I do not know how long it has been there.

D: What sort of man was the Edgiin monk?

B: He spent time with the Bogd, read the prayers, and did magic. Only the Bogd really knows about him, and the other lamas knew little. He read the prayers in such a deep voice that the hall trembled and the wind stirred up the dust so that the Bogd had to tell him to stop. He would not have been considered a well-educated person and had never written a book, but he could perform magic.

D: Do people in your area talk about this man?

B: I don't know.

D: Have the recent prayers for rain at the *oboo* brought rain?

B: A bit, yes.

D: From prayer?

B: Well, a bit of rain fell for about twenty or thirty minutes, but there really was

not much rain. Maybe they did something wrong, but at least there was some rain.

D: Do you burn incense at your *ger*?

B: Yes, incense is burned, and I read the prayer in Mongolian myself.

D: How did you learn all of this?

B: I really taught myself.

D: In socialist times?

B: Yes, and I am pretty good at this. In the countryside, I also read some Mongolian books which were difficult. Unlike more modern books, the old wooden printed books had no punctuation and were hard to read, even though one got used to them. A hand written book had many missed places, and there were many homophones, so I always had to use a dictionary. Now there is an interesting hobby of copying out the sutras. During the winter when there is no TV, I listen to the radio, which has a lot more news than the TV. I listen in the evening, and by candle light with my eyeglasses on I do my copying. So I copied the sutras using Altangerel for the (Sanskrit: Suvarna-prabhasotama-sutra), Banzrach (Sanskrit: Pancha-raksah), and Taravchimbay (Sanskrit: Aria-ghanaja-mahabhicap-hulukarma-avirnasodhaya-bhudharakusumasancaya-sutra.) Daravjam, the Eighth Gegeen, copied several sutras which cannot be read very often since they are so pure. With the TV on, you can't do anything. There are a lot of good books now, and I am a reader so there is no need to see an American or Korean film with all their crime and killing. There are three sins committed by the mind and soul and four sins committed by the body. These comprise the ten black sins. So watching TV is a mind sin as is seeing a movie and wishing the villain were dead. Long ago in the past, a great translator translated the Buddhist scriptures and wrote them down in our own language. They were quite clear and oddly elegant.

D: People say that now, if the Uighur script is transliterated into Cyrillic, Mongolians will not be able to understand it.

B: The meanings must be translated and not just the letters just like Mr. Damdinsüren translated “The Secret History of the Mongols.”¹³ A translator must handle all the works of the Great Teacher. Enkhbayar has done translations of the Buddhist prayers, but they are hard to understand. The same is true of the translations of the Bible.

D: Yes.

B: Translations are often looked down on. The Buddhist prayers must not be translated by people like me who are poorly educated. Enkhbayar is a major scholar and even his translations are not well regarded. You must know the books of the Bible and the sutras very well in order to write about them. When an American lama writes a book, a Mongol translator checks the translation for

accuracy.

D: Is it necessary to use Cyrillic?

B: Yes, it is necessary. One's religion and piety are compromised if one does not know the prayers. That's the way it is. Even when one knows the Mongolian language, the prayers are not always understood. The Buddhist prayers and the books of philosophy written in the Cyrillic script are not understood but there are all sorts of simplified study books or guides which are easier to understand. There is a strangely beautiful little book of poetry by the teacher Badamsambuu (Padmasambhava,) who lived during or even before Chinggis Khan, which includes the essential principles of what is good and what is bad. A Mongol did a wonderful translation of this poetry book.

D: This has been a good conversation. Many thanks.

B: Yes, and we have talked about many aspects of Buddhism.

D: Yes.

B: Buddhism.

D: The condition of Buddhism today and how it will enter Mongolian history is most interesting.

B: Generally, there are not many things relating to Buddhism that were collected during socialist times. The intellectuals, some of whom were the leaders, saved some things but were told that they were greedy for holding on to these religious artifacts. They had a salary of more than three hundred and up to five hundred *tugriks* a month, so they could afford to buy cloth, as well as firewood, which were expensive in the sixties, and they could look elegant. We passed our youth in this way. Nowadays people want more and more. Some fall on their faces, others claw their way up the ladder, and some, like me, just live out our lives. In fact, I am surprised that we have two societies. Many people are very poor, and many are shocked that there is such a big difference. You can peer down a tunnel and find children who are being raised underground and on the streets. They certainly must be desperate.

D: How much time did you spend on raising your animals? Did you do the milking yourself?

B: Certainly. My father and mother had several animals which we ate, but the State Farm controlled the number by marking the sheep that we could eat. When food was in short supply, the number of animals marked for butchering was reduced, but that did not lead to hunger even though the food was scarce. You seldom saw places where people were wasting away and as long as there are animals there will not be starvation in Mongolia. Let me give you an example. There were two very poor men who herded for a wealthy man when the sheep they were tending gave birth midst great confusion. The rich man wondered if these poor men were eating his sheep because they were so quiet, and so he spied on them at night

and listened outside their *ger*. Smoke was billowing from the roof as food was being prepared, so he figured he was right and listened to the two poor men who said that since they helped the rich man they were enjoying a good meal of the after birth and were both lucky and happy. However, the rich man was convinced that they were eating his sheep. So, no Mongol experiences starvation. In another story some Mongols who had no transportation visited a Chinese family near the Gobi. They were afraid that they might starve to death since they had nothing to eat, but they found the remains of a horse, lit a fire and heated the bones and the carrion as they kept warm and cooked the head, which they ate to retain their strength. Generally, we do not eat a lot and certainly not some of the strange things others eat like grasshoppers, worms, or ants. A book has been written about this sort of food, but we don't pay much attention to that kind of thing. Eating meat makes you fat, and you get too thin if you don't eat meat. Have you heard of eating donkey meat?

D: No I haven't heard about that.

B: Maybe a few Chinese eat donkey meat. I read somewhere about a very old, Chinese man who was wasting away and had only one old donkey who died. So he boiled him up and made a soup and some jelly with spices and flavoring. This sort of food is sold sometimes in nice pottery bowls with chopsticks and is quite delicious. Even if a cow died, we would not eat it unless we had to. Then we would cook it up with all sorts of spices and make a mash of it. But we usually do not do such things. I think that today's youth are lazy — frighteningly so — and they just live for the moment.

D: Is the migration from the countryside to the *sum* center to the *aimag* center and then to the city?

B: Yes. People think that life is easier if you live near a city.

D: Since it is now difficult to herd, are more people leaving the countryside for the city?

B: Herding is difficult and for five years there is little free time. The one nice season is the mid-summer when the herds get fat, and it is *airagh*¹⁴⁾ time when the herder is at his most competent and happy. Then a person can really eat and drink. People have fun playing a finger guessing game, and everyone eats and drinks and enjoys himself. But then life becomes difficult, as all sorts of storms come in from the north. People can get frost bite, lose their way, and freeze to death. There certainly are difficulties, and all sorts of things can happen. The mud and dung must be dug up, and the hayfield must be prepared for fodder. Thus working with the herds never ends, and what you did today, you do all over again tomorrow for your whole life, and there is no end of work. One also has to think about the children's education and cultural life, so one has to get involved in trade to make a bit of money, even though children can become spoiled by

money. I am, however, critical of those who want to live with no responsibilities. Moving can offer a better place to live and some people, with little access to markets for their herds, are leaving to sell their meat to *aimag* and *sum* centers, even though there may be few people in some areas. The price of gas is high for the vehicles which speed along and transport the meat, but the price of the meat is not always what is asked for. But that is the way it is with herding.

D: Do the parents follow their children if they move to the city?

B: Ah, yes they do follow their children.

D: There are now about one or two hundred schools in Ulaan Baatar but there is no TMC technicum.

B: Generally a person who graduates from college goes on to get a better job since a boss earns a good salary. If, however, the market does not produce jobs, then a person must go to high school, college, or a professional school. Now it is essential to do that. A worker in a skilled profession can be a leader in his trade and earn a good salary. The young people must understand that. The child of average ability should attend an average school and not prefer the university to a school which is more appropriate for him.

D: Yes, that does happen today.

B: Yes. You must not be considered inferior to someone who has graduated from two or three universities but who has no job and turns to his parents for money from their herds and pensions. Such a person will never earn money. A university degree and no work — that is not good. However, if someone has influence or pull, work can be found, but without it, one is stuck. The children from the countryside do not have the friends or the connections, so no matter how serious and qualified, they are they will lose out. Thus they put out a great deal of effort. In addition, if you bribe the teacher, you can find a job more easily.

D: Are your children now herding in the countryside?

B: Yes. I made the best student go into herding, but the others went to the city. One is in Erdenet¹⁵⁾ and one is in Korea. Although I scolded them about being away and asked them to return soon, they didn't come back. The girl in Korea works in marketing for the Khas bank, and though she does not make much money, she stays there. She secretly and suddenly took off. If we had known what she was about to do, we would not have let her go. She resigned from her job here, went to the city with her mother following her, and then flew off. We had no choice and we lost her. She came home last year for Tsagaan Sar, but she has extended her stay in Korea. She has changed her job and seems to be wandering about, sometimes working, and sometimes not. I scolded her and told her if she is doing nothing, she should come home. But it is useless to talk about this because she will do what she wants.

D: Today it is very stormy.

B: That is alright. The climate to the north and the south of Övörkhangaï is generally quite gentle. Now it is late in the evening, and the weather is good. One must always listen to the weather reports.

D: The calendar used to be focused around the herder.

B: Yes the herders' calendar showed the seasons and the times of day, the months, and the years, and we depended on it. Now the calendar is less extensive, and it does not mark the rest days. Thus each person decides the best days to stay home, so the job is never properly completed, and there are really bad days when nothing is done.

D: Do you use the calendar to find the lucky days?

B: Sometimes.

D: Is this Batkhoo's calendar?

B: It is Batkhoo's calendar.

D: Did Batkhoo get elected from here?

B: Yes, although there are lots of calendars given out in an election year. During all this talk, the fire has gone out.

D: We have had a very good conversation.

B: Yes. We have had plenty of time to talk.

D: And it is good to talk like this.

Notes

- 1) A cooperative.
- 2) A cooperative movement in the countryside that was initiated in the mid-1950s.
- 3) A fenced-in enclosure for animals.
- 4) An administrative unit below the *sum*.
- 5) A mountainous and forested steppe region.
- 6) This refers to Sino-Indian border clashes in 1962. For one viewpoint of this war, see Brahma Chellaney, "India's Intractable Border Dispute with China" in Bruce Elleman, Stephen Kotkin, and Clive Schofield, eds. *Beijing's Power and China's Borders*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2013, pp.47-59.
- 7) Namsrai is the Chief of the Four Heavenly Kings and guards the North. He is reputed to help the poor and is the "God of Wealth."
- 8) Y. Tsendenbal (1916-1991) was the Head of the Mongolian state and the Secretary of the MPRP from 1952 to 1984.
- 9) K. Choibalsan (1895-1952) was the Head of the Mongolian state from the mid-1930s until 1952.
- 10) The most important monastery in Ulaan Baatar.
- 11) N. Enkhbayar (1958-) was President of Mongolia from 2005 to 2009, but was arrested in 2012 on charges of corruption. He was found guilty, but many believe his claims that his arrest and trial were politically motivated.
- 12) A Turkic people who constitute about five percent of Mongolia's population. Most live in Bayan-Ölgii. On their recent history, see Peter Finke, *Nomaden im Transformationsprozess*:

Kasachen in der post-sozialistischen Mongolei. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004; Alexander Diener, *One Homeland or Two? The Nationalization and Transnationalization of Mongolia's Kazakhs*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, and Holly Barcus and Cynthia Werner, "The Kazakhs of Western Mongolia: Transnational Migration from 1990-2008," *Asian Ethnicity* 11:2 (2010), pp.209-228.

- 13) T. Damdinsüren (1908-1986) was a poet, writer, and translator. He helped in the adoption of the Cyrillic script for Mongolian, a task he later regretted. He was the Editor of the official newspaper *Ünen* and compiled a Russian-Mongolian dictionary.
- 14) Fermented mare's milk.
- 15) Site of a major copper and molybdenum mine.

Three Buddhists in Modern Mongolia

Morris Rossabi

Preface

Lkhagvademchig Jaadamba, who conducted the three interviews translated in this volume in December of 2010, is a Lecturer in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the National Mongolian University and has devoted much of his career to the study of Buddhism in Mongolia. A graduate of the Central University of Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, Varanasi, Mr. Lkhagvademchig earned a M.A. in Buddhist Studies from Hong Kong University and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree with a dissertation on the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia, focusing specifically on the re-introduction of the institution of reincarnated lamas.

Unlike the six people whose interviews have been translated into English in *Socialist Devotees and Dissenters: Three Twentieth-Century Mongolian Leaders* and *A Herder, A Trader, and a Lawyer: Three Twentieth-Century Mongolian Leaders*¹⁾, the three individuals in this work have not become major figures in Mongolia. The earlier groups included a Minister of Industry, a State Procurator, the Director of the State Farms, and the brother of the Head of State and Secretary of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (hereafter, MPRP). The present three people were not leaders and did not achieve prominent positions. One had been a factory worker, another was an agronomist, and still another was a herder and worker. Several in the earlier group were born to herder families, but serendipity or support from friends or officials permitted them to reach the capital in Ulaan Baatar and offered an opportunity at education. Five of the six then qualified to study in the USSR, which often proved to be critical for advancement in socialist Mongolia. Each was born in a different section of the country.

By contrast, the three individuals in this collection are inhabitants of the same general areas, Kharkhorin, in the central part of Mongolia, and nearby regions, and have scarcely spent much time in Ulaan Baatar. Two had rudimentary, if any, educations, and the other enrolled in an agricultural school and had wider interests and aspirations. None have studied in the USSR or the Eastern European bloc and one has not traveled out of the country. They have led lives centered on work, family, and festivals, offering the reader a unique view of life in socialist Mongolia than in the earlier volumes. A different slice of life, including popular beliefs and

religion, not concerns about the government or the MPRP, appear in their interviews and lives.

1. Mongolian Buddhism: a very short introduction

The interviews often focus on Buddhism, which has had a significant influence on Mongolian history²⁾. The Mongolian empire was exposed to Buddhism in the thirteenth century. The Mongols' move into Tibet led to their first direct involvement with Tibetan Buddhism. A young monk named the 'Phags-pa lama (1235-1280) impressed Khubilai Khan who invited him to his court. Khubilai's wife Chabi was captivated by the Tibetan monk and received instruction about Buddhism from him³⁾. Perhaps influenced by his wife, Khubilai appointed the 'Phags-pa lama State Preceptor and gave him jurisdiction over much of the Buddhist establishment in China⁴⁾. Later the Khan delegated him to be the secular and religious ruler of Tibet. However, conflicts among the various Buddhist sects in Tibet led to the 'Phags-pa lama's assassination in 1280. Other than conversions and interest in Buddhism by some in the Mongolian elite, evidence about mass conversion at this time does not exist. The Mongols eventually withdrew from China in 1368 to return to Mongolia, but they had not opted to become Buddhists, nor did they restore the unity that characterized them in the thirteenth century.

Buddhism truly arrived in Mongolia in the late sixteenth century. The Altan Khan, one of Chinggis Khan's descendants, concluded that religious unity would translate into Mongolian political unity. He invited a Tibetan Buddhist to instruct the Mongolian elite in the precepts of Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetan lama reached the ancient capital of Kharkhorin, the native land of the three individuals interviewed in this volume, and was astonishingly successful, resulting in a considerable number of conversions. Before the Tibetan cleric departed, he asserted that the Altan Khan was a reincarnation of Khubilai Khan, associating the present Khan with one of the greatest periods of Mongolian history. He then claimed that the Khan was a reincarnation of Manjušri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, bolstering the Khan's image with Buddhists. In turn, the Altan Khan gave him the title of Dalai Lama and dispatched a force to impose him and his order as Tibet's ruling sect⁵⁾. It turned out that religious unity did not lead inexorably to political unity. Nonetheless, the Mongols built their first monastery in Erdene Zuu, the site of the Dalai Lama's teachings, which is repeatedly referred to in these interviews.

Moreover, Buddhism did not become the dominant religion in Mongolia without some challenges. Shamans and shamanism resisted the Buddhists through the middle of the seventeenth century, but the two practices eventually developed a rapprochement⁶⁾. Buddhists accepted some shamanic figures⁷⁾, and both had a fire cult and sought protection from the Fire Goddess and performed ceremonies around

*oboos*⁸). Both began to use charms and spells to protect against pain, disease, and epidemics, and each claimed to foretell the future through astrology and other methods of divination⁹. They asserted that their prayers and practices could prolong life and foster economic prosperity. So-called beneficiaries of the monks' efforts were expected to make offerings of butter, milk, meat, tea, and alcohol¹⁰.

The rise of Buddhism coincided with China's domination of the Mongols. Qing China compelled the Khalkha Mongols to submit in 1691 and overwhelmed the Western or Zunghar Mongols by 1697. The Manchu Qing dynasty imposed a colonial administration over the country, supervised by a government body known as the Lifanyuan¹¹. The Manchu court divided the country into a number of Banners (the organizational scheme that also characterized the Manchus as well) in seeking to prevent the Mongols from uniting around one single leader. It also limited the herders' migrations to specific territories in order to maintain supervision and control over them.

The Qing then offered rewards to the Buddhist establishment to "tame" the Mongols¹². It encouraged the Banner princes to grant substantial lands and animals to Buddhist monasteries and their head, the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu (or Bogdo Gegeen), whose first reincarnation was the multi-talented Zanabazar (1635-1723), a translator, developer of a new alphabet for Mongolian, and builder of new monasteries, but perhaps most important, a brilliant sculptor¹³. The monasteries received *shabinar* (or forced laborers) to tend the herds, to care for the monks, and to fashion luxurious ritual objects and statues. As the monasteries became wealthier, they increased in size and needed more supplies and greater means of bartering or selling their own products. They created settled communities and took an active part in trade. Such commerce yielded even more profits for the monasteries and prompted some parents to turn their children over to them or induced some adult Mongols to join. Most obviously became monks for spiritual reasons, but pecuniary objectives no doubt attracted many. By 1900, approximately one-fifth of the country's males were monks. Most were ordinary lamas and did not have access to the luxuries enjoyed by the chief monks. Nonetheless, many continued to join the monasteries, leading to population decline, as many but not all chose to remain celibate.

Chinese merchants exacerbated the Mongols' problems through economic exploitation. The Mongols had meat and meat products to barter only in later summer and early autumn but needed Chinese products throughout the year. The Chinese merchants and eventually Chinese banks offered loans at usurious rates of interest to the herders and the princes, who craved Chinese luxury products. Many Mongols became indebted, and the country became increasingly pauperized.

The Qing had prevented Mongolian unity and undermined the Mongolian threat. Part of its strategy had been to foster Buddhism and support the monasteries, which, it hoped, would lead to the spread of pacifism among the Mongols and thus

a weaker military. A brief outbreak by a Mongolian noble named Chenggünjab (1710-1757) in 1756-57 prodded the Qing court to prevent secular and religious unity by mandating that all future Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus be Tibetans¹⁴). The leader of the Buddhist establishment would, in this way, be unable to stimulate Mongolian national unity.

The leading specialists on eighteenth and nineteenth-century Mongolia concur that, by 1850, many in the Buddhist hierarchy were exploitative, corrupt, avaricious, and, on occasion, ill-educated. Joseph Fletcher, for example, wrote that “There was little that ordinary Mongols could do to protect themselves against the growing exactions that banner princes, monasteries, and Han [Chinese] creditors imposed upon them.”¹⁵) Charles Bawden describes the exploitation of ordinary lamas and then adds: “What critical writing there was in Mongolia in the nineteenth century had the limited purpose of exposing abuses in Church and society...”¹⁶) Larry Moses offers the most devastating indictment of the organized Buddhist establishment: “The Church, its dogma, and its officers were responsible, in part, for the illiteracy, poor health, and poverty of the population...Every Mongol recognized the venality of the lamas and the parasitic nature of the organized church.”¹⁷)

Russian, European, and American travelers, including Aleksei Pozdneyev and James Gilmour, contributed first-hand accounts of the Buddhist lamas, which tallied with the cited specialists. John Sheepshanks, Bishop of Norwich, was appalled at the lamas’ laziness and their lack of celibacy¹⁸). William Woodville Rockhill, American diplomat and scholar, wrote about “the innumerable rapacious lamas who swarm in every corner of the land,”¹⁹) while others blamed the lamas for the high incidence of sexual diseases. The early Mongolian Communist leaders also had extraordinarily negative perceptions of lamas²⁰).

A few Buddhists or those sympathetic to the religion have questioned these generally negative perceptions of the Buddhist establishment during the Qing dynasty. One asserts that this dim view is based on the views of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Orientalist voyagers in Mongolia, but that assertion ignores confirmation of the travelers’ depictions by the almost unanimous consensus of historians who have studied the formal Buddhist organization during this time. Moreover, no one denies that the Buddhist establishment did little to improve the lot of the poor and weak or to challenge injustice. It also scarcely objected to China’s oppressive rule.

On the other hand, the monasteries contributed to Mongolian culture. They produced or acted as patrons for sculpture, paintings, textiles, and gold and silver ritual objects. They managed the construction of hundreds of lamaseries throughout the country, some of which were exquisite. The monasteries preserved both Mongolian and Tibetan texts, and indeed the Mongolian State Library currently has the largest collection of extant Tibetan texts, including the *Kanjur*, 108 volumes

reputedly of the Buddha's own writings and the *Tanjur*, 224 volumes of Buddhist commentaries. Warfare in Tibet, the Tibetan revolt, and the damage inflicted by the Red Guards during the Chinese Cultural Revolution caused the loss of many of these texts in Tibet. The volumes in the Mongolian State Library are in parlous condition, but they have survived and are being digitized²¹). Individual monks, such as Danzan Ravjaa (1803-1856), wrote poems, songs, and a musical play entitled *Saran kökege-yin namtar* (*Moon Cuckoo*)²²). The lamaseries also introduced Tibetan medicine and whatever medical care was available.

Qing dynasty support, assistance from Banner princes, and the monasteries' own power and popularity contributed to their enormous wealth²³). One source writes that by 1921, Buddhists had 747 monasteries, 181 temples, 40,000 monks in the lamaseries, and 80,000 to 90,000 forced laborers²⁴). At one game and festival, the participants, who derived from the elite, offered 10,000 ounces of silver and 1,000 ounces of food for the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu²⁵). An ordinary Mongolian had to provide ounces of silver in order to worship with the Heads of the Buddhist establishment who were not necessarily pillars of rectitude²⁶). The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu's own residence attracted so many of the pious and required so many retainers that it became the largest town, which was known as *Khüree* or *Urga*²⁷).

The later Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus scarcely contributed to a positive image of Buddhism and instead were notorious for their sexual and alcoholic profligacy. The eighth and last Khutukhtu had sixteen waiters to cater to his every wish and whim. He was sexually insatiable, leading to a dreadful case of syphilis. Discarding his wife, he took up with a servant girl. Later he had a homosexual liaison but then had his partner exiled and killed²⁸). His remarkable power allowed him to act capriciously²⁹). Even some pious and loyal lamas were appalled by these excesses.

The decline and final collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 offered the Mongolians and especially the Buddhist establishment an opportunity to achieve independence. In the mistaken belief that Buddhism could serve to unify the population, Mongolian patriots concurred that the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu should be granted the title of secular as well as religious ruler. However, the already cited failings of the Buddhist potentate left a vacuum that foreigners sought to fill³⁰). The Jebtsundamba retained his title as "King," but he scarcely wielded the power signified by that appellation. Foreigners capitalized on the lack of Mongolian unity, creating chaotic conditions in the country. In the decade until 1921, Chinese warlords, Japanese-supported Chinese militarists, bizarre White Russian renegades, and American, Japanese, and Russian diplomats vied for power, with the Jebtsundamba on the sidelines. The Jebtsundamba and other Mongolians initially perceived of the White Russian Baron Roman Nikolai Maximilian von Ungern-Sternberg, who occupied Urga in 1921, as a savior, but they quickly recognized that he was simply a mad and murderous nobleman³¹). The Russian Tsarist Court, which

had attempted to play a pivotal role in Mongolia from the mid-nineteenth century on, faced its own difficulties in the years after 1911, with World War One and calls for revolution, and was not an entirely reliable supporter of Mongolian independence. Only with the accession of the Bolsheviks in 1917 did Mongolia's northern neighbor engage in the country. Perceiving that they needed foreign assistance to eliminate the rapacious and increasingly devastating military forces, Mongolian patriots turned to the USSR for help. Soviet troops, together with Mongolian detachments, crushed the forces of the bizarre and genocidal Ungern-Sternberg by July of 1921, and agents of the Communist International (or Comintern) collaborated with Mongolian nationalists to proclaim Mongolia the second socialist State in world history.

2 Mongolian Buddhism in the Socialist Era

Although the new leadership did not immediately adopt radical measures from 1921 to 1928, the stage was set for such transformations. The earliest and most dramatic changes were the winnowing out of the Mongolian leaders, who were not necessarily radical socialists, and, in fact, several had been lamas. Their fellow leaders or Comintern agents had them executed, or they died under suspicious circumstances. A more forceful policy would be initiated after the death of the Jebtsundamba in 1924. The government quickly announced that a reincarnation who could serve as the Jebtsundamba could not be found. In the same year, it changed the name of the country to the Mongolian People's Republic and mandated that the only legal political party would be the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.

Yet four years elapsed before the government attained sufficient confidence to challenge the Buddhist establishment. It confronted an influential antagonist, with considerable resources and popular support. It had launched anti-Buddhist and anti-religious propaganda from the early 1920s but had not yet adopted punitive measures. In 1928, however, it followed the example of the USSR in initiating more radical measures to change society. Like Joseph Stalin's collectivization movement and his liquidation of the *kulaks*, or so-called rich peasants, the government's new policies aimed to undermine both the secular and monastic elites. The government imposed stiff taxes on the monasteries and confiscated some of their herds³². Monks responded with sporadic outbreaks that erupted into a civil war "spearheaded, in part, by lamas."³³ The opposition was so fierce that the government finally abandoned the policy and blamed MPRP Leftist Deviationists for provocative and illegal actions.

The ensuing peace did not last long because the monasteries remained powerful and, from the state's viewpoint, had to be tamed. Stalin also pressured the MPRP and the government leaders to curb, if not crush, the Buddhists. He and some, though not all, the leaders in the MPRP accused several of the monasteries of

seeking to collaborate with the Japanese against the Mongolian government. They maintained that monks had contacted the Inner Mongolian nationalist leader Demchugdongrob (known to the Chinese as De Wang), whom they regarded as a Japanese puppet and who sought to break away from China in the same way that Puyi (1906-1967), another Japanese puppet and the so-called Last Emperor of China, separated from China³⁴.

Stalin's pressure led like-minded Mongolians to imprison or execute government and MPRP leaders who resisted efforts to launch an anti-Buddhist campaign, resulting in purges in the mid-to-late 1930s. The government needed to persuade the Mongolian population of the monks' perfidy and subversion of Mongolian independence. Thus it adopted the strategy of the contemporary Moscow trials³⁵. The so-called traitor monks had to admit their crimes in a public arena. Threats, propaganda, and torture persuaded the monks to recount their "subversive" activities in big show trials in a theater in Ulaan Baatar³⁶. The trials centered on high-ranking lamas who were found guilty and quickly executed. Monks resisted, leading in 1937-1938 to government reprisals in the form of destruction of hundreds of monasteries and temples and thousands of Buddhist texts and ritual objects and the deaths of thousands of lamas. The government closed the monasteries, and only in 1943-1944 did the state allow the Gandan, Ulaan Baatar's most important monastery, to reopen as a show piece of the regime's tolerant attitude toward religion.

From the late 1930s to 1990, the government issued propaganda in support of atheism and in opposition to Buddhism and prevented much public worship of Buddhism³⁷. The number of monks declined, with few children joining the monasteries. Yet some monks secretly performed ceremonies, including presiding over weddings and funerals. The interviewees in this volume reveal that they had hidden Buddhist objects from the authorities, and the substantial quantity of surviving artifacts confirms their testimony. Monks and laymen preserved sutras, once again attested to by the interviewees and the number of such texts that have been saved.

3 Buddhism in Post-Socialist Mongolia

The collapse of the socialist system in March of 1990 influenced the fate of the Buddhist establishment. A scant four months elapsed before an Association of Mongolian Believers was founded, with the specific intentions of reviving the religion but also to search for books and artifacts and to press for the rehabilitation of lamas imprisoned or killed in the late 1930s³⁸. In 1992, the new Constitution granted religious freedom but did not follow the pleas of some monks to accept Buddhism as the state religion. By this time, the general population and indeed monks had lost much of their knowledge about Buddhism. The question was: could

Buddhism revive?

Foreigners actively participated in attempts to revive Buddhism. The Dalai Lama and high-level Tibetan lamas repeatedly visited Mongolia and gave lectures and teachings³⁹). Buddhists from Western countries also arrived to instruct the Mongols in the tenets of Buddhism, and one American Buddhist even lectured on Mongolian television⁴⁰). Japanese, Koreans, and Westerners provided funds for the rebuilding and repair of Buddhist monasteries and the preservation of Buddhist texts. Bhutanese craftsmen came to assist in repairing Buddhist buildings, and Nepalese Buddhists helped to set up a nunnery⁴¹).

Perhaps the most important foreigner was Kushok Bakula (1917-2003), the Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, who sought to revive Buddhism. This leading reincarnate provided funds for the construction of a monastery in Ulaan Baatar, intending it to take an active part in the transmission of Buddhist teachings⁴²). The U.S. Embassy contributed to growing interest by funding a project, in collaboration with the Arts Council of Mongolia, to map out the sites of the old monasteries and temples throughout the country, many of which had been destroyed or damaged in the late 1930s⁴³).

The collapse of socialism offered Buddhism, and to an extent, shamanism opportunities to become vibrant forces in Mongolian society⁴⁴). They were no longer stigmatized as subversive and illegal, and the demise of socialist ideology left a vacuum in people's lives, especially among the youth⁴⁵). Parlous economic conditions, in part due to a wild ride to unregulated capitalism, contributed to malaise and anxiety and then social instability in the form of increased alcohol consumption, crimes, and corruption⁴⁶).

The Buddhist establishment began to respond to these problems but now faced considerable competition. Islam, Hinduism, Bahai, and, most important, Christianity started to make their mark in Mongolia. Christian missionaries from Korea, the U.S., and Europe streamed into the country, and some misleadingly portrayed themselves as English language teachers but covertly engaged in proselytizing for Christianity⁴⁷). A fundamentalist Christian group founded a television broadcasting station called Eagle TV to promote its ideas⁴⁸). By 2005, Mongolia had seventy churches, as opposed to 157 Buddhist temples and monasteries, not to mention seven mosques⁴⁹). The accelerating pace of conversion to Christianity may have been due to the benefits offered by its representatives — exposure to the West, English language classes, and possible study or travel to English-speaking countries. The preponderance of Mongolians who attended Christian services consisted of women, and some have suggested that the women sought to find more suitable mates among the foreigners who were less prone to alcoholism and domestic abuse. In any event, the accelerating pace of conversions to Christianity concerned the Buddhist establishment.

Facing such competition, the Buddhist monks now attempted to ingratiate

themselves to the population rather than maintaining a remote attitude and focusing on prayer and other ceremonies. They championed environmental issues, including protection of endangered species, such as wolves, deer, and snow leopards, opposed unregulated mining and performed rituals at sacred mountains and rituals⁵⁰. They engaged in such social welfare as community projects, prison counseling, and summer camps for children, and they started clothing drives for the poor, founded a Children's Center for abused children, offered English language classes, and developed a meditation center⁵¹. Capitalizing on the burgeoning Mongolian nationalism of the post-1990 period, they linked up to the virtual deification of Chinggis Khan, the attempt to renew use of the Uyghur (rather than Cyrillic) script, and the wearing of the traditional *deel* robes⁵². Moreover, some Buddhist symbols, such as the lotus, became intertwined with politics and nationalism⁵³.

Despite the cessation of anti-religious propaganda, the support of foreign Buddhist communities, and the monastic community's own efforts, the revival of Buddhism has not been robust and does not compare with the religious developments in Tibet. The Buddhist establishment is not as wealthy as it had been during the Qing dynasty and through the 1920s, and the government now owns the old Buddhist sites, although more and more of them are being turned over to the monasteries and other Buddhist organizations⁵⁴. However, more significant is the quality of the lamas⁵⁵. There is scarcely any high-level Buddhist education⁵⁶. Some monks may have memorized the sutras, but they do not know Tibetan and cannot understand the religious texts. Part of the liturgy has been translated into Mongolian, but the bulk of the most important texts have not been translated.

One scholar who visited many monasteries observed that "the average knowledge of Mongolian lamas is still rather poor."⁵⁷ Such lack of knowledge may be due to the haphazard way of reestablishing Buddhism. Four lamas in one location are needed to form a *sangha* or community, but only three out of thirty-six sites in Ulaan Baatar have the required number⁵⁸. Many of the others are organized in *gers* because the state no longer subsidizes these sites. Lay clergy who are often not ordained and scarcely have the best reputations take charge. They are stereotyped as ignorant, as users of tobacco and alcohol, and as making money out of fortune telling⁵⁹. Many educated youth thus view them as corrupt, superstitious, and obscurantist⁶⁰. Donations are essential for most services provided by the monks. There have also been lingering rumors about corruption even among the most prestigious monks. Lamas have been accused of stealing carpets and paintings from monasteries⁶¹. In 1998, an investigative journalist asserted that Choijamts, the Head of the Gandan or the country's most important monastery, was guilty of nepotism, corruption, and misuse of donated funds for personal travel⁶².

Critics also questioned the Gandan's judgment in employment of its resources. In 1996, the Gandan built a huge statue of Migjid Jansraisig (in Sanskrit,

Avalokiteśvara or in Chinese, Guanyin)⁶³ The rationale for construction of this statue was replacement for a statue of Migjid Jansraisig that the USSR dismantled during World War Two; the Soviets allegedly used the metal for its war efforts. The new statue consisted of twenty tons of copper and iron and was gilded in gold⁶⁴. Construction of this expensive statue appeared, to some critics, to be insensitive in a time of an extraordinarily high rate of poverty.

Despite such critiques, monks and Buddhists in general have assumed some of their traditional roles, especially in the countryside. Worshippers consult lamas about the most propitious date for a wedding, and lamas often preside over funerals. Believers also seek medical treatment from lamas⁶⁵. Photographs of the Dalai Lama and prayer wheels, books, family altars, and other ritual objects, which had been hidden, have reappeared⁶⁶. The Gandan has founded astrological and medical colleges and has, for the past two decades, accepted a few acolytes⁶⁷.

The establishment of nunneries has added new Buddhist institutions. At least three nunneries have been founded in Ulaan Baatar⁶⁸. Many of the women have been lay nuns who wear makeup, have not shaved their heads, and are married and have children⁶⁹. They live in their own homes and do not reside in the nunneries. They appear to have faith in Buddhism but are not well informed about its teaching. Some may have joined for the educations offered at the nunneries, including courses in mathematics, physics, and English. In these turbulent times, a few have become nuns as employment to avoid becoming “street-beggars and prostitutes.” Because they also encounter quite a few unemployed and alcoholic men, not good marital prospects, they seek the sanctuary of the nunneries. As a study in the early years of the twenty-first century noted, “Faced with bleak prospects for the future, young women, exposed to ideas of gender equality, have therefore started to enroll in monastic institutions and religious schools, not only to satisfy their spiritual needs but also their wish for both a secular and religious education.” The real novices cut their hair, wear Tibetan robes, and study religious subjects, but they appear to be in the minority.

4 Three Modern Mongolian Buddhists

Living near perhaps the most revered Buddhist site in Mongolia, the three interviewees confirm the general trends concerning the religion described above. All three resided adjacent to the remains of the thirteenth-century Mongolian capital at Kharkhorin and the sixteenth-century monastery of Erdene Zuu and could actually notice its 108 stupas or reliquaries, its surviving temples, its statues, and its ritual objects. Having been born either in the 1920s or in the early 1940s, they were old enough to witness both the socialist and post-socialist eras and to remember the socialist restrictions on the religion. Their families had been ardent Buddhists, with

some stretching back several generations. One of the three was, in fact, directly related to important Buddhist lamas, and another became a lama in old age. They would naturally emphasize the positive aspects of the religion.

Badamkhand Dambind (b. 1943) was the first to describe the status of Buddhism in the socialist period. She explains that, during her childhood, the government repeatedly labeled Buddhism as “feudal” and demanded that lamas participate in herding rather than reading and chanting texts. Erdene Zuu, she notes, was closed until the 1970s. Nonetheless, she attests to continued devotion to Buddhism in the socialist era, as her family had statues, incense lamps, amulets with the Buddha’s image, and other ritual objects. Devotees requested that lamas read prayers on their behalf and act as fortune tellers. Badamkhand says that participation in such religious activities was hazardous, as the government could portray participants as counterrevolutionaries. Starting in the early 1980s, however, the state adopted a more relaxed attitude toward the practice of Buddhism, and Badamkhand even heard that the Dalai Lama had visited Mongolia. The collapse of the socialist system permitted religious organizations to assist lamas, especially the elderly, and her own son-in-law, a teacher, to talk even-handedly about Buddhism.

Badamregzen, another of the interviewees, descended from a long line of Buddhist monks and confirms even greater limitations imposed upon Buddhism. He and his friends could not even talk about the sutras. Nor could they mention the lamas who had been arrested or executed in the 1930s purges or the confiscation of ritual objects. The socialist government tolerated lamas who proved to be loyal to the MPRP, but it would not allow independent lamas who did not subscribe to its tenets. Despite all these restrictions, Badamregzen reveals that lamas presided over secret prayer services which some Mongolians attended while other lamas preserved sutras in nearby caves. He also claims that executed lamas, as well as those hounded to death, placed curses on the people and places that harmed them. Their souls would be converted into wolves who could avenge them. After 1990, Badamregzen, now freed from the constraints of the socialist system, studied in a lamasery for four years and became a lama and a diviner or fortune teller. Some lamas who had married during the socialist era were now accepted as legitimate. The revival of the Gandan monastery, the renewed visits of the Dalai Lama, and the preliminary translations of the sutras from Tibetan into Mongolian all earned his praise in his new role as a lama.

Borjigon provides additional evidence about the covert efforts to preserve Buddhism during the socialist period. He too mentions the cache of Buddhist ritual objects that were hidden by devout families, as well as night-time prayer meetings, offerings to the Buddha, and surreptitious prayer services with lamps in front of Buddhist statues. Lamas continued to give names to the new born, an ancient tradition, and secretly participated in wedding and funeral ceremonies.

Although he did not consider himself to be an ardent Buddhist, he still was distressed by the socialist-era destruction of statues and ritual objects, by the fear that led monks to avoid wearing robes that would identify them with Buddhism, and by the government demand that lamas work in the economy and not necessarily follow their religious vocation.

Borjigon appears pleased with the revival of Buddhism after 1990 but is not uncritical of the religion. He praises other religions for working with the homeless and with alcoholics but finds that Buddhism focuses on piety and beliefs rather than the welfare of the population. Judging from this observation, the great monasteries' attempts since the 1990s to ingratiate themselves by caring for the population seem not to have reached his area.

Buddhism aside, the interviewees reveal much about other religious or customary practices. They are pleased that the *tsam* dances, the Naadam athletic events, and the Tsagaan Sar or New Year celebrations that were forbidden in the socialist period have now been revived and are an integral part of the annual cycle of festivities. They scarcely mention shamans or shamanism in the interviews except for rituals associated with the *oboos*. It seems that shamanism has revived in specific locations in the country, especially in northern Mongolia and among the Darhad peoples, but not in others. Christian missionaries have introduced Christianity, but the interviewees assert that most Mongolians had little interest in the religion. Again, Christianity may appeal in specific areas of the country.

5 Three Interviewees and Society

The interviewees challenge other socialist propaganda. Badamkhand never went to school and says that there were no countryside schools in her area until the early 1950s, and Badamregzen states that the first school in his *sum* was established only in 1945. Borjigon attended school only through the fourth grade and notes that children often fled from schools, and many parents, who needed the children for herding, kept them out of school⁷⁰. He estimates that one-third of the students dropped out by the fourth grade. The schools were often in makeshift *gers*, and the students in the fourth grade were offered courses in geology, world geography, gymnastics, and literature, especially in the forms of fairy tales. A group of students joined the so-called Young Pioneers and wore the red scarfs associated with this honored organization. However, the MPRP leadership had claimed that it emphasized education. Yet as late as the 1950s, few resources had been allocated to the countryside schools although the schools in Ulaan Baatar seem to have been better attended. The *negdels* or cooperatives of the mid-1950s may also have provided more opportunities for countryside children to attend schools and to achieve a higher rate of literacy. Judging from these interviews, however, the socialist government's

astonishingly high figures for literacy were inflated and need to be revised.

The interviewees provide scenarios about the *negdels* and about life in the countryside that differ from government accounts. They assert that herders did not voluntarily join the *negdels*, and the more prosperous of them had to be cajoled, if not pressured, to become members, with many killing their animals to avoid turning them over to the collectives. Badamkhand recounts an even worse fate that befell her area. Within a few years after the founding of its *negdel*, the government converted these lands into a State Farm, confiscated most of the herds, and ordered the herders to engage in farming. The work on the *negdels* and the State Farms was grueling, even for children. It started early with the milking of the herds at 3 in the morning in the *negdels* and laboring in the fields by daylight. The government also mandated substantial taxes to be paid in wool, antlers, and animal hair, and considerable effort was required to meet such state quotas. Even Badamregzen, a water and irrigation specialist, found the work demanding, and he had a relatively less difficult position in a mineral water spa in the town of Khujirt.

The countryside food was not lavish, consisting of some mutton and other meats and dairy products. The three interviewees hardly saw vegetables except for cabbage and wild onions. No rice was available, and millet was scarce. As late as 1985, some herders had not tasted potatoes. Children barely saw candy, and adults rarely had access to sugar and fruits. The government occasionally sent meat but no flour or rice. Borjigon says that children were, on occasion, hungry and had no money to buy goods at the sparsely supplied stores in the *sum* centers.

All three interviewees credited the socialist era with the introduction of better sanitation and medicine and other social and recreational changes. The MPRP emphasized public hygiene and dispatched specialists to teach the herders about proper sanitation, including how to check bedding for vermin. Western medical care replaced Tibetan therapies, and the state sought to prevent lamas and shamans from treating the sick. Badamkhand reveals that her parents had arranged her marriage, but she implies that the practice became less common in the socialist period. Other sources write that the state sent teams of projectionists to the countryside to show mostly propaganda films, but the interviewees mention only night time story-telling and ankle bone and playing cards games as recreation.

All three interviewees were aware of the significance of MPRP membership and of the presence of Russians in the countryside. The MPRP imposed strict requirements on its recruits, but members often had access to better education and employment. The Russians who worked in Mongolia also had special privileges, and knowledge of the Russian language offered opportunities for study in the USSR. Russian technical advisers assisted in Mongolia's few industrial enterprises and in the joint railway commission and the copper and molybdenum mining complex in the city of Erdenet. One hundred thousand Russian troops were stationed in the

country during the height of the Sino-Soviet dispute from the 1960s through the 1980s. All the Russians had higher salaries than their Mongolian counterparts and could shop at special stores for products unavailable to most Mongolians, a source of considerable irritation and hostility. Yet both Badamkhand and Borjigon emphasized that they liked the Russians and were grateful for their help.

Their attitudes toward the Chinese offered a sharp contrast to their mostly favorable view of the Russians. A few Chinese had remained in Mongolia through the early stages of socialism, but most had returned to China by the early 1930s. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese workers streamed into the country, which had a labor shortage, to undertake infrastructure projects designed to pave the way for industrialization. Badamkhand found them clannish and uninterested in interacting with Mongolians. Her judgment on the post-socialist arrival of Chinese was that "they are not good people." Borjigon came across Chinese when he helped to transport sheep from Mongolia to Vietnam during the Vietnamese War. He and fellow Mongolians had to travel, via China, to Vietnam. He characterizes late 1960s China as underdeveloped, especially the countryside, and notes that the Chinese picked up anything the Mongolians threw out as trash, an indication of their poverty. He also comments negatively on the fact that nearly all Chinese wore the same kind of blue uniforms. In light of the dramatic growth of the Chinese economy since the late 1970s, it is unlikely that he would have the same views today.

All three interviewees are as critical of the post-1990 state policies as they are of the socialist period. They agree, for example, that immediate privatization and so-called shock therapy, which Western advisers and some in the Mongolian elite championed, turned out to be problematic. Badamkhand, who had worked in a factory for thirty years, criticized the privatization of her place of employment because a small group, rather than the majority of the workers, profited. The company's assets were not equally divided, and the new owners then closed the dormitories, leaving many workers homeless. Similarly, a small group benefited from the privatization of the *negdels* and State Farms, leaving behind weak or unfit animals and poor land for ordinary people. The workers in the factories, many of whom were dismissed, did not receive any animals. Borjigon reports that conditions deteriorated after privatization.

He describes a rapid and increasing rate of income inequality, as a privileged few gained ownership over the vast majority of animals. Acknowledging that food was scarce in the socialist era, he nonetheless argues that the current level of hunger is unprecedented. He laments the decline in the pasturelands as desertification increases because of the lack of rain and of overgrazing in some areas. Herders face constantly higher prices for fuel to transport their animals to market, while the prices they receive remain relatively constant. Such difficult conditions compel herders to

migrate to the towns and cities, especially Ulaan Baatar where they have generally been unable to obtain steady and gainful employment and have had to live in *ger* slums without food security, running water, trash pickups and electricity. Because they and their children have no connections or friends in Ulaan Baatar and other cities, they have been discriminated against in employment and education.

The testimonies of these three individuals naturally do not yield the entire context of Buddhism or of social and economic life in socialist and post-socialist Mongolia. Yet these accounts supplement the interviews and autobiographies that others who lived through these eras have produced. Oral history projects on twentieth and twenty-first century Mongolia undertaken by specialists on the country as well as field research by anthropologists and non-governmental organizations have enriched our knowledge of Mongolia and will continue to contribute to understanding of this period of Mongolian history. It is, after all, the lives and testimonies of specific individuals that provide vivid portraits of a society in a particular era.

Notes

- 1) Interviews conducted by Yuki Konagaya and I. Lkhagvasuren (trans. by Mary Rossabi; Edited and Introduced by Morris Rossabi) *Senri Ethnological Reports* 96 (2011) and 107 (2012), National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.
- 2) The next few pages offer a short sketch of Mongolian Buddhism to provide the background for the three biographies and should not, in any way, be construed as a definitive work on the subject.
- 3) Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press (2009), pp.16 and 41.
- 4) Song Lian, *Yuanshi (Yuan Dynastic History)*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976, p.68.
- 5) For a slightly different version of events, see Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006, pp.44 and 55.
- 6) Walther Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism in the 17th Century," *Anthropos* 48 (1953), pp.1-29 and 493-536.
- 7) Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*. Trans. by G. Samuel, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp.62-64.
- 8) Christopher Atwood, "Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion: A Re-examination of the Fire Cult," *History of Religion* 36: 2 (1996), pp.121-125; *oboos* were piles of stones and other objects in hills or mountains which allegedly led to good fortune and prevented harm. Buddhists initiated circumambulations around the *oboos* as a means of ensuring such blessings.
- 9) Henning Haslund, *Men and Gods in Mongolia*. London: Kegan Paul, 1935, p.40.
- 10) Agata Bareja-Starzynska and Hanna Havnevik, "A Preliminary Study of Buddhism in Present-Day Mongolia" in Ole Bruun and Li Narangoa, eds. *Mongols From Country to City*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2006, p.216 and Aleksei Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual*

- in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in Late 19th Century Mongolia*. Trans. by Alo and Linda Raun. Bloomington: The Mongolia Society, 1978, pp.221-230.
- 11) A comprehensive study of this agency is Ning Chia, "The Li-fan Yuan in the Early Ch'ing Dynasty," Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1991.
 - 12) The term "tame" derives from the essay produced by Joseph Fletcher in "Ch'ing Inner Asia c. 1800" in the authoritative *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 10: *Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911*, Part I edited by John Fairbank. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p.52.
 - 13) For a Mongolian depiction of Zanabazar's life, see Charles Bawden, trans. *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus of Urga*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961, pp.42-67. For his works of art, see N. Tsultem, *The Eminent Mongolian Sculptor — Zanabazar*. Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House, 1982 and Patricia Berger, "Zanabazar (1635-1723)" in Terese Tse Bartholomew and Patricia Berger, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1995, pp.261-304.
 - 14) Charles Bawden, "The Mongol Rebellion of 1756-1757," *Journal of Asian History* 2:1 (1968), pp.18-21; Morris Rossabi, "The Development of Mongol Identity in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" in Leonard Blussé and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, eds. *Shifting Communities and Identity Formation in Early Modern Asia*. Leiden: Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, Universiteit Leiden, 2003, pp.56-60; and Christopher Kaplonski, "Collective Memory and Chingunjav's Rebellion," *History and Anthropology* 6: 2-3 (1993), pp.243-246.
 - 15) "The heyday of the Ch'ing order in Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet" in Fairbank, p.353.
 - 16) *The Modern History of Mongolia*. New York: Frederick Praeger, 1968, p.170.
 - 17) *The Political Role of Mongol Buddhism*. Bloomington: Asian Studies Research Institute, Indiana University, 1977, pp.6-7.
 - 18) John Sheepshanks, *My Life in Mongolia and Siberia*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1903, pp.32 and 74.
 - 19) For a brief sketch of Rockhill, see Alicia Campi and R. Baasan, *The Impact of China and Russia on United States-Mongolian Political Relations in the Twentieth Century*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009, pp.18-33.
 - 20) See for example, Morris Rossabi, ed. *Herdsmen to Statesmen: The Autobiography of Jamsrangiin Sambuu of Mongolia*. Trans. by Mary Rossabi. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010, pp.5-7, 45, and 87-88.
 - 21) Pearly Jacob, "Mongolia: Preservation Challenges Confront Treasure Trove of Buddhist Texts," *Eurasianet*. <http://eurasianet.org/node/66551> (February 13, 2012; accessed February 14, 2013) and see my report to Open Society Institute and Arts Council of Mongolia, January, 1999.
 - 22) For a brief description of literature in this period, see Walther Heissig, *Geschichte der mongolischen Literatur*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972, vol.1, pp.215-217.
 - 23) Bawden, *Modern History*, p.169 writes, in this connection, that "Yet at the same time the Church was immensely popular and valued by the ordinary Mongols, who were, in a way, the slaves of their own piety and superstition."
 - 24) Shagdariiin Sandag and Harry Kendall, *Poisoned Arrows: The Stalin-Choibalsan-Mongolian Massacres, 1921-1941*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p.121.
 - 25) C. R. Bawden, trans. *Tales of an Old Lama*. Tring, U.K.: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1997, p.18.

- 26) Bawden, *Tales*, p.46.
- 27) Robert Rupen, "The City of Urga in the Manchu Period," *Studia Altaica: Festschrift für Nicholas Poppe zum 60. Geburtstag am 8. August 1957*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1957, pp.157-169.
- 28) Bawden, *Tales*, p.26.
- 29) Bawden, *Tales*, p.48.
- 30) On this era, 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.
- 31) For a popular account of Ungern von Sternberg's career, see James Palmer, *The Bloody White Baron*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.
- 32) Moses, pp.197-202; Vesna Wallace, "Surviving Modernity in Mongolia" in Bruce Knauff and Richard Taupier, eds. *Mongolians After Socialism: Politics, Economy, Religion*. Ulaan Baatar: Admon Press, 2012, pp.90-91.
- 33) Christopher Kaplonski, "Prelude to Violence: Show Trials and State Power in 1930s Mongolia," *American Ethnologist* 35: 2 (2008), p.325.
- 34) On Demchugdongrob, see Sechin Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince: The Life and Times of Demchugdongrob, 1902-1966*. Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, 1999. For Puyi's life, see Henry Pu-yi, *The Last Manchu: The Autobiography of Henry Pu Yi, the Last Emperor of China*. New York: Skyhorse Publishers. Rev. ed., 2010; also see Michael Jerryson, *Mongolian Buddhism: The Rise and Fall of the Sangha*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2007 on the fear of an alliance of the lamas with the Japanese in Inner Mongolia. For a detailed work on Japanese plans for Mongolia, see James Boyd, *Japanese-Mongolian Relations, 1873-1945: Faith, Race and Strategy*. Folkstone: Global Oriental, 2011.
- 35) Kaplonski, "Prelude to Violence: Show Trials and State Power in 1930s Mongolia," *American Ethnologist* 35: 2 (2008), pp.326-330.
- 36) Baldandorjiin Nyambuu provides a description of these show trials in one of his interviews with Yuki Konagaya and I. Lkhagvasuren, *Socialist Devotees and Dissenters: Three Twentieth-Century Mongolian Leaders* (trans. by Mary Rossabi). Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2011, pp.174-178.
- 37) Wallace, "Surviving," p.92 writes that "By 1934, the MPRP had produced twelve feature films that portrayed Buddhist ideas and practices as corrupt and shameful...In 1936, the MPR government printed 3,000 copies of its first anti-Buddhist magazine and disseminated it among the lower-ranking lamas."
- 38) Udo Barkmann, "The Revival of Lamaism in Mongolia," *Central Asian Survey* 16:1 (1997), p.72; also see Bayantsagaan Sandag, "Contributions to the Development of Mongolian Buddhism by the Association of Mongolian Devotees," in Knauff and Taupier, *Mongolians*, pp.101-107.
- 39) Agata Bareja-Starzynska and Hanna Havnevik, "A Preliminary Study of Buddhism in Present-Day Mongolia" in Ole Bruun and Li Narangoa, eds. *Mongols from Country to City*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2006, pp.223-224. This essay is a useful guide to post-1990 developments in Mongolia. On the Dalai Lama's visits, see *Mongol Messenger*, November 6, 2002. He visited in 1979, 1982, 1987, 1991, 1995, and 2002 and continues to visit. On the survival of shamanism, see Matyas Balogh, "Contemporary Shamanisms in Mongolia," *Asian Ethnicity* 11: 2 (2010), pp.229-238. The author argues that "The

revival of shamanism in Mongolia is closely connected with the cult of Chinggis Khan being a revival of nationalistic pride that had been suppressed during the Soviet era similar to other forms of practicing religion. It is essential to bear in mind that the religious revival is mostly about the renaissance of Buddhism, and shamanism plays a more and more significant but still a secondary role in the religious life of the contemporary Mongolians” (p.236).

- 40) *Mongol Messenger*, March 31, 1999 on Michael Roach, one of these Americans.
- 41) *Mongol Messenger*, July 30, 2008.
- 42) See Oidov Nyamdavaa, *Mongolia-India Relations*. New Delhi: Bhavana Books and Prints, 2003, p.128 ; *Email Daily News*, July 19, 1999; and Sue Byrne, “The Ambassador-Teacher: Reflections on Kushok Bakula’s Importance in the Revival of Buddhism in Mongolia,” *Mongol Survey* (2008), pp.11-16.
- 43) Kriszina Teleki, “Building on Ruins, Memories, and Persistence: Revival and Survival in the Mongolian Countryside,” *Silk Road* 7 (2009), pp.64-65; *Mongol Messenger*, June 3, 2009 and November 29, 2006.
- 44) Laetitia Merli, “Shamanism in Transition: From the Shadow to the Light,” in Bruun and Narangoa, *Mongols*, pp.254-271; Tuvshintugs Dorj, “The Development of Shamanism in Mongolia after Socialism” in Knauff and Taupier, *Mongolians*, 115-127; see also the field study conducted by Morten Axel Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.
- 45) Wallace, “Surviving,” pp.94-95.
- 46) Wallace, “Surviving,” p.96; Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn, “Shamans, Marginal Capitalism, and the Remaking of History in Postsocialist Mongolia,” *American Ethnologist* 34: 2 (2008), pp.127-147; Richard Tomlinson, “From Genghis Khan to Milton Friedman: Mongolia’s Wild Ride to Capitalism,” *Fortune*, December 7, 1998, pp.192-200, and Morris Rossabi. *Modern Mongolia: From Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- 47) Wallace, “Survival,” pp.95, 98; Purevdorj Jamsran, “Developing Christianity in Mongolia During the Last Two Decades” in Knauff and Taupier, *Mongolians*, pp.129-137.
- 48) “Among Foundation Finds Eagle TV,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1997, p.13
- 49) Guido Verboom, et al. *Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature*. Ulaanbaatar: Netherlands Mongolian Trust Fund on Environmental Reform, 2009, pp.7-9.
- 50) Guido Verboom, et al., *Mongolian Buddhists*, pp.15-21; Bayantsagaan Sandag, “Contribution” in Knauff and Taupier, *Mongolians*, p.104.
- 51) Bataa Mishig-Ish, “Buddhism and the Grand Maitreya Complex Project in Mongolia” in Knauff and Taupier, *Mongolians*, pp.111-113; Matthew King, “Finding the Buddha Hidden Below the Sand: Youth, Identity and Narrative in the Revival of Mongolian Buddhism” in Julian Dierkes, ed. *Change in Democratic Mongolia: Social Relations, Health, Mobile Pastoralism, and Mining* Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp.23-25; *Email Daily News*, November 17, 1997 and December 3, 1997.
- 52) See Alicia Campi, “The Rise of Nationalism in the Mongolian People’s Republic as Reflected in Language Reform, Religion, and the Cult of Chinggis Khan,” *Central and Inner Asian Studies* 6 (1992), pp.46-58; for more on the link between Buddhism and nationalism, see Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, “A Preliminary” in Bruun and Narangoa, *Mongols*, pp.224-226.
- 53) Uradyn Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

- 1998, p.238.
- 54) Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, "A Preliminary" in Bruun and Narangoa, *Mongols*, p.224.
 - 55) Karénina Kollmar-Paulent, "Buddhism in Mongolia After 1990," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 4 (2003), pp.21-24.
 - 56) Zsuzsa Majer, "Continuation or Disjunction with the Past and the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition," *Silk Road* 7 (2009), p. 52.
 - 57) Majer, "Continuation," p.62.
 - 58) Majer, "Continuation," p.57.
 - 59) Barkmann, "The Revival," p.71.
 - 60) King, "Finding the Buddha," p.72.
 - 61) *Mongol Messenger*, October 18, 2000; One monk stole statues. See *Email Daily News*, January 5, 1999.
 - 62) *Mongol Messenger*, June 10, 1998.
 - 63) Kollman-Paulent, "Buddhism in Mongolia," p.42.
 - 64) *UB Post*, September 25, 1996.
 - 65) Ole Bruun, *Precious Steppe: Mongolian Nomadic Pastoralists in Pursuit of the Market*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006, pp.121-142 on Buddhism in one rural site.
 - 66) Barkmann, "The Revival of Lamaism in Mongolia," *Central Asian Survey* 16:1 (1997), p.57; Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, "A Preliminary" in Bruun and Narangoa, *Mongols*, p.212.
 - 67) Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, "A Preliminary" in Bruun and Narangoa, *Mongols*, p.220.
 - 68) Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, "A Preliminary" in Bruun and Narangoa, *Mongols*, pp.226-228 on these nunneries.
 - 69) Majer, "Continuation," pp.55-57; Verboom, et al., *Mongolian*, p.13.
 - 70) The renowned herder Namkhainyambuu noted that he too attended school through the fourth grade. Ts. Namkhainyambuu, *Bounty from the Sheep: Autobiography of a Herdsman* (trans. by Mary Rossabi). Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2000, p.47.