

Through Inner Mongolia

In 1989 I received an invitation from the scholars of Inner Mongolia University. Accordingly, in October 1990, I was able to spend two weeks there and saw many different things. The Inner Mongolians described their region as "a large and beautiful country of wealth," which was made clear in one of their guide books.

The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was established on May 1, 1947 as one of the provinces of the People's Republic of China. It has an area of 1,200,000 square kilometers and has a population of over twenty million, including two and a half million Mongols. The region consists of eight aimags, four cities, and 101 khoshuu and settlements. More than ten nationalities live together in harmony, including Chinese, Mongols, Hui [Chinese Muslims], Manchus, Koreans, Dagur, Khorchin,¹ and others.

In addition to high mountains, dense forests, wide steppes, deserts, and gobi [semi-deserts], there are the Khatan Gol or Yellow River, and lakes and ponds. The region produces fodder for livestock, grain, vegetables and fruit. It also contains great mineral wealth. The region is rich in iron ore, coal, and oil. Since I had not examined the detailed economic statistics of the region, my understanding of them was limited.

As a consequence of the establishment of the autonomous region, I witnessed with my own eyes the revival of the culture, art, language, history and traditions of the Mongols and other races, and the development of their education and culture. For a few days I traveled by car around Hohhot and its surrounding area, the Ordos, and Baotou, which was the way I saw most things.

Hohhot stretched for several dozen kilometers in an east-west direction in a vast valley in front of a multi-layered plateau called Dalan Khar Uul. The valley contained plantations of forests, fruits and berries, vegetable fields and large fields of grain which were worked by many households living in densely packed buildings made of mud and brick. Mongols herded flocks of sheep. Though it seemed strange, we occasionally came across a Chinese herdsman.

Hohhot was founded in the seventeenth century and became a major political and economic center of the Tümed people.² The construction of its first famous Buddhist monastery (Ikh Zuu) began in 1579. Sengedüüren, the eldest son of Altan Khan of the Tümed, invited the third Dalai Lama, Sodnomjamts, to Hohhot, and asked him to recite the Buddhist texts of Sakyamuni. In 1652, the Fifth Dalai Lama stopped there for the mid-day meal on his way from Tümed to Beijing, and read some scriptures.

The temple buildings were constructed in a beautiful, artistic style and housed, among other items, the ten-volume *Ganjuur*, a valuable compilation embodying parts of the Mongol historical and cultural heritage. In 1986 this temple was declared an impor-

¹ The Khorchins are not recognized as a separate nationality.

² The Tümeds are a Southern Mongolian tribe.

tant monument and came under the protection of the state. Queen Mandukhai had spent some of her life in Hohhot. We visited a garden named after her. We had many opportunities to learn about the history of Mongolian culture and art and about the customs of the other nationalities when we visited the Five Stupas of Hohhot, the Baga Zuu, and the National Museum.

One of the sights in Hohhot was the department store for traditional Mongolian merchandise. Although it was a place for trading, in reality it also revived production of the many individual items used by the Mongolian races in early times, and so could be regarded as an important cultural museum for all the many nationalities of the region.

Hohhot was divided into old and new quarters, the old quarter containing temples, walls, enclosures, and a few streets with buildings made of blue brick. The new quarter, however, included Inner Mongolia University, Inner Mongolia Normal University, a theater, cultural palaces, and the building housing the government of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. There were beautiful, modern and towering multi-story buildings, long streets, wide squares, forests, and many parks.

Hohhot was said to have a population of over 700,000, but there seemed to be few passenger cars on the roads, not from any lack of driving ability among the population but to conserve gasoline and keep the city air clean. In order to improve the health of its citizens, bicycle riding was very popular. The city had its own bicycle factory, and it was noticeable that the bicycle traffic was orderly and pedestrians gave way to cars. I was struck by the thought that in a country much like ours, with livestock including many hundreds of thousands of horses, the capital city, towns, settlements, and district centers all had bicycles and light, covered carriages which were manufactured using metal bearings, rubber, and light high-speed gears. Horse-drawn taxis had also been established to serve the urban population, thus saving fuel and keeping the air clean, which was a most advantageous way of reviving the traditional customs of the people.

The shops in the city carried both goods which had been imported through official channels and also many thousands of different useful items made out of the primary and secondary raw materials of the region. When I saw this, I thought that if we melted down all the glass we threw away, we could begin to make beautiful containers and all sorts of other goods. This, of course, is an initiative we ourselves should undertake.

We headed westwards from Hohhot towards the vast desert of the Ordos, where the shrine of Chinggis had been established. On the way, we stopped to look at Badgar Zuu, one of the famous old monasteries of Inner Mongolia. The artistically-created temple buildings had been built on a rocky cliff. We entered some of the buildings where religious services were held and which the people supported with all their hearts.

Despite the fact that this temple building had its own unique history, it had been falsely criticized and destroyed by the deviationists during the 1950s and the early 1960s.³ Although it had been damaged, it was pleasing to see that it had now been restored to its original condition.

We had lunch in Dongsheng, the neat compact capital of Baruun Tümed. On our way back we stopped at Baotou, a city of over one million people and the center of the iron-mining region. While we were there we learned a great deal about the history of the

³ Actually, widespread destruction did not occur until the so-called Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 until Mao Zedong's death in 1976, though its most actively destructive stage had ended by the end of the '60s.

area and its contemporary affairs.

As planned by Inner Mongolia University, we arrived at the Shrine of Chinggis, where we paid our respects. Over three hundred years ago, eight white gers were erected at this place and a large [religious] sacrifice was carried out. Chinggis's belongings, legends, and other memorable items were still being preserved there. In 1954, the Government Council of the People's Republic of China passed a resolution which authorized spending a large amount of money on this charitable cause, and a shrine was erected, thanks to the energetic participation of the leading political figure in the autonomous government of Inner Mongolia, the revolutionary leader Ulaankhüü.⁴

The local people had worked hard to stabilize the shifting sand dunes of the Ordos desert by planting trees and bushes there. The three large halls of Chinggis were located in a separate area of 55,000 square meters called Gandiriin Shil, which had a large garden containing all kinds of trees. The roofs of the three sacred temples were in the shape of Mongol ger. The three pavilions were constructed on a platform one meter high. Five other sections had also been built, including a central temple with southwest, southeast, east, and west-facing temples. The central pavilion was twenty-four meters tall, and there were two eighteen meter-high pavilions on either side of it, each one having black and blue tiles on its roof. Right in the middle of the veranda beside the large door of the central pavilion was an inscription in gold lettering which read "The Shrine of Chinggis Khan."

This shrine was proclaimed one of the important monuments of the People's Republic of China. Inside the main pavilion there was a large figure of Chinggis carved out of granite, in front of which stood a few people offering tea, khadags, milk foods and [sacrificial] wine in accordance with Mongolian custom. The ancient ceremony was respectfully conducted by the remaining descendants of the famous original five hundred Darkhad people. Four young people dressed in Mongol deel recited the felicitations connected with the spirit of Chinggis. The whole ceremony was conducted by Sharaldai, the deputy chairman of the Chinggis Research Center.

After the ceremony, I went to look at the black and white flags and other things used by Chinggis and his close followers. These were all kept in the three pavilions. Within the halls of the pavilions, I saw how gers, palaces and other memorable things portrayed the customs of the Mongols.

I became well acquainted with the educational and academic work being carried out in Inner Mongolia. Inner Mongolia University was established in 1957, with Ulaankhüü as its rector. He continued to work there for a long period. Many famous professors who had worked with him succeeded him, including Chinggeltei,⁵ Buusiyang,⁶

⁴ Ulanfu, a Tümed whose original name was Yunze, was born in 1903 [or 1904 or 1906] and joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1925. After 1949 he became the most powerful non-Chinese in Beijing, where he held many posts, including those of member of the party's politburo and vice-premier of the national government. He became one of the chief victims of Mao's "cultural revolution" and died some time during the late 1980s.

⁵ Chinggeltei, also Cenggeltei or Qinggeertai, born in 1924, became one of China's foremost specialists in Mongolian linguistics. He served as vice-president of Inner Mongolia University, vice-president of the China Philology Society of Nationalities, vice-chairman of the Council of the Mongolian Philology Society of China, and vice-president of the International Association of Mongolian Studies. He is also a long-time deputy to the National People's Congress of China.

Tüvshin,⁷ Buyankhishig,⁸ Choijinjav,⁹ and the elder and younger Baatar. They produced a large amount of scholarly work during their many years of teaching and leadership work.

At present, there are several departments in the university, including Mongolian language, Chinese language, history, philosophy, economics, law, and foreign languages. There is a center for research in agriculture, and research institutes in mathematics, theoretical physics, power and energy, biology, and other subjects. The university has a large library, and computer technology is being skillfully used for linguistic research.

Following the establishment in 1952 of the Inner Mongolia Normal College [now University], teachers were trained in educational science, Mongolian language, Chinese language, history, foreign languages, art, mathematics, physics, chemistry, physical education, and other areas. These two establishments of higher education also teach courses in Marxism-Leninism, political economic theory, and politics.

Much care was taken when the college buildings were being designed to aid the teaching process. For example, both of these institutions occupied a large area of land where woods, lakes, and ponds could be created. Accommodations for teaching staff, student halls of residence, a library, a cultural center, a refectory, a hospital, sports grounds, and other facilities were all built simultaneously for the convenience of the teachers, students and workers, and with the aim of strengthening the relations between these groups, which was considered an important task. This all reminded me of the layout of university buildings in England and France.

Inner Mongolia Normal University was, like Inner Mongolia University, concerned with academic achievement, but also carried out some research work and the training of skilled personnel. I was presented with some of the publications of the Normal University, including the two-volume *Qauli jüil-ün bicig* [Textbook of Law], *Oyirad teüken surbulji bicig* [Source Materials for Oirad History] and *Kökeqota-yin teüken Monggol surbulji bicig* [History of Hohhot] in six volumes.¹⁰ In addition, Professor Chinggeltei of the university gave me some of his best work, and Professor Buusiyang gave me a cherished souvenir entitled *Kelen-ü sinjilel-ün uduridqal* [Introduction to Linguistic Research].¹¹

We are now broadening our relations with China, including the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, and study of the development of these countries will create an agreeable context for such studies. After President Ochirbat of Mongolia paid a visit to China and Inner Mongolia, Chinese Party, government, and cultural figures, including the Inner Mongolian leader, Bökhhöo, visited our country, which was of great significance

⁶ Born in 1934, Buusiyang, better known by his Sinicized name Baoxiang, was serving as one of Inner Mongolia University's vice-presidents during Shirendev's visit.

⁷ Tüvshin, also spelled Töbsin and Tubuxin, was one of the thousands of Mongol victims of Mao Zedong's "cultural revolution." In the 1980s, he served for several years as president of Inner Mongolia University, in which capacity he led a delegation to Western Washington University and some other American institutions.

⁸ Buyankesig or Buyankheshig was born in 1936 and is a well-known poet.

⁹ Choijinjav, also Coyijungjab and Quejingzhabu, was born in 1931. He has cooperated with Chinggeltei (q.v.) in field researches and has written several books on Mongolian dialects.

¹⁰ The first two titles were published by the Inner Mongolian Cultural Publishing House in Hailar in 1989 and 1985 respectively. The third title was published between 1987 and 1990 by the Hohhot Mongolian History and Literature Society.

¹¹ Published in 1988 by Inner Mongolia University Press.

for the future development of the traditional friendship and cooperation between our two countries. The number of citizens traveling to and from both countries is increasing.

We Mongols can see and learn much from visiting our neighbors, China and Inner Mongolia. For example, thanks to the support and development of initiatives by service sector workers, herdsman, and the light and food industries, their goods can be traded with foreign countries, or manufactured and processed for the nation. The development of the livestock sector and their outstanding expertise in vegetable growing, especially salad vegetables, fruits and berries, should be studied. Our citizens should make a visit to this country a supreme priority. Similarly, it will be even more useful for us to study the good work they have done in reviving their history, culture, and heritage.