

A. I. Oshirov (c. 1901-1931): A Buriat Agent in Inner Mongolia

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In the history of the Asian revolutionary movement, the term "Comintern representative" has come to have an unpleasant ring.¹ In the language of the opponents of this revolution, these representatives, or "agents," were seen as the diabolic instigators of strife and anarchy who incited humble and peaceful workers and peasants to make destructive and nihilistic rebellion.² Even in the historiography of the Asian revolutionaries themselves, the term Comintern representative has come to have a bad odor; whether in China, or Vietnam, or Korea, they are seen as ignorant dogmatists, doing incalculable harm to the revolution with their mechanical application of Soviet theories. Even more damaging, they are subject to the implicit accusation of not acting in good faith, putting Russia's imperial interests ahead of those of the colonialized peoples of Asia.³ Even in Mongolia, where the Soviet

¹ I would like to thank Ochiryn Namsraijaw (Ina I. Oshirova) for her invaluable aid in supplying information about her brother Aleksandr. Interviews were conducted with her in Mongolian on April 3 and May 13, 1992, in Ulaanbaatar, where she lives in retirement. Without her help, this article could not have been written. György Kara and Elizabeth Constantine read drafts of this paper and contributed important and helpful suggestions and corrections. Research for this article was supported in part by a grant from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the United States Information Agency, and the United States Department of State, which administers the Russian, Eurasian, and East European Research Program (Title VIII).

² See, for example, *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian* ["Compilation of documentation on Soviet plots"] (Beijing, 1928; reprint Taipei, 1987), vols. 1-7 (vs. 402-408). One chapter of this compilation of translated documents seized from the Soviet embassy in April, 1927, is titled *Mitan lei*, or "About agents."

³ See, for example, Sun Wuxia, *Gongchan guoji he Zhongguo geming guanxi shigang* (Zhengzhou, 1988). The classic example of this trend

influence was pervasive up until the fall of the Communist system and where the Comintern was hence still held to be infallible, the new post-Communist historiography has in rapid order recapitulated the nationalist critiques voiced long before in China, North Korea and Vietnam.⁴ All that was popular, good, and effective in the Mongolian revolution and the ensuing socialist regime is ascribed to the genius of native Mongolian revolutionaries, while all the cruelties and repressions are heaped upon the head of the Soviet Union and its Comintern agents. This approach gives a comforting resolution to the fundamental problem of Mongolian national identity--the lack of any past that is modern and yet not Communist. If all the good was done by the Mongolians and all the evil by the foreigners, then the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party was in essence a good party and its past a proud one.

The Communist International was a fundamental factor in the formation and development of virtually all the Asian revolutionary parties. Thus, despite the accusations directed against the organization, it is a futile enterprise to dream of what these parties might have been like had not Soviet influence "distorted" their development. Nor can the stereotype of dogmatic foreign-based bumbler and native revolutionary geniuses, so comforting both to American journalists like Harrison Salisbury hoping to "play the China card," as well as to Asian Communist parties in a post-Soviet era, be accepted without question.⁵

in Western historiography is Benjamin Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York, 1967).

⁴ For the old view, see MAKhN *үүсч khögjikhöd olon ulsyn kommunist khödölgöönii tuslamjiin roli, ach kholbogdol* (Ulaanbaatar, 1978), and *Mongol Ardyn Khuwisgalt Nam ba olon ulsyn kommunist khödölgöön: barimt, matériel* (Ulaanbaatar, 1979). The new view is found, with a wealth of original documentation from the security archives of Mongolia, in S. Bat-togtokh, *Nuuts khuwaldanaas nugalaа zawkhrald* (Ulaanbaatar, 1991).

⁵ Richard C. Thornton, in *The Comintern and the Chinese Communists, 1928-1931* (Seattle, 1969), long ago delivered a powerful critique of Benjamin Schwartz's thesis that Maoism represented a struggle of the correct native line against obviously wrong-headed ideas imposed by ignorant Soviet communists and their Chinese acolytes. Shum Kui-kwong, in *The Chinese Communists' Road to Power: The Anti-Japanese National United Front, 1935-1945* (Hong Kong, 1988), has done the same for the Maoist historiography of the second United Front period.

One reason this simplification has gone unchallenged for so long is that even the leading personalities of the Comintern lived their lives in secrecy and died in obscurity, often in the camps of the Soviet Gulag, while those who have later criticized them had all the apparatus of the state in their hands to spread their views. To this date, few monographic studies of the notorious "Comintern agents" have appeared.⁶

A study of the life of one such representative, A.I. Oshirov (c. 1901–1931), a Buriat Mongol who was assigned to the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia (1924–1946), demonstrates the inadequacy of the view that such representatives either always represented the interests of the Soviet Union over those of the local parties to which they were assigned, or that they were always bumbleres demanding that everything be done exactly the way Lenin had done it in October. It also shows that these representatives were far from being pure instruments of the international Communist apparatus, with no thoughts other than those their programmers had instilled in them. Oshirov's background among the Buriats of Russian Siberia was a uniquely appropriate one for his work among the Mongols of China's Inner Mongolia. Yet if his work there had any fault it was in giving too much support to the local Inner Mongol party leadership and in not exercising enough his function of guidance and leadership. For this fault he was replaced, in 1927.

Yet contrary to the received view of the Comintern, the changes made by his replacement, M.I. Amagaev, were not destructive, nor were they imposed on the party by force. What did almost destroy the party in 1928 was a series of ill-considered uprisings which were sponsored as much, if not more, by young hotheads in the party as by the advice of the Comintern. When Oshirov returned to Inner Mongolia after an absence of several years it was to implement another change of line, this time one that pushed the Inner Mongolian revolutionaries into close union with the Chinese Communist Party. Again, contrary to received opinion, this change was not unwelcome to substantial parts of

⁶ See the comments in Branko Lazitch, with Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford, 1973), v-xiii. Mikhail Markovich Borodin seems to be the only Comintern representative in Asia to have received a full scale biography in English—see Dan N. Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge, 1981).

the Inner Mongolian party movement, although it was rejected by others.

Oshirov played no part in its implementation, however. He was captured just after crossing the border in 1931 and executed by local Inner Mongolian border guards. He thus participated in virtually the whole first stage in the history of the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia. His death coincided with its eclipse, as one part merged with the Chinese Communists, one part gradually lost touch with the party center, while others to the east were reduced to being impotent conspirators working underground in the new Japanese-sponsored Inner Mongolian autonomous governments. His involvement offers a glimpse into how the implementation of the Communist International's policies towards local parties was mediated by individuals who unavoidably brought their own personal histories into play.

Oshirov's Background Among the Buriat Mongols (1901–1924)

Aleksandr Ivanovich Oshirov was born among the Buriats of Russia. The Buriats were Mongols who had been incorporated into the Russian Empire in the seventeenth century and had undergone a more or less profound process of cultural change and adaptation. Up through World War II, however, most continued to preserve their language and traditional religion, be it shamanism or Buddhism.⁷ The Buriats of the Ekhirit, Bulagat, and Alair clans, who lived west of Lake Baikal, were subject to a greater pressure from Russian immigration, which by the early twentieth century led to profound changes in their originally pastoral nomadic way of life.⁸ In addition, these western Buriats, unlike the southern (Selenge, Tsongol, and Sartuul) and eastern (Khorii, Barguzhin, Aga) Buriats did not adopt Buddhism, and had relatively low literacy in the Mongol script. Thus Russian high culture, in the form of Russian as a written language and the Christian religion,

⁷ On the Buriats, see James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (Cambridge, 1992); Caroline Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm* (Cambridge, 1983), "Buriats" in Graham Smith, *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (London, 1990), 290-303.

⁸ Caroline Humphrey, "The uses of genealogy: A historical study of the nomadic and sedentarized Buryat," in *Pastoral Production and Society* (Cambridge, 1979), 235-260.

also spread more widely among them than it did to the south or east of Lake Baikal. Yet all through the Buriat lands, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a Buriat intelligentsia that placed the dual question of identity and progress, especially as this identity related to Buriat religion, at center stage.⁹

The childhood of A.I. Oshirov well illustrates the cultural trends among the Buriats in the first quarter of the twentieth century.¹⁰ He was born among the Alair Buriats living west of the Baikal, in a village called Togot (Mongolian *Tost*, Buriat *Tohoto*), near the present day town of Kunulik, on the Trans-Siberian railway. Although the village was purely Buriat, Aleksandr's father, Ivan Anatol'evich Oshirov, was actually not a pure Buriat, but the son of Anatol Szczeglowski, a Pole exiled to Siberia for his participation in the Polish uprising of 1863. Szczeglowski married a Buriat woman, but both he and his wife died soon after the birth of Ivan, their only son. Left an orphan and destitute, Ivan was taken in by the family of one of his wife's relatives, a wealthy but childless shamaness (*udgan*). She died soon afterwards, and Ivan was able to claim her property as his own. Rumor had it that he had in fact killed her by using her own shamanic magic. Sheep's milk sliced with a knife in a special way and fed to an old person will supposedly kill him or her.

However that may be, Ivan turned the property he inherited from the old shamaness into a flourishing estate. He married a Buriat woman, Agafiia Vladimirovna, from the village Moilt about twelve kilometers from Togot. Agafiia was of the Tarkhai clan who had the title of *shülenge* or gentry. Up to the revolution, this title was preserved on a leather diploma dating from the mid-seventeenth century,

⁹ On the revival in general, see Robert Rupen, "The Buryat Intelligentsia" *Far Eastern Quarterly* XV (1956), 383-398. On specific figures, see Dorji Banzarov, trans. Jan Nattier and John R. Krueger, "The Black Faith or Shamanism among the Mongols," *Mongolian Studies* VII (1981-2), 53-91, Robert Rupen, "Cyben Zamcaranovic Zamcarano," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 19 (1956), 126-145; Thubten J. Norbu and Dan Martin, *Dorjiev: Memoirs of a Tibetan Diplomat*. (Hôka Bunka Kenkyû no. 17, 1992). On the dynamic of identity and progress (or "essentialism" and "epochalism") among developing and colonized peoples, see Clifford Geertz's essay "After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States" in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 234-254.

¹⁰ The information on the childhood of A.I. Oshirov is derived from interviews with his younger sister Ochiryn Namsraiaw.

before Mongolia's division between the Manchu and Russian empires. Ivan's specialty was raising horses of the Orlov breed, for which he received a medal from the local government.¹¹ The family also raised many other types of livestock. They also kept bees, and Ivan would supplement their diet with game shot in the forests. His youngest daughter (Ina, later Namsraiaw) remembered a childhood of abundance and plenty, with fresh milk and cream available regularly. Ivan was a respected member of the community as well, being accepted into the Fourteenth Branch of the Khonggodor clan of his mother and his shamaness guardian. (His Russo-Buriat surname, Oshirov, also came from his mother's relatives.) Thus Ivan's social position combined an honored role within the local Buriat society with a prosperity that brought recognition from Russian society as well. His pale skin and large nose, inherited from his father, may have also helped him win recognition in a Siberian society in which anti-Asian racism was becoming stronger.¹²

The Oshirov family were typical examples of the characteristically Buriat (but rapidly evolving) culture in the valley of the Angara River. Previously, the inhabitants of the Togot village had practiced trans-humance, moving between a summer and a winter camp, but the local Buriats felt that their traditional summer pastures had been ruined by the Trans-Siberian railway which was laid in this region around 1893-5.¹³ In the same period, coal mines were also opened at Cheremkhovo (about 25 km down the line to the south-east). As a result, the Khonggodor clan settled down permanently in the Togot village, the old winter camp.

The Oshirov family lived in a sort of permanent yurt; it had a traditional lattice-work yurt frame, but it was covered by wood, not felt. The mother of the family, Agafiia Vladimirovna, was a Christian --her whole village of Moilt had been baptized in the nearby river by the

¹¹ See *Great Soviet Encyclopedia: A Translation of the Third Edition*, vol. 18 (New York, 1974), under "Orlov Trotter," 561.

¹² Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 220-223. Serge Wolff, who met Ivan's eldest daughter and her husband in Germany, received from them the impression that Ivan was a Russian man: "Mongol Delegations in Western Europe, 1925-1929," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 32 (1945), 292

¹³ Stephen G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917* (Ithaca, 1991), 171-2, 179-180.

local Orthodox priests. Thus all the children had Christian names and an icon of St. Nicholas was hung on the wall. Ivan, however, stuck to the shamanism of his maternal ancestors and St. Nicholas had to share the wall with his *ongods*, or dolls that were home for the spirits of the clan ancestors, especially shamans. Only shortly before his death, in 1926 did he abandon shamanism. By that time, however, the dominant role that Orthodox Christianity had played in his youth was a thing of the past. Ivan converted to Buddhism; he held a great feast and then "saw off" his *ongods* (*ongodyg khariulakh*), by taking them off into the forest and burning them. In the few months before his death, a table with the White Tara (*Tsagaan Dari Ekh*), a Buddhist goddess favored as a protectress by the Mongols, occupied the place of honor in the yurt.

For Ivan and Agafia's children, at least nine of whom survived to adulthood, education was largely in the Russian style. The whole family did know the Mongol script, but the children also knew Russian.¹⁴ Grigorii, the eldest, was an avid reader--his favorite reading was the Brockhaus-Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary (*Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauz i Efron*), which his father had at home.¹⁵ Through this encyclopedia, Grigorii began to acquire a different cultural perspective; he made a hobby of growing tomatoes and carrots in a garden, but the Oshirov family retained the traditional Mongol disdain for vegetables and refused them. Once when a villager went insane, Grigorii was able to diagnose his illness using the concepts he had learned from the encyclopedia.

When the Russian revolution broke out, it was natural that Ivan Anatol'evich, as a wealthy farmer-rancher and the son-in-law of a minor Buriat gentry family, would support the privileged against the rebellious Bolsheviks. He supplied the troops of General Kappel', commander of Kolchak's Second Army with food and mounts, and Agafia Vladimirovna was proud to recall that Kappel', whom she considered a gracious and well-educated man, had once dined at their house. This

¹⁴ The only personal letter I have seen that was written in Mongolian by A.I. Oshirov was dictated to an Inner Mongolian associate. From Oshirov's Mongolian signature on it, he does not seem to have used Mongolian as an everyday written language.

¹⁵ The *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* was published in St. Petersburg in 82 volumes, from 1890 to 1904. The publication was a joint effort between F.A. Brockhaus in Leipzig and I.A. Efron in St. Petersburg.

must have happened during Kappel's epic retreat in January, 1920, and demanded considerable courage on the part of the Oshirovs, as the end of the White regime was by then clearly in sight. Ivan Oshirov even allowed White detachments to store grenades in their house. With the collapse of the Kolchak regime in November, 1919–January, 1920, many friends and relatives who had fought for the Whites fled to China and Khölön Buir.

We know that Aleksandr Ivanovich did not follow in his parents' path and in the end joined the Bolsheviks. Unfortunately, there is no evidence on exactly how this happened. When the revolution broke out, Aleksandr, then about sixteen years old, was attending a non-classical high school (*real'nye uchilishcha*) in Irkutsk. The Bolsheviks took power in Irkutsk on January 8, 1918. From the beginning, though, Siberia was hostile to Bolshevik sectarianism. Through his schoolmates, Oshirov had become involved in student political activity but he, too, was not a Bolshevik. Thus, when a coalition of non-Bolshevik parties, spearheaded by *iunkers* (cadets in military high school), staged a rebellion against the ruling party in July, Oshirov supported them.¹⁶ There is no sign that he was active during the ensuing civil war (1918–1920 in Buriatia)—it must not be forgotten that he was still under twenty at the time.¹⁷ Yet his youthful support for the *iunker* rebellion placed him in great danger of being taken automatically for an anti-Bolshevik, should the Bolsheviks return.

The first Soviet government in Siberia was overthrown by foreign intervention in June–August, 1918. From that point forward, a partisan movement had operated at a low level among Siberia's peasants. By September, 1919, the arbitrary exactions of the White regime and its Allied supporters had caused this movement to mushroom. Beginning in November 1919, partisans were active in the Alair and other Buriat regions west of the Baikal, but there is no evidence that

¹⁶ See *Great Soviet Encyclopedia: A Translation of the Third Edition*, vol. 21 (New York, 1975), under "realschule," 528, and vol. 30 (1982), under "iunker," 448. Irkutsk had both a *iunker* school and a preparatory school for the Siberian cadets corps—see *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* vol. 25 (St. Petersburg, 1894), under "Irkutsk."

¹⁷ On the Russian revolution in Buryatia, see Russel E. Snow, "The Russian Revolution of 1917–18 in Transbaikalia," *Soviet Studies* 23 (1971–2), 201–215, and *The Bolsheviks in Siberia, 1917–1918* (London, 1977).

A.I. Oshirov was involved with them.¹⁸ As the Kolchak regime disintegrated and the Red Army advanced from the west, Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and some Bolsheviks created a leading organ, called the Political Center, to demand an end to the White regime. From December 19, 1919, onwards, regiments under the Center's control began to openly seize power in town after town in Central Siberia. The Political Center finally came to power in Irkutsk on January 5, 1920 and executed Admiral Kolchak on February 7, 1920. The Political Center hoped to establish a buffer region between the Soviet government to the west and the Japanese occupied area to the east, but within a few weeks Bolshevik elements in Irkutsk had, supported by the advancing Red Army, dispersed the Political Center and brought the Soviet republic's borders to the shores of Lake Baikal. The buffer plan was, however, put into effect east of the Baikal, where the Far Eastern Republic was formed. Its leadership was, behind the scenes, securely in Communist hands.¹⁹

At first, the local Bolsheviks and their Buriat supporters declared that under the Soviet regime, the Buriats "have no need of any autonomy whatsoever." From Moscow, however, Lenin intervened in January, 1921, to create a Central Committee of the Buriat-Mongols of East Siberia. For almost a year, he was unable to secure the formation of a definite Buriat autonomous area. The creation of a Buriat-Mongol Autonomous Region in the Far Eastern Republic, however, pushed the Irkutsk government to create its own Mongol-Buriat [sic] Autonomous Region on January 9, 1922. Although the territory, a non-contiguous patchwork of five districts (*aimag*), was 70% Buriat, only about 100 of the grand total of 353 Communist Party members were Buriat.²⁰ It was in this context that many figures who might otherwise have been treated with disdain were allowed into the party and government, and among them was Oshirov.

¹⁸ G.D. Basaev and S.I. Erbanova, *M.N. Erbanov* (Ulan-Ude, 1989), 39-40. On the partisans in Siberia, see David Footman, "Siberian partisans in the Civil War," *Soviet Affairs* 1 (1956), 24-53.

¹⁹ On the Civil War in Buriatia and the restoration of the Communist regime there, see Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (New York, 1951), 350-363 and Paul Dotsenko, *The Struggle for Democracy in Siberia, 1917-1920* (Stanford, 1983), 110-120.

²⁰ Boris Chichlo, "Histoire de la formation des territoires autonomes chez les peuples turco-mongols de la Sibérie," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 28 (1987), 362-401, and especially, 367-371.

In December, 1922, at the First Congress of Soviets of the Buriat-Mongol Autonomous Regional, A.I. Oshirov was elected to the fourteen-man Regional Executive Committee (*oblispolkom*) of the Russian Republic's Mongol-Buriat region.²¹ With the final withdrawal of the Japanese from the Siberian mainland, and the merger of the Far Eastern Republic with the Russian Republic in October 1922, the two republics' autonomous regions were merged and elevated to form the Buriat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (BMASSR) as proclaimed on May 22, 1923. As an Autonomous Republic, this new state had a Soviet (or Council) of People's Commissars, just as did the Soviet Union as a whole. Here A.I. Oshirov, barely in his twenties, served as People's Commissar of Agriculture.²²

The Soviet Union & Inner Mongolia: Forming a Policy (1924-1927)

The Soviet Union and China established diplomatic relations in May, 1924. The new ambassador, Lev Mikhailovich Karakhan (1889-1937), quickly began to set up the apparatus to implement the Soviet Union's two-fold policy: regular diplomatic relations through formal embassy personnel, and clandestine contacts with various dissident forces in China, carried on both by the Communist International and the Soviet military advisers.²³ Oshirov was chosen to play a role in this second, highly sensitive, aspect of Soviet policy. From the beginning, both the Buriat Mongols and Russian Siberian Communist organization played an important role in the formation of the USSR's Asian policy. The Communist International's Secretariat for the Far East, formed in 1921, was chaired by Boris Zakharovich Shumiatskii (1886-1943), the Communist Party boss of Siberia.²⁴ It also included the red-haired Grigorii Naumovich Voitinskii (1893-1953) and his wife Mariia Kuznetsova. In spring, 1920, Voitinskii had undertaken one of the first Soviet Communist missions to China and from November,

²¹ Basaev and Erbanova, *M.N. Erbanov*, 66-67.

²² Interview with Ochiryn Namsraijaw, April 3 and May 13, 1992.

²³ See his biography, V.V. Sokolov, *Na boevykh postakh diplomaticheskogo fronta: zhizn' i deiatel'nost' L.M. Karakhana* (Moscow, 1983).

²⁴ See Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, under "Shumiatsky, Boris Zakharovich" and S. Demberel, *Nert Khuwisgalch B.Z. Shumyatskii* (Ulaanbaatar, 1975).

1923, to July, 1927, he was the senior representative of the Comintern in China.²⁵ Another member of the Far Eastern Secretariat was Mikhei Nikolaevich Erbanov (1889-1938), who was Oshirov's superior, both as the chairman of the Regional Executive Committee of the RSFSR's Mongol-Buriat Autonomous Region, and as the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars in the BMASSR.²⁶ Erbanov quite possibly brought Oshirov to the attention of the Secretariat as a potential representative.

From its very inception, the Buriat-Mongol Republic was closely linked to the Soviet Union's hopes for influence in the east.²⁷ The Russian People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs had strongly advocated raising Buriat autonomy from the provincial to the autonomous republic level precisely in order to demonstrate to the Asian peoples the uniqueness of Soviet Russia's minority policy.²⁸ At the same time, the Siberian organization was likewise closely involved. In July, 1920, an Oriental Political Bureau was created under B.Z. Shumiatskii's Siberian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party's Central Committee. The Bureau was organized into four departments: Mongolian-Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. It primarily dealt with the peoples of those nationalities who lived in Siberia, although its propaganda was meant to have wider influence. The Mongolian-Tibetan Department was particularly active in promoting the development of the Mongolian People's Party of Outer Mongolia into a significant force in winter 1920-1921, organizing Buriats like El'bekdorzhi R. Rinchino and Tsyben Zh. Zhamtsarano to join the party. The Department also published the newspaper *Monggol-un Ünen* ("Mongolia's Truth"), in Mongolian.

²⁵ See Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, under "Voitinski, Grigori" and James Pinckney Harrison, *The Long March to Power: A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1972* (New York, 1972), 27-30, 55, 67-8, 100-101, 120.

²⁶ See the photograph in Basaev and Erbanova, *M.N. Erbanov*, plate 3.

²⁷ The following discussion of the Comintern's relations with East Asia and Mongolia derives, apart from the sources mentioned, from an interview conducted in April, 1992, with Dr. Sanjiin Damdinsüren (Ulaanbaatar) who has worked extensively in Comintern and MPRP archives. I would like to record here my thanks to him.

²⁸ Chichlo, "Histoire de la formation des territoires autonomes . . ." *Cahiers du monde russes et soviétiques* 28 (1987), 370.

In June 1921, the Communist International set up its own Secretariat for the Far East. At that time, the Mongolian-Tibetan Committee was transferred to the Comintern, which was the regular channel for international revolutionary activity. In fact, though, since the Secretariat was headed by B.Z. Shumiatskii, the difference between the old set-up (under the Siberian Bureau) and the new one (under the Comintern's Secretariat for the Far East) was nominal. After April, when the People's Army led by the Mongolian People's Party built a base in Mongolia, the Mongolian Tibetan Department and its *Monggol-un Ünen* lapsed, being replaced by direct ties between Mongolia and the Comintern. Many Buriats, of whom E.R. Rinchino and Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano were only the most prominent, moved south to Mongolia in the wake of the Mongolian People's Party's victory. Most of these initial Buriat advisers were suspect characters in their own homeland, former Social Revolutionaries under a cloud for previous nationalist and anti-Bolshevik activity. Rather than simply liquidating them, however, the Russian Communists encouraged them to go south and work to develop Mongolia along revolutionary lines.²⁹

The Comintern's Secretariat for the Far East was abolished early in 1922, and replaced by the Eastern Department, which was under the Comintern's general Secretariat. Shumiatskii, who was being ap-pointed as ambassador to Persia, was replaced as head of the new organ by a hotblooded revolutionary romantic, Fedor Fedorovich Raskolnikov (alias Petrov, 1892-1939).³⁰ In 1924, in the wake of the controversy surrounding the execution of S. Danzan, the Comintern's links to the Mongolian People's Party were strengthened. The People's Party was officially admitted as a candidate member of the Comintern, with deliberative rights in its Congresses. In August 1924, the Kazak Bolshevik Turar Ryskulovich Ryskulov (alias Khasagbai/Kazakbay,

²⁹ Robert Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1 (Bloomington, 1964), 201-203, 239. Of course Zhamtsarano and other Buriats had been active in Mongolia during its first period of independence/autonomy (1911-1919) as well.

³⁰ See biographical notes in Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, under "Raskolnikov, Feodor F." and the sketch in Georges Haupt and Jean-Jacques Marie, trans. C.I.P. Ferdinand and D.M. Bellos, *Makers of the Russian Revolution: Biographies of Bolshevik Leaders* (London, 1974), 202-208.

1894-1938),³¹ was assigned as the first representative; in summer, 1925, he was replaced by Matvei Innokent'evich Amagaev (1897-1937), a Buriat Bolshevik who had earlier been a member of the Central Committee of Buriat-Mongols of Eastern Siberia and chairman of the Far Eastern Republic's Buriat Region, then a member of the Presidium of the BMASSR's Communist Party Committee.³² These appointments mark the eclipse of Social-Revolutionaries, nationalists, and other politically unreliable persons in the Comintern's Mongolian operations and their replacement by Bolsheviks, albeit ones often of non-ethnic Russian origin. At the same time, a Mongolian Commission was organized in the Far Eastern Department to serve as a kind of think-tank for the Comintern's Mongolian policy. Ryskulov and Amagaev were made members, as was Moscow's first consul in Mongolia, A.N. Vasil'ev, and Nikolai Bukharin in Moscow.³³

Raskolnikov's Eastern Department also served as the Comintern's main supervisor for policy towards East Asia (China, Korea, and Japan) as well as Indochina and the Dutch Indies. From 1923 on, the East Asian operation seems to have been under the supervision of Grigorii Voitinskii, then living in Shanghai. As a result, perhaps, of the wide range of tasks for which Voitinskii was responsible and the difficulty of maintaining underground communications, he was able to exercise only a loose coordinating role between the various party organizations in each area. In the Guomindang's southern base, he tended to be eclipsed by the Comintern/Russian Communist Party representative, Mikhail M. Borodin, and in Beijing by the Soviet ambassador Lev M. Karakhan.³⁴ In Inner Mongolia, the earliest links to native revolutionaries were undertaken by El'bekdorzhii Rinchino. As the Communist International became aware of the revolutionary possibilities in Inner Mongolia in the spring and summer of 1925, it came to view the Inner Mongolian revolution primarily as part of the

³¹ See the biographical notes in Aleksandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago, 1979), 205-6.

³² See his biography, N.P. Egunov, *M.I. Amagaev* (Ulan-Ude, 1974).

³³ Biographical notes on A.N. Vasil'ev in *Mongol Ardyn Namyn Gurawdugaar Ikh Khural: 1924 ony naim-yesdügeer sar: delgerengüi temdeglel* (Ulaanbaatar, 1966), 258. On the Commission and Bukharin's views therein, see O. Batsaikhan, "Mongol owogtny negdekhiig esergütsekh," *Il Towchoo* (Ulaanbaatar), no. 7 (40), March 1-10, 1992.

³⁴ Harrison, *Long March to Power*, 67.

Chinese revolution. Thus it was also put under Voitinskii's general supervision. In line with this policy, Ryskulov and Amagaev repeatedly asked the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (as the People's Party was renamed in spring, 1925) to refrain from making direct contact with the Inner Mongols and instead to channel all such contact through the Communist International.

In 1924, young, politically active Inner Mongols were all responding to the Mongolian revolution of 1921.³⁵ In 1922, one group, based in the rich steppes of Khölön Buir, in the northeast corner of Inner Mongolia, had organized an Eastern Border People's Party (*Doronadu Khijagar-un Arad-un Nam*, also known by its unofficial name as the Khölön Buir Youth Party). Led by a Daur Mongol, Mersé, this weakly organized group enjoyed the exclusive patronage of the Mongolian People's Party for two years (1922-1924). El'bekdorzhii R. Rinchino, the powerful Buriat in the Mongolian People's Party, was their main supporter.³⁶

Another group of Mongols, mostly in their thirties and forties and from more Chinese influenced areas of Chakhar and Eastern Inner Mongolia, were members of the Chinese Guomindang. In 1923, they allied with Mersé and began creating their own Inner Mongolian revolutionary organization. In April 1924, a Kharachin Mongol, Serengdonrub, went to independent Mongolia with a proposal to create an ethnically-based Inner Mongol party, to be called the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia.³⁷

³⁵ On the Inner Mongolian revolutionary movement and the People's Revolutionary Party from 1924 to 1931, see Hao Weimin, "Di yi, er ci guonei zhanzheng shiqi de Nei Menggu Renmin Geming Dang," in *Zhongguo Menggu Shi Xuehui chengli dahui jinian jikan* (Khökhkhota, 1979), 580-604, L. Jamsran, "MAKhN, Öwör Mongolyn Ardyn khuwisgalt nam üüsch bekhjikhed tusalsan ni," *Dornodakhiny sudlal*, 1991, no. 1 (24), 11-17, and Christopher Atwood, "National Party and Local Politics in Ordos, Inner Mongolia (1926-1935)," *Journal of Asian History* 26 (1992), 1-30.

³⁶ Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, Central Party Archives (Ulaanbaatar), 7-1-29: 13, 26-27; 7-1-20: 42-43, A. Lumburai, "Ardyn Tsergiin ankhny tagnuulch," *Ardyn Erkh*, Oct. 4, 1991, no. 17 (243), 4; Christopher Atwood, "Nationalism and Localism: the Origins of the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia" (M.A. Thesis, Indiana University, 1990), 78-81.

³⁷ *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 7 (v. 408), 107-109; "Shou Wai Menggu yingxiang zhi Nei Menggu chihua yundong," *Chen Bao*

Probably the earliest Inner Mongols to get in contact with the Soviet embassy were some agrarian radicals from Ordos, on the bend of the Yellow River in southwest Inner Mongolia. From the mid-nineteenth century, these radicals had been organized into *duguilangs*, or "circles." In recent years, however, the native Mongol princes, helped by the Chinese military authorities, had almost entirely suppressed the *duguilangs*. The rebel leaders were forced to either stop their activity or go into exile. Among the exiles were two in Beijing: Wangdanimba, the Bandida Gegen, or incarnate lama of Jasag Banner, and Öljeijirgal, a clerk and *duguilang* leader from Üüshin banner. Wangdanimba was close to Serengdonrub's group, but the Üüshin leader, Öljeijirgal, aimed to link the Ordos *duguilangs* directly to the new Mongolian government. He left for Mongolia in August, 1924, taking fifteen *duguilang* comrades from Üüshin banner with him to plead for aid and acquire a political and military education.

In the fall of 1924, another of the Chinese republic's interminable warlord conflicts had broken out. This time, Marshal Feng Yuxiang (1882-1948), a relatively progressive-minded commander, was able to occupy Beijing. He declared a truce, however, with the reactionary Zhang Zuolin (1875?-1928), warlord of Northeast China, a truce which allowed Zhang's forces to share in the occupation of Beijing. Feng expelled the former Qing Emperor, Puyi, from the Forbidden City, declared that the Chinese republic would tolerate no more monarchist revivals and renamed his troops the Citizen Army (*Guominjun*). By December 1925, Feng's Citizen Army had taken control of the western half of Inner Mongolia.³⁸

Overnight, this development changed the political possibilities in Inner Mongolia. Mersé, from the Eastern Border People's Party, went south to Beijing to examine the new situation. There he met Guomindang Mongols in Beijing, such as Serengdonrub. Together, in early December 1924, they formed the People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia that had first been proposed to Mongolia the previous

(Beijing), Jan. 31, 1927; *Zhonghua Minguo shishi jiyao (chugao)* 1924, vol. 1 (Yonghe County, 1979), 416-7; MPRP, Central Party Archives, 7-1-20: 8-11, 7-1-19: 1.

³⁸ James C. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-hsiang* (Stanford, 1966); Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China: 1911-1928* (Stanford, 1977).

April.³⁹ Sun Yat-sen, leading the pro-Soviet Guomintang party in southern China, also saw great opportunities for a peaceful reunification of China. That month, Sun Yat-sen came north to Beijing and appointed Guomintang party representatives to go to each province and agitate for a National Assembly. Serengdonrub and a young Communist Mongol were appointed to do this work among the Mongols of Inner Mongolia.⁴⁰

Marshal Feng's new territory, however large, lacked either a seaport or an arsenal. If he wished to keep his Citizen Army armed he would have to turn to the Soviet Union which could supply him overland via the Mongolian People's Republic. From March on, the Chinese Citizen Armies and the Soviet Union began courting each other. In this new atmosphere, Soviet citizens acquired a new freedom to leave the embassy and visit the countryside. Until then they had only been able to work in Beijing. There, in summer, 1924, Oshirov, going under the more standard Mongol form of his name (either as Ochir, Ochirov, or Ochirun), had begun working out of the Soviet Union's Beijing embassy, along with a Russian military man named Ledogorov. In that year, Oshirov got to know some popular leaders from the Ordos region in western Inner Mongolia. Oshirov impressed them as a good man, but his Russian customs, such as embracing and kissing old acquaintances mystified the more traditional Ordos Mongols.⁴¹ In March, 1925, however, A.I. Oshirov, in the company of He Zishen, a representative of the Chinese Communist Party's Beijing-based Northern Committee, made what was probably his first trip into the Inner Mongolian countryside.⁴²

Through the summer of 1925, Oshirov's main task, along with Comintern representatives in Mongolia itself, like Turar R. Ryskulov,

³⁹ *Mongol Ardyn Khuwīgalt Namyn Döröwdüģeer Ikh Khural: 1925 yesdüģeer saryn 23--arawdugaar saryn 1: delģerengüi tailan* (Ulaanbaatar, 1978), 50; MPRP, Central Party Archives: 7-1-18: 22-23; 7-1-29: 16-17.

⁴⁰ Luo Jialun and Huang Jilu, eds., *Guofu nianpu* (Taipei, 1969), 1169-1170.

⁴¹ Üüsin qosigun-u Sinelam-a-yin durasqal-un suburg-a bosqagsan yosulal-un yeke quralun uduriduqu duguyilang, *Gilaljagsan nigen nasu* (Üüshin Banner, 1985), 100-101.

⁴² Du Fan and Wuriġitu, "Nei Mengģu dashġi changbian (1919.5.4-1949.10.1)," in *Nei Mengģu shizhi ziliao xuanbian*, vol. 7, *Dashġi zhuanze* (Khökhkhota: n.d.), 187.

was getting the disparate political groups in Inner Mongolia to cease relying solely on salvation from Mongolia, and begin relying more on each other. The new People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia (PRPIM, Mongolian *Dotoodu Monggol-un Arad-un Khubiskhaltu Nam*) encompassed Serengdonrub's Guomindang group, as well as some of the Khölön Buir group and Wangdanimba from the Ordos group. Yet the Khölön Buir-based Eastern Border People's Party (EBPP) was still officially separate with much of its leadership in Ulaanbaatar. In February 1925, another party appeared, the Inner Mongolian Youth Party (*Dotoodu Monggol-un Jaluuchud-un Nam*).⁴³ It was composed of young Mongol students from Beijing's Mongolian and Tibetan school, in their twenties or late teens, almost all from banners with heavy Chinese settlement where the Mongols themselves were beginning to take up farming. The party was inspired by Sosordawa, a Mongol from independent Mongolia's youth league, who in fall, 1924, came to Beijing to proclaim the gospel of radical pan-Mongolist ideas. Pan-Mongolian in its thinking, the Youth Party was strongly hostile to the PRPIM, calling it the party of the rich and the nobility.⁴⁴

All of these parties were in a competition for the favor of the Soviet Union, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) or both. Originally the EBPP had the inside track in Ulaanbaatar, but its patron Rinchino was recalled to Buriatia that summer in semi-disgrace. The PRPIM had two advantages which proved telling: it carried with it the blessing of support from Sun Yat-sen and the Guomindang center and it counted members from all over Inner Mongolia. Given that the Soviet Union was committed to the Guomindang as the central force in China's revolution (and that it hoped to build up a powerful all-Inner Mongolian organization), these two properties were crucial. In contrast, the EBPP was amorphous and existed only in a small area, and the Youth Party was too young, too socially radical, and too pan-Mongolist.

⁴³ This party should not be confused either with the "Khölön Buir Youth Party," the commonly found, unofficial name of the Eastern Border People's Party (EBPP), or the Young Men's Party of South Mongolia (*Öbör Monggol-un Jaluus-un Nam*) of the 1940s.

⁴⁴ Wulanfu geming shiliao bianyanshi, *Wulanfu huiyilu* (Beijing, 1989), 56-57; MPRP, Central Party Archives: 7-1-23: 12; 7-1-73: 6; 7-1-26: 31-37, 49-53.

The People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia got in touch with visiting Mongolian dignitaries in late April, 1925. Party members approached the Soviet embassy in Beijing in the second half of May, 1925, if not before, and the ambassador Karakhan was amenable to arming Inner Mongol troops as long as approval for such a force by Marshal Feng, the local authority, could be arranged. As one embassy report, possibly by Oshirov, put it:

We must admit that . . . even supposing that these organizations [the PRPIM and an alliance of Chinese militias] as a whole will be able to get together only one half of the number of men they promised, i.e. 5,000, still such a mass of cavalry in the rear of Chang Tso-lin [Zhang Zuolin] may decide the issue of the war.⁴⁵

From May to July 1925, Serengdonrub and comrades were in Ulaanbaatar negotiating with the leadership of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP). Their proposals envisioned a merger of the PRPIM with the EBPP, the subordination of both to the MPRP, and financial and military aid from the Soviet Union and Mongolia.⁴⁶

The MPRP supported these proposals, as long as the role of the MPRP was kept secret, and was preparing to send a representative to Moscow to ratify this policy. In July, however, Grigorii Voitinskii, the Comintern representative in Shanghai and Oshirov's boss, passed through Ulaanbaatar on unrelated business. When he heard what was going on, he asked the MPRP to delay sending any representative to Moscow. Voitinskii asked that the MPRP not interfere directly in the affairs of the Inner Mongolian party, leaving that up to the Communist International's organization in China. The crucial point was that policy towards Inner Mongolia had to be coordinated with policy towards China, especially towards the Guomindang and Marshal Feng's Citizen Army. Serengdonrub and the others had no choice but to go along--after all, what they needed above all was money and weapons, and ultimately the Soviet Union was the only source for that--but the Inner Mongols were not happy about it.⁴⁷

The task of unifying the Inner Mongolian parties was complicated by the role of Li Dazhao (1888-1927), the main Chinese Com-

⁴⁵ *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 7 (v. 408), 112.

⁴⁶ MPRP Central Party Archives, 7-1-18: 24-26, 29-31.

⁴⁷ *Mongol Ardyn Khuwisgalt Namyn Döröwdügeer Ikh Khural*, 50-51; MPRP Central Party Archives: 4-1-364: 19-20; 7-1-26: 3; 7-1-19: 2.

munist in Beijing.⁴⁸ Although he himself insisted that the Inner Mongolian revolution was an inter-ethnic task, involving both Chinese and Mongols, Li was influential among the young Mongol students in Beijing, even among those who formed the Youth Party. Li assigned a Chinese disciple of his, Han Linfu, to bring together an Inner Mongolian front organization that would embody the Communist program of an inter-ethnic Inner Mongolian struggle. Han was unable to recruit successfully among Mongols, however, and hence turned to ethnic Chinese farmers and bandit groups in the southern part of Inner Mongolia, with only a few Mongol students participating. The resulting front, called the Grand Alliance of Inner Mongolian Peasants, Workers, and Soldiers, approached Oshirov at the Soviet embassy in May, 1925, asking for it to intercede with Marshal Feng on their behalf, and also to supply them with ammunition.⁴⁹

The Soviet embassy was thus presented with a murky, three-cornered relationship between the Grand Alliance, the Youth Party, and the PRPIM. The Grand Alliance had some kind of relations with the PRPIM, but they were not close. The Youth Party and Serengdonrub's PRPIM were both exclusively Mongol parties, but the former was younger, more radical, and more alienated from the Mongol elite. The Grand Alliance's idea of a multi-ethnic revolutionary struggle would seem to exclude the Youth Party's pan-Mongolism, but in recruiting Mongols the Chinese Communist Party and the Youth Party successfully drew on essentially the same pool of students in Beijing's Mongolian and Tibetan School. Many young Mongols joined the Youth Party and the Chinese Communist Party simultaneously.

The ramifications of these conflicts extended beyond Inner Mongolian politics alone. Li Dazhao and Han Linfu were not only Communists, they were also members of the Guomindang, and among the most active members of the Beijing Political Council (BPC), the major GMD organization in northern China.⁵⁰ The BPC handled

⁴⁸ See Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (New York, 1973).

⁴⁹ Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Communist Party*, vol. 1, 1921-1927 (Lawrence, 1971), 129, 338; MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-23: 12.

⁵⁰ The Beijing Political Council contained nine members, of whom four, Li Dazhao, Han Linfu (Communist faction), Xu Qian (Left Guomindang), and Yu Youren (centrist), showed evidence of interest in the Inner Mongolian question.

negotiations both with the Mongolian People's Republic and with the Soviet Union. Serengdonrub, despite having been appointed by Sun Yat-sen as the chief GMD figure in Inner Mongolia, was not a member and a rivalry between Li Dazhao and Serengdonrub over who would control Inner Mongolian policy can be traced back as far as the First Congress of the GMD in January 1924. Since Serengdonrub was close to Dambadorji and other members of the Mongolian government, tension between him and the PRPIM on the one hand and Li, Han, the BPC, and the Inner Mongolian Youth Party on the other, could derail the already not-very-stable relations between Mongolia and the GMD. At the same time, it could lead to an exacerbation of relations between the right and left in the United Front the Comintern was trying to hold together.

It fell to Oshirov to try to reconcile the two Inner Mongol parties. Both were too promising to be ignored: in July-August, the PRPIM had 300 full members and 3,000 candidates, while the Youth Party had only 30 full members but somewhere between 800 to 1,500 candidate members.⁵¹ When Serengdonrub returned to Beijing in July, he met with Karakhan, Oshirov, and Li Dazhao. The latter, in his capacity as a member of the BPC, gave the formal approval of the Guomindang to organize the PRPIM, but seems to have extracted an understanding from Serengdonrub that his hitherto all-Mongol organization would admit ethnic Chinese.⁵² Serengdonrub refused to accept this denouement, however, and relations between the PRPIM and the Soviet Union and the BPC seem to have cooled. At the party's Provisional Meeting of July 26, 1925, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP)'s representative in Beijing attended, but neither Oshirov nor any representative of the Soviet Union or the BPC was invited. Serengdonrub's report (delivered at the assembly) on the latest party activities mentioned only the mission to Ulaanbaatar and ignored all of the important talks with the Soviet embassy.⁵³

Afterwards, however, Oshirov proved to Serengdonrub the worth of the Comintern ties by mediating a dispute between the Youth Party and the PRPIM. By the middle of August, notes one observer, "He has given [the two parties] the appearance of friendship," and,

⁵¹ *Mongol Ardyn Khuwīgalt Namyn Döröwdüger Ikh Khural*, 51; MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-26: 52; 7-1-23: 12.

⁵² MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-23: 11.

⁵³ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-26: 1-2; foto-fond B3.01.1.

perhaps as a reward, Oshirov was invited to join in drawing up the documents to be ratified at the October Congress. By the opening of the first Congress of the PRPIM, which would seal the unification of the various groups, Oshirov had managed to get the Inner Mongolia Youth Party to dissolve and join the PRPIM in a subordinate role. The new party, however, would be a purely ethnic Mongol party. No ethnic Chinese would be given membership. The Grand Alliance was kept separate, although the two ethnic Mongols in its leadership were elected as alternate members of the PRPIM's Central Committee.⁵⁴ The Inner Mongolian Party was to have deliberative rights in the Comintern's Congresses, just as did the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the Chinese Guomindang.⁵⁵

Meanwhile in Ulaanbaatar, Öljeijirgal was informed that the MPRP would provide no direct aid to him or the Üüshin *duguilangs*. Assistance would come only through the PRPIM. Reluctantly, Öljeijirgal agreed to attend the first Congress, planned for October in Zhangjiakou. The remaining members of the Eastern Border People's Party also tried to preserve their organizational independence, pointing out how the special geographical position of Khölön Buir made revolutionary prospects there especially bright, but the EBPP too was pushed into union with the PRPIM.⁵⁶

The Rehe and Ordos Campaigns: 1925-1927

By the time of the first, constituent, Congress of the PRPIM, A.I. Oshirov had begun to establish his position as an adviser on northern Chinese politics. When the question came up of who to send as the MPRP's representative to the Guomindang, Amagaev, the Comintern's representative in Ulaanbaatar, asked that the Central Committee first consult with Oshirov. At the Congress, Oshirov was

⁵⁴ Central Party Archives, 7-1-23: 11-12; 7-1-26: 49-51; Zhang Jingru, and others, *Li Dazhao shengping shiliao biannian* (Shanghai, 1984), 262-3.

⁵⁵ "Report of the Credentials Commission," *International Press Correspondance*, vol. 8 (no. 81), Nov. 21, 1928, 1532. In fact, the first and only Comintern Congress ever held during the PRPIM CC's period of existence was the Sixth, in 1928, in which two PRPIM representatives did participate with deliberative rights. The assignment of a regular Comintern representative to the party would seem to indicate, however, that the PRPIM was treated as a candidate member of the Comintern before then as well.

⁵⁶ Central Party Archives, 4-1-364: 81; 7-1-29: 14-15; 7-1-20: 14.

one of only three outsiders included in the official photographs--the others were Dambadorji, the chairman of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, and Buyannemekhü, a talented Mongolian writer and poet sent to help the Inner Mongols with propaganda and pamphleteering. Even so, in negotiations over supplying Soviet weapons for a planned Inner Mongol military force, it was not Oshirov but Grigorii Voitinskii and the assistant military attaché Voronin who had the authority to commit the Soviet side.⁵⁷

For the next year and a half, Oshirov would follow the Central Committee as it campaigned first in Rehe and then as it retreated west into Ordos. Yet far from acting as the all-powerful Comintern agent, dictating strategy, he appears in the record primarily as a messenger for the Central Committee. His main task seems to have been to assure a steady supply of guns and money to the party. He did not receive much thanks for taking on this task. Nowhere are his endeavors noted with the kind of generous thanks which Serengdonrub and Mersé expressed about Nasunbatu (1891-1937), a Mongolian Central Committee member sent to Inner Mongolia to advise the PRPIM from August to November, 1926. Again, Oshirov's age may well have been a factor--he was ten to fifteen years younger than the leaders of the PRPIM. Indeed, in biographical notices on the PRPIM leaders he consistently overestimated their ages by five years or more.⁵⁸

Yet another factor may have been his lack of any significant Buriat revolutionary experience. Nowhere in the two lengthy reports on the party that he wrote for the Soviet embassy or in the letter he wrote to the party CC does he ever refer to the historical experiences of Buriatia in the Russian Civil War, or indeed to any aspect of Buriat politics at all. This deprived him of the chance to deliver instruction as one more experienced in the art of Revolution, a pose which Borodin, Voitinskii, and other Russians in China frequently adopted.⁵⁹ Indeed

⁵⁷ MPRP Central Party Archives: 4-1-364: 81; Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, figure 28 (Oshirov in the back row, with a tie); *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 7 (408), 103. Voronin, the assistant Soviet military attaché also participated in these negotiations on weapons supply.

⁵⁸ Compare the ages in *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 7 (v. 408), 107-109 to Hao Weimin, "Di yi, er ci guonei zhanzheng shiqi de Nei Menggu Renmin Geming Dang," in *Zhongguo Menggu Shi Xuehui chengli dahui jinian jikan*, 600-601.

⁵⁹ For example, Allen S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China, 1917-1924* (Stanford, 1953), 245-246; C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen:*

he at least once overestimated the experience of his Inner Mongol collaborators, claiming that one Murungga had been elected to the Chinese parliament and worked with Sun Yat-sen, when in fact it was Murungga's father who had done so.⁶⁰

Yet in his reports, especially his final report on the party, delivered to the embassy on December 6, 1926, before he left for Southern China, Oshirov shows an understanding of the local politics of Inner Mongolia, both as it related to the personalities in the party and the local political realities. Unlike other Soviet advisers, he was well aware of Marshal Feng's unpopularity among the Mongol grass-roots.⁶¹ He was also able to overcome common prejudices among foreigners about Mongolian lamas and accurately relate their unexpectedly "progressive" attitude to the local economic background. Finally, he seems to have been the only outsider to discern the profound internal cleavages among the Inner Mongols, and relate them to differing levels of influence by Chinese culture. His main deficiency was a tendency to be carried away with enthusiasm. He always managed to find a silver lining in every cloud. For example, in discussing the sharp personal feuds which wracked the party, he concluded that these very feuds made each leader anxious to recruit more followers, which led to a rapid expansion of the party ranks.⁶² At the same time, he also showed little awareness of the aims and counsels of Serengdonrub, who became increasingly autocratic as the party's fortunes waned. Thus although his reports do contain sharp insights, they tend to be impressionistic, lacking a sense of what the inner council was planning at any given moment. Serengdonrub seems to have aimed at keeping the Soviet representative at arm's length while drawing the Mongolian government in closer.

After its October Congress, the PRPIM became closely involved in the campaigns of Feng's Citizen Army. Growing tensions with Zhang Zuolin's Fengtian Army led, on November 22, 1925, to

Frustrated Patriot (New York, 1976), 178, 193; Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C. North, *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927: A Documentary Survey* (Stanford, 1957), 218-219.

⁶⁰ *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 7 (v. 408), 107.

⁶¹ See, for example, *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 2 (v. 403), *San . . .*, 10a-b, compared to 17a-b from a military report on Shanxi and Inner Mongolia.

⁶² *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 2 (v. 403), *San . . .*, 12a.

war. On December 3, 1925, Marshal Feng ordered his First Army to invade Rehe.⁶³ According to the agreements reached after the Congress, the PRPIM was to lead a Mongol force to take over the northern part of this region--Jingpeng, Linxi, and Wudan counties--while another army formed from bandits led by Li Dazhao's Grand Alliance of Inner Mongolian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers was to capture Chifeng. By the time that Feng had ordered the attack, however, the weapons promised from the Soviet Union to arm the Inner Mongols still had not come.

In early November, Voitinskii and the embassy's assistant military attaché, Voronin, asked the Mongols to send some of their Soviet-supplied weapons to Inner Mongolia with the understanding that the Soviet Union would replace them. The replies from Ulaanbaatar, however, avoided mentioning weapons. On November 13, the party's Central Committee then wrote an imploring letter to the MPRP Central Committee asking them to act quickly. Likewise, Oshirov "on instructions from the Inner Mongolian People's Party [i.e., the PRPIM]" wired Dambadorji and Amagaev from Beijing to send weapons and if necessary borrow them from Soviet stores on hand.⁶⁴ The existing PRPIM troops, formed from a local Mongol banner militia, numbered 500-600, of whom little more than half were armed. The commander Murungga, a presidium member and local official, had been chosen to lead because the basic militia had earlier been his own force. Although the weapons had not arrived, Murungga attacked anyway. Miraculously the troops succeeded in taking all the cities assigned to them. The low morale of the enemy soldiers, ravaged by opium, and the conspicuous cowardice of their commanders who fled at the first report of enemy action were responsible for this easy victory. The Inner Mongol army swelled to 3,000--of whom perhaps 1,100 were armed.

Oshirov had been near the front, but went back to Beijing before the capture of Wudan. Based on a letter from Murungga dated December 12, he delivered an optimistic report to his superiors, detailing the party's plans to expand the army to five thousand and develop the offensive towards the northwest, eventually into Khölön Buir.

⁶³ On the Rehe campaign see Oshirov's report of December 17, 1925, with comments by Egorov, the Beijing military attaché in *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 7 (v.408), 101-109.

⁶⁴ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-19: 4-7; 7-1-23: 52.

Buried in his report, though, appeared ominous problems. In the report, he assessed the commander, Murungga, as earnest and energetic but "scarcely a real military leader." The weapons requested from Mongolia had not arrived and the Mongol force, whose ranks were swelled by defectors, was still more than half unarmed. Relations between the people and the army were good, but there was no political activity and no political workers to carry it out.

Murungga reported incredibly low casualty figures for the Mongol unit—one dead and four wounded, with 1,000 of the enemy captured at Wudan alone. These figures made it clear either that the front line was not being entirely candid in its reports or that the Mongol force had won against no genuine resistance. Clearly the victories of the first ten days of combat were windfalls, something which the party could not rely on repeating in the face of genuine opposition. Oshirov, however, gave no indication of having tried to restrain Murungga from his plans for further expansion, even though consolidation was obviously necessary.

Within a few days, the tide turned against the Citizen Army. In three days of fighting against Zhang Zuolin's armies on the banks of the Liao River, the vanguard of the Citizen Armies was thrown into a chaotic retreat. By New Year's Day, Marshal Feng was in the mood to make peace; he resigned and went to the Soviet Union in the hopes that his removal might prevent his enemies from allying against him. In January, however, Wu Peifu, leader of the Central Chinese warlord clique, and Zhang Zuolin came to terms and formed an alliance against Feng. Zhang's armies moved back into the Rehe region in February, 1926.

The pamphlets, instructors and some of the weapons demanded in mid-December did finally arrive from Ulaanbaatar late in that month and in the following January.⁶⁵ The Central Committee, however, seems to have lacked any firm plan, moving first from Zhangjiakou to Dolonnuur (to be closer to the front), then to Beijing (to try to control the Central Government's Court of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs), and then off to Ulaanbaatar (to consult with the MPRP).⁶⁶ As Oshirov

⁶⁵ *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 2 (v. 403), Guo . . . , 46a; MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-19: 9, 23-24.

⁶⁶ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-18: 20-21; 7-1-19: 10; S. Rentsensonom, "Öwör Mongolyn tүүххэн amidral," typescript in the archives of the Oriental and International Institute (folder 2-4-4), 51

ruefully acknowledged later, many of the youth and officials who joined the party were wavering elements who dropped out when the tide turned against it.⁶⁷ By the beginning of March, the whole of Rehe was in the hands of Zhang Zuolin's lieutenants, while less than fifty of the party's quondam 3,000-strong cavalry, escaped west to regroup in Suiyuan.⁶⁸ Murungga's reputation, as well as those of others involved in the fiasco, seems to have suffered a major blow; he spent the next year in Mongolia, with no active role to speak of.

Along with the fall of Rehe, Beijing also fell into the hands of the advancing armies. Even before the forces of Zhang Zuolin arrived, the care-taker government of Duan Qirui had cracked down on Guomindang activity. All the members of the Beijing Political Council fled: some like Xu Qian and Yu Youren fled to Mongolia to join Marshal Feng; others like the Communists Li Dazhao took refuge in the Soviet embassy. The embassy itself entered into a virtual state of siege. Embassy officials themselves were allowed limited movement, but anyone in contact with them was liable to be arrested. Unfortunately, Oshirov's movements, like much else about the Inner Mongolian party movement in this period, are obscure.

By the end of August, 1926, however, we know that Oshirov was with Serengdonrub, Mersé, and some other members of the Central Committee, were preparing a desperate attempt to establish a base in the Ordos region.⁶⁹ The Citizen Army's attempt to halt the advance of Zhang Zuolin northwest of Beijing had failed, and the force was disintegrating in the wake of defeat, turning into a predatory bandit horde that picked clean the roads west. The PRPIM originally thought that the remnants of the Citizen Army would retreat all the way to Gansu, leaving virtually all of the Chinese-settled areas of Inner Mongolia under the control of Zhang Zuolin. They hoped to build a rural base in the surrounding ethnically Mongolian steppes in which the party could subsist until a favorable turn in events occurred. In spring and summer, Wangdanima and Öljeijirgal had very encouraging success

⁶⁷ *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 2 (v. 403), *San* . . . , 11b.

⁶⁸ Nozu Akira ("Yejin Peng"), trans. Jin Hai, "Nei Menggu chihua yundong de bianqian," in *Nei Menggu Daxue Zhong-Gong Nei Menggu Diqu Dangshi Yanjiu Suo*, ed., *Nei Menggu jindai shi yi cong* (Khökhkhota, 1986), 128-9.

⁶⁹ On this campaign in Ordos, see Oshirov's report of December 7, 1926, in *Sulian yinmou wenzheng huibian*, vol. 2 (v. 403), *San* . . . , 2b-12a.

in getting *duguilang* members of several Ordos banners to join the party. In several places though, the local rulers reacted with brutal crackdowns, arresting, executing, or fining any who had connection with the "Red Party."

In late August, the Central Committee, accompanied both by Oshirov and the MPRP adviser, Nasunbatu, began a sweep through Ordos. Bringing a motley force of Ordos troops and the remnant of the Rehe campaign along with stores of about 300 rifles, they armed the *duguilang*/party supporters, and forced the banner authorities to sign agreements that granted freedom of political activity to the *duguilangs* and the PRPIM. All the new military forces were placed under the ultimate control of the Central Committee. Despite the sudden death of Wangdanima on the eve of departure, the expedition was a tremendous success, with the party members achieving power in all but the two northeastern banners of Ordos.

In his only first-hand prolonged contact with the Inner Mongolian countryside, Oshirov was struck above all by the insularity of the society and economy. Economically there was no unity even within the Ordos, let alone on an all-Inner Mongolian scale. Each banner depended upon the neighboring Chinese areas for trade, and the resulting Chinese disunity had political repercussions as each Chinese province cultivated ties with neighboring banner princes and strove to keep each banner hostile to the others. Internally, Oshirov was struck by the odd phenomenon that the high lamas and incarnations tended to be vigorous supporters of the party and its reforms, while the secular nobility clung tenaciously to their old privileges. He attributed this unexpected support to the prestige of Wangdanima, who was one of the highest ranking incarnate lamas in the Ordos. Probing still deeper, though, he pinpointed the divisive role of Chinese colonization. The secular nobility used its administrative power to profit from the sale of Mongol lands and to secure bottom-soil rents from the immigrant Chinese tenants.

The lamas, however, who depended upon steady contributions from the faithful for their living, suffered as the Mongols were moved off the land and replaced by Chinese (who did not patronize the old monasteries). At Bagshi-yin Sūme, Wangdanima's old residence, where Chinese colonization had been especially heavy, the several hundred resident lamas were patronized by only thirty households of Mongols. Thus the "religious feudalists" strongly supported the party's calls for

responsible rule that would put the interests of the Mongol people as a whole above the selfish interests of the princes.

At the same time, Oshirov also remarked on the tension between the Mongols from eastern Inner Mongolia and those from Ordos. The East Mongols (as they called themselves), along with some Chinese, were concentrated in the force of forty to fifty soldiers that had been recruited in the Rehe campaign to the east. They also included, of course, Serengdonrub and many other prominent leaders in the Central Committee. The East Mongols considered themselves the most learned and advanced Mongols, due to their contact with secular, Chinese-oriented education, and looked down upon the Ordos Mongols as benighted and backwards herdsmen. Yet the problem was more severe than mere bad feeling. Oshirov did not inform his superiors that early in this campaign the two groups in the party's armed escort had come to blows and the Central Committee had been forced to execute two East Mongol youths for attempted mutiny. Here he was clearly covering for the party leadership, assuming (correctly) that no amount of explanation would overcome the impression of instability such news would cause.⁷⁰

Oshirov and Nasunbatu returned to Baotou when the expedition into Ordos was about half over.⁷¹ Since the expedition had left for Ordos, many important things had happened. Marshal Feng had returned to Inner Mongolia, and openly joined the Guomindang party, officially putting his army under the Guomindang Canton government. Simultaneously, the Guomindang armies were scoring enormous success in their northern expedition, rapidly reaching the Yangtze valley.⁷² The news threw much of the Inner Mongolian party leadership into a temporary euphoria. The planned Second Congress, to be held in the Ordos countryside, was abandoned and the leadership hurried back to

⁷⁰ See Serengdonrub's defense of the executions in MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-19: 36-42, and the criticism of them at the 1927 Party Congress in Ulaanbaatar in Rentsensonom, "Öwör Mongolyn tүүхэн amidral" (Oriental and International Institute Archive: 2-4-4), 53.

⁷¹ Compare the lists of signatories on agreements in Üüshin Banner (October 1, 1926), where Oshirov and Nasunbatu are present and Otot Banner (October 10, 1926), where they are absent--MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-20: 54-55, 56-58.

⁷² On China's national revolution, see C. Martin Wilbur, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927* (Cambridge, 1989).

Baotou to ask for Feng's approval to set up an Inner Mongolian Citizen Army. Feng seemed to approve, but showed far more enthusiasm for abolishing the Mongolian nobility and their traditional jurisdictions than for establishing any ethnic-democratic institutions in their place.

The great successes of the Guomindang in their southern bases suggested an alternative source of support. Perhaps the new National Government, now moving its headquarters from Canton to Wuhan on the Yangtze River, might be able to supply the PRPIM with money and weapons. Due to the occupation of Beijing by Zhang Zuolin's counter-revolutionary armies, however, the party was unable to receive any reply from Wuhan. Thus A.I. Oshirov, along with Sainbayar, was dispatched to go to Wuhan and try to get aid from the Guomindang.

The party's aim was to get 100,000 silver dollars and 5,000 rifles from the Guomindang. Oshirov may have chosen to go in order to get back in touch with Voitinskii, in Shanghai, but the mission was not suited to him. It required above all the ability to impress Chinese leaders who knew little or nothing about Inner Mongolia. The minimum requirement would be a fluent command of Chinese and some kind of name-recognition among the Chinese. Oshirov himself did not know Chinese, although his Inner Mongol companion, Sainbayar, did. Unfortunately, Sainbayar was the most junior member of the Presidium of the PRPIM's Central Committee and had no reputation at all. Apparently Oshirov and Sainbayar were dispatched largely because they were considered expendable in the eyes of the party's leadership, especially Serengdonrub. At the same time as Oshirov was being sent away, Nasunbatu, the Mongolian representative, was appointed commissar for the party's new Military and Political School. After Nasunbatu had returned to Mongolia in December, Serengdonrub and Mersé repeatedly told the MPRP what an excellent person Nasunbatu was and how delighted the PRPIM would be if it could have another direct representative from the MPRP.⁷³ Clearly the PRPIM valued its link to Mongolia far above that to the Soviet Union.

Mission to the South, December, 1926-March, 1927

Oshirov left in early December as the party center was preparing to move west.⁷⁴ Marshal Feng's open adherence to the

⁷³ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-19: 19, 35; 7-1-18: 17-18.

⁷⁴ Material for this section, unless otherwise noted, is drawn from the letter of March 8, 1927, sent by A.I. Oshirov from Verkhneudinsk to the

Guomindang had not strengthened his armies in Inner Mongolia; quite the contrary, it diverted his attention towards linking up with the GMD forces in Henan. Lacking the mounts to move them, his troops exploded millions of rounds of Italian ammunition as they evacuated Baotou, leaving the roadside littered with guns and ammunition dropped by the exhausted and demoralized troops.⁷⁵

Oshirov and Sainbayar arrived in Beijing and handed in a fairly optimistic report to the Soviet embassy on December 7. The situation in Beijing was depressing. The Fengtian Army's white terror was in evidence everywhere. Engkhebatu, one of the founders of the party, was in jail and Oshirov, as a foreigner, was not allowed to see him. He was able to see the wife of Alta (Wu Zixing) another promising party leader who had disappeared while bringing money from Mongolia for the party's use. Alta had, in fact, been captured and executed by Zhang Zuolin's troops. Party members would come to Beijing from Inner Mongolia surreptitiously looking for someone with whom they could connect. Finding no one, they would depart fearful and disappointed. The only good news was that the Soviet embassy had received Oshirov's earlier report on the Ordos situation as well as the Central Committee's request to the Guomindang for aid. The embassy had wired the former to "the appropriate places" (probably meaning Voitinskii in Shanghai) and the latter to the Guomindang Party center. No reply was received. Li Dazhao, then trapped in the Soviet embassy and representing the remnants of the GMD in Beijing, subsequently suggested that going on to Wuhan would be better. The embassy provided travelling expenses for the trip.

Oshirov and Sainbayar spent little more than a week in Beijing. Then they sailed to Shanghai, where they spent most of their time with Voitinskii detailing the whole course of events. Voitinskii wired a status report to Moscow, together with the request for 100,000 silver dollars and 5,000 guns. In the preceding six months, Moscow had sent several telegrams questioning Grigorii on the progress of events in Inner Mongolia. It was only with Oshirov's report that he was able to answer the questions.

Oshirov had arrived at Shanghai at a crucial moment in the Northern expedition. The Nationalist armies had liberated Hunan,

Central Committee of the PRPIM (MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-19: 57-63).

⁷⁵ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-19: 14-15.

Hubei, and Jiangxi provinces. In the course of December, 1926, the personnel of the National Government, which had been proclaimed little more than a year ago in Canton, began an uncoordinated migration north to Wuhan. As the columns passed through Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi, however, the commander-in-chief of the National Revolutionary Army, Chiang Kai-shek tried to persuade as many as possible to stay there.⁷⁶ Already political disagreements were surfacing while two alternative centers coalesced, one in Wuhan, where Borodin and Xu Qian, a former member of the BPC and past participant in negotiations with Mongolia, held power, and the other in Nanchang where Chiang Kai-shek and his military adviser Vasilii Blücher held sway. Although Shanghai was still under warlord rule, the Nationalist party comrades there were already beginning to take sides in the budding conflict. Most supported Chiang and suggested that Oshirov go to Nanchang.

Oshirov took a boat to Nanchang, arriving there on January 7 or 8, 1927. Although he came ostensibly to see the Commander-in-Chief Chiang, Oshirov felt cautious about involving the Inner Mongolian cause in the party split. Just before they arrived the army officers and party leaders in the city had convened and called for the National Government to move to Nanchang. So having arrived in Nanchang, Oshirov and Sainbayar waited until Chiang Kai-shek had left for Wuhan himself and then followed him the next day, January 12. When they arrived at the harborside, they saw for the first time the mass character of the Chinese revolution. The people of Wuhan had begun to drive the British out of their concessions and the foreigners' women and children had gone aboard warships floating off shore, while the men planned to defend the concessions with guns. Oshirov concluded that the right wing of the Guomindang had become frightened that the masses might "become completely red," and hence demanded that the government be moved to Nanchang and put under Commander Chiang. The left wanted to keep the party's Central Committee in charge, while the right wished to put it under the army, and break with the Communists. Oshirov's own sympathies were clearly with the left.

When Oshirov met Xu Qian and Borodin together, the Wuhan leaders tried to be encouraging. Xu Qian, whom Oshirov probably knew from the summer of 1925 negotiations in Beijing, said: "The

⁷⁶ See Vera Vladimirovna-Akimova, trans. Steven I. Levine, *Two Years in Revolutionary China, 1925-1927* (Cambridge, 1971), 254-277.

Guomindang will certainly help Inner Mongolia. One hundred thousand yuan is nothing, but still this should be decided in a meeting of the standing committee of the Guomindang." Borodin added that "It would be hard to confirm it now, when [the party] is split into two groups. We should wait until these people themselves understand what is happening and come back to re-unite. So there's no reason for you to hurry." Only after talking with them did Oshirov and Sainbayar meet Chiang Kai-shek. As they outlined the need for money and rifles for Inner Mongolia, Oshirov knew enough Chinese to understand Chiang's occasional comments of *shi, shi* ("yes, yes") and *duile, duile* ("right, right"). When they concluded, Chiang, too, said this couldn't be decided all at once and asked them to submit a written request. Sainbayar wrote one up in Chinese and submitted it, but on January 25, Chiang suddenly left for Nanchang after a public quarrel with Borodin, so they never had a chance to address the issue again.

Clearly, affairs in Inner Mongolia were not on anyone's priority list in Wuhan. Xu Qian, feeling perhaps a twinge of conscience that these negotiations, like the ones with Mongolia he'd participated in a year and a half ago would again die for lack of interest on the Chinese side, arranged a last meeting of the Wuhan government leaders. As Oshirov later reported:

After we two stupid Mongols (*büdüülig Monggolchud*) reported the entire situation, Comrade Xu read to them the secret telegram we had previously sent from Baotou. They all just stared at us blankly or ruffled through their things and didn't ask a single question.

The request for money and rifles was referred to a special commission chaired by Xu. Afterwards, Borodin and Xu were hardly encouraging; if the right wing won, they said, even Marshal Feng's forces would be cut off from supplies, let alone the Inner Mongols. Xu Qian told them that even in Guangdong, the authorities were frightened of the *feng* or "wind" of the Wuhan government.

Sainbayar tried to send a telegram to the PRPIM's Central Committee, but (as usual) it was impossible to tell if it arrived at its destination. Wuhan and Nanchang continued to negotiate, and until the future of the Guomindang was decided, neither side had much time for two "stupid Mongols." Thus they decided Sainbayar would stay behind to pursue the question of aid, while Oshirov would return north via

Shanghai. Before he left, Xu Qian managed to dig up 5,000 yuan, of which 1,000 could be used for Oshirov's travel expenses and 4,000 could be wired by Xu Qian to Erkhimbatu, the PRPIM representative in Ulaanbaatar.

When he got to Shanghai, Oshirov had far worse news awaiting him. The embassy in Beijing had received news that off in the north-west, the entire Central Committee of the PRPIM, from Serengdonrub and Mersé on down, had been arrested by Zhang Zuolin's troops. The only ray of hope was that one part of the rumors, at least, was obviously false; Oshirov too was said to be among those arrested. Oshirov thought in his pidgin Chinese: "I too had become *meiyou fazi* ('no way')." Clearly, travelling back to Inner Mongolia through Beijing was out of the question. At the same time he heard that the two factions had agreed to locate the central government in Wuhan, not Nanchang. "Chiang Kai-shek had become completely *meiyou fazi*," and Grigorii encouraged Oshirov to return to Wuhan to confirm the promise of aid. Oshirov however was too worried about the Central Committee and decided to return to Mongolia via the Soviet Union. Thus he sailed from Shanghai to the Japanese-leased port of Dalian (Dairen) and from there took the railway to Manzhouli and on to his old home of Verkhneudinsk, capital of the Buriat-Mongol Republic. Although he seems to have planned this trip as a temporary interlude, he would not return to Inner Mongolia again until 1931.

The first news he received in Verkhneudinsk was good. The Central Committee had only been plundered by bandits nominally belonging to Marshal Feng's armies. The Inner Mongols were quickly released and all were safe and sound. The incident luridly illustrated the disintegration of discipline in the Citizen Armies as they retreated west, but had done little material harm to the party. He called Erkhimbatu, the party's representative in Ulaanbaatar, and found out that the money had been received from Xu Qian. Happily Oshirov dictated a letter, dated March 8, 1927, to his friends in the Central Committee. He told them of the disappointments in the south, the split in the party, and the confidence among the Soviet advisers that the split was healed and Chiang Kai-shek had been brought back under party control. He told them that

Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Xu Qian and many Guomindang comrades . . . all asked after the health of the comrades in the Central Committee and especially asked a lot about Serengdonrub and

Mersé. But as I was *bu zhidao* ("don't know") in Chinese it was *meiyou fazi* ("no way") to remember all these names and I could just say *hao, hao* ("good, good") to them.

The leaders of the Chinese Communists had hoped Serengdonrub and Mersé could come to their forthcoming Congress, but as Oshirov noted "It is another *meiyou fazi*. A-ya! When will we escape from all these *meiyou fazis*, comrades?!" Still, he was still optimistic--he thought the party ought to make plans for a final campaign against Zhang Zuolin (just as Chiang's adviser Blücher was doing). Oshirov himself planned possibly to go to Moscow to make again the plea for money and weapons.

The Party Split and Oshirov's Return to Russia

Aleksandr Ivanovich Oshirov's return from China came only a few months after his father's death on October 1, 1926.⁷⁷ Aleksandr had completely broken off any ties with his anti-Bolshevik parents, but most of the children had stayed on their kulak farm. Only one of Aleksandr's older sisters, Antonina, actively associated with the new regime. She had joined the Youth League and after graduating from school went to a poor village to work with the people. While Aleksandr was gone, however, she contracted tuberculosis and died in 1925.

Now that the father of the family was dead, in spring 1927, Aleksandr visited his old homestead for a few days. The funeral had just been held as the frozen land thawed, and his sister Ina noticed the funny impression the soles of his new Chinese shoes made in the muddy courtyard. To her, Aleksandr gave the advice to work hard and scientifically "like an American," to be frugal, reuse her clothes, study hard, and keep clean. The emulation of American science was a slogan of the New Economic Policy period soon to be abandoned. Aleksandr's mother and brothers, however, continued to live their prosperous way of life, one which would bring disaster on their heads in a few years.

In May, A.I. Oshirov went to Moscow. There, from May 7 to May 30, the Eighth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International was considering the significance of the dramatic news from China. First, there was the Zhang Zuolin regime's raid on

⁷⁷ Information on Oshirov's personal life in this section again derived from interviews with his younger sister and ward Ochiryn Namsraiaw.

the Soviet embassy on April 6. Many Russian and Chinese Guomindang members were arrested; twenty Communists, including Li Dazhao, were publicly strangled by order of the warlord government. The second piece of news was Chiang Kai-shek's open break with the Communists on April 12-14, as gangs under his orders massacred hundreds of strikers in newly liberated Shanghai. From the night of April 14, another purge of Communists began in Canton as well. The question was: Who was *meiyou fazhi* now?--Chiang Kai-shek and the right wing in Shanghai and Canton or the Left Guomindang-Communist government in Wuhan?

In addition, the policy on the Inner Mongolian revolution was also discussed. Oshirov was reporting on his mission to the south and on the request for money and aid. Yet in the few months since he had left, not only had the situation in China, but also that in the PRPIM, had undergone disturbing developments. The chairman of the Central Committee, Serengdonrub, and the secretary were caught up in a furious dispute over the party's ties with Feng's Citizen Army. At first it had little to do with the issues animating the split between the right and the left in the south. After the retreat Mersé blamed the party's troubles on the alliance with Feng. These allegations angered the local commander of the Citizen Army and Serengdonrub could only mollify him by assuring him Mersé would be assigned out of Ningxia.⁷⁸ On April 4, 1927, officers in Feng's troops encouraged local Mongol party members in the central town of nearby Alashan banner to stage a *coup d'état*. With the open backing of the unpopular Citizen Army and carried out without the participation of the Central Committee, the seizure was a political disaster in terms of the party's objectives. The rural Mongol herdsmen and petty officials, led by a charismatic leader Mao Baatur, rallied to the defense of the old regime and the banner against the invading Chinese. Prince Tawangbürügjäl, one of the most conservative rulers in Inner Mongolia, suddenly received the strong support of his people.⁷⁹ Mersé was angered by the Chinese army's opposition

⁷⁸ Nozu Akira ("Yejin Peng"), "Nei Menggu chihua yundong de bianqian," in Nei Menggu Daxue Zhong-Gong Nei Menggu Diqu Dangshi Yanjiu Suo, ed., *Nei Menggu jindai shi yi cong*, 154.

⁷⁹ Zhuolike, "Guanyu Alashanqi 'Xiao Sanye shijian'" and Luo Yongshou, "'Xiao Sanye shijian' shimo" in Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Nei Menggu Zizhiqu Weiyuanhui Wenshi Ziliao Yanjiu Weiyuanhui,

to the PRPIM extending its activities into Alashan, but Serengdonrub insisted the party go along. Serengdonrub appeared increasingly impatient with dissent and entertained visions of a swift and victorious advance over the steppes when the southern forces reached Inner Mongolia. Serengdonrub temporarily dismissed Mersé from the party center, and the latter proceeded to Mongolia, intending to call on the MPRP and the Comintern to back him up in the conflict.⁸⁰

Thus the Inner Mongolian party was splitting on its own, just as the Comintern's Executive Committee was considering how the splits in the Chinese revolution were to be handled. Unfortunately, the plenum's documents on Inner Mongolia have not yet been published.⁸¹ To judge from the references to them in the PRPIM documents, the main decisions, presumably based on Oshirov's oral and Voitinskii's written report, called for the PRPIM to preserve its alliance with the Left KMT, but for the first time to treat the Chinese Communists as full partners in the Inner Mongolian revolution.

Tactics and personnel would be changed and the Central Committee would no longer base itself at Feng's headquarters. The goal of autonomy would be further clarified to demand an "Autonomous Republic"; that is, Inner Mongolia would have the same status in China that Buriatia had in Russia. The program and general aims as set out in the documents of the First Congress, however, would not be changed. When the Central Committee presidium members then in Ulaanbaatar (totaling five of the original seven) on May 31 demanded a Special Emergency Meeting (*tuskhai yaaraltai khural*) and wired their request to Oshirov in Moscow, the latter replied saying that he would come with representatives of the Left KMT and the Chinese Communists, as well as additional Comintern representatives from Moscow.⁸²

By June 17, however, Moscow wired that Oshirov was sick and the Comintern would be represented at the Congress by the tough,

ed., *Nei Menggu wenshi ziliao*, vol. 4 (Khökhkhota, 1964; reprinted, 1979), 1-19, 20-33.

⁸⁰ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-18: 13-14, 41-42; 7-1-27: 37-38.

⁸¹ *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional v dokumentakh: resheniia, tezisy, ivozvaniia kongressov Kominterna i plenumov IKKI, 1919-1932* (Moscow, 1933), 717-745, records the Eighth Plenum's resolutions on war, China, Britain, and Trotsky but nothing on Inner Mongolia.

⁸² MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-26: 42; 4-1-185: 24, 35.

leather-jacketed Buriat commissar Matvei Innokent'evich Amagaev.⁸³ M.I. Amagaev was quite the opposite of Oshirov. Didactic and self-confident, he was often assigned to brief foreign visitors on the successes of the Mongolian revolution. Due to his genuine ability, he generally impressed foreigners, who described him as "a very knowledgeable young Buriat Mongol" (Feng Yuxiang), or "spoken of by everyone as a man of prestige in the Mongolian revolution," "a zealot," "who in fact gave me the completest story of the history, growth, and problems of the National revolution in Mongolia" (Anna Louise Strong).⁸⁴

Suddenly Oshirov was "off the case." Since he was well enough to go back to his old job as Commissar of Agriculture in the Buriat-Mongol government, this dismissal clearly had a political component. If we look at the criticisms Amagaev made at the PRPIM's Special Congress (August 8-September 3, 1927), they concentrated on the leadership's policy of swift military victories to be won in alliance with the Citizen Army, and its disdain for building solid bases among the people in ethnically Mongolian areas. The bungling of the campaign in Rehe and the lack of focus in Ordos were advanced as proof of these opportunistic errors.⁸⁵ Yet as we have seen, Oshirov's reports, written as these errors were taking place, did not warn the Comintern of them. Oshirov clearly was unable to take on the leadership of the party and force it in a new direction, and so he was replaced.

Oshirov was safe from any serious political repercussions stemming from this implicit rebuke, for he had married Mariia Mikhailovna Sakh'ianova, an old Buriat associate of M.N. Erbanov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the BMASSR and herself the First Secretary of the Buriat Mongolian Provincial Party Committee (*obkom*). Born in a wealthy Buriat family of eight daughters, she was given an unusual education for a Buriat woman of that era. She had been acquainted with both Russian and Buriat revolutionary youth while at school in Balagansk, after the 1905 Revolution. She went on

⁸³ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-26: 43.

⁸⁴ Feng Yuxiang, *Wo de shenghuo*, vol. 2 (Harbin, 1981), 452-3; Anna Louise Strong, *China's Millions* (New York, 1928), 357-362, 394.

⁸⁵ Rentsensonom, "Öwör Mongolyn tüükhen amidral" (Oriental and International Institute Archive: 2-4-4), 51-64.

to a prestigious finishing school in Petrograd, the Bestuzhev Courses.⁸⁶ The effect was presumably otherwise than her parents intended, for by 1917 she had become a staunch Bolshevik. After the October days, she returned to Irkutsk where in April 1918, she headed the Buriat Sector of the Central Siberian Bureau until the Czech revolt and the advance of White forces forced her to flee. Unlike V.I. Trubacheev, M.N. Erbanov, and others in the small group of Buriat Communists, M.M. Sakh'ianova spent the Civil War in Moscow, returning to Buriatia at the end of 1921. From March 1924, she became the First Secretary, and member of the Presidium of the Buriat Provincial Party Committee.⁸⁷

She and A.I. Oshirov must have known each other from 1921, if not from Irkutsk in 1918. Their backgrounds--Bolshevik children of wealthy, partially Russified, western Buriat farmer/ranchers--were quite similar. Both were true believers in the Bolshevik way of life, although Mariia was both several years older and far more prominent than Aleksandr. Despite M.M. Sakh'ianova's position, the couple followed the "commune" movement then current and shared an apartment with another couple in order to relieve the housing shortage. The squeeze was increased when, in the fall of 1927, Oshirov took his youngest sister Ina, then less than ten years old, from their mother to live with him in Verkhneudinsk. Thus Oshirov saved one member of his family from the fate that the government he served was preparing for them.

The beginning of collectivization coincided, perhaps not coincidentally, with Sakh'ianova and Oshirov's transfer from Verkhneudinsk to Moscow. Mariia Mikhailovna joined the staff of the Central Committee, while Aleksandr Ivanovich was to receive a higher education in the Communist Academy. At the same time collectivization was wiping out the Oshirov family. In the course of 1929-1930, Aleksandr's mother and brothers, hard working Apollon, blue-eyed and bushy-eyebrowed Filipp, Petr, and Grigorii, the encyclopedia reader, were exiled without trial to the far North, one after another, for the crime of being wealthy in a poor country. Only the daughters escaped; Irina ran away to the north by herself, to Igarka. There she learned the

⁸⁶ On this school, see *Great Soviet Encyclopedia: A Translation of the Third Edition*, vol. 3 (New York, 1973), under "Bestuzhev Courses" and "Bestuzhev-Riumin, Konstantin Nikolaevich" (pp. 233, 234). The earlier name of the school was "The Advanced Courses for Women."

⁸⁷ Basaev and Erbanova, *M.N. Erbanov*, 11, 25, 29, 31, 63, 83; interview with Ochiryn Namsrajaw.

local Ewenki language and was eventually brought to Leningrad as a teacher of the same. Yet the price of escape was the constant fear of meeting any Buriat who knew her background. Once on a steamer on the Yenisey she saw her brother Grigorii. Not wishing to be recognized she casually sidled up to him and asked "How are you? Where are you going?" and he replied "Not far, to Turukhansk." Neither the sons nor their mother survived their exile by long. The oldest daughter, Radnaa (1900-1979), who had taken a job with a trading company in Chita may have seemed safer. She had married Dashi Sampilon, a Buriat official working in the Mongolian People's Republic. Yet her husband was disgraced in 1928-9, and was eventually executed, leaving Radnaa as the widowed mother of two children.⁸⁸

In Moscow, Aleksandr himself earned no economic advantage from his position of safety. He and his wife practiced the austere ethics of the Old Bolsheviks, accepting only the salary that accorded with the "party maximum" (no higher than a skilled worker's wage).⁸⁹ They lived near the Metropol' hotel in an area fashionable with the Communist elite and had a dacha, but food and clothes were always in short supply. They taught their young charge, his sister Ina, not to get rich or pretty herself. Aleksandr and Mariia had little time for her, being always busy on the tasks of the revolution, but he did arrange for piano lessons. At the same time the house was a stopping point for both Buriats and Aleksandr's old associates in China. Grigorii Voitsinskii was a frequent guest, as was the Chinese communist Wang Ming. And Buriats, like the painter Tsyrenzhap Sampilovich Sampilov (1893-1953), noted for his oil-painting horse portraits, were always welcome in Aleksandr and Mariia's house (despite the couple's self-imposed poverty).⁹⁰ Oshirov's little sister Ina, recalls the New

⁸⁸ See Serge Wolff, "Mongol Delegations in Western Europe, 1925-1929," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 32 (1945), 289-298 and 33 (1946), 75-92, especially p. 292, and Plate I which shows Radnaa and Sampilon with their first child, Nima. After Sampilon's disgrace and execution Radnaa married Byambyn Rinchén, the noted Mongolian scholar (György Kara, personal communication).

⁸⁹ The "party maximum" was coming under fire from Stalin at this period--see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York, 1990), 111-114.

⁹⁰ See *Sovetskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Moscow, 1983) under "Sampilov."

Year's Day of 1932. Mariia was out working, and Aleksandr had left on a mission to China. Ina stayed home with a newly arrived Buriat actor, Khaptagaev, and wife Zoya Piritolchina, daughter of a woman doctor in Khiakhta. On the table there was nothing--only black bread and two pieces of dried *vobla* (Caspian roach fish) so hard that they had to go outside to bang it into pieces. For drink they had only hot water, yet the guests insisted, "Well, O.K., it's a fine New Year."

Meanwhile in Inner Mongolia things were going no better with the PRPIM than with Oshirov's own family. At the Special Congress in August 1927, Amagaev had not only redirected the party but completely replaced the old Central Committee with youth trained in Moscow and Ulaanbaatar. Serengdonrub, Murungga and others were placed under virtual house arrest. In the beginning of October 1927, Serengdonrub and several of his associates escaped from Mongolia on a Citizen Army truck. Returning to the old party headquarters in Ningxia, he rallied his followers, proclaimed the decisions of the Special Congress null and void, and denounced the new Central Committee as puppets of the Soviet Communists. From October on, two Central Committees--the "old" one in Ningxia and the "new" one in Ulaanbaatar--competed for the allegiance of rural cells.

In western Inner Mongolia, the old Central Committee dominated the area, sending out Sainbayar (who had come back from Wuhan in summer, 1927) to command all the local Mongol forces. Yet tensions between party center and the local troops came to a head in May-June 1928, when Sainbayar tried to order Öljeijirgal's forces back to Ningxia. Fearing to leave their own banner defenseless, the troops revolted and drove Sainbayar out. Just after Lunar New Year in February, 1929, Öljeijirgal was killed by disaffected elements in his own command.⁹¹ Elsewhere as well, conflicts between party members loyal to the old and new Central Committees ended in destruction of one or the other side and, in all cases, demoralization and apathy among the previously enthusiastic populace. By August 1928, the old Central Committee of the PRPIM in Ningxia was being dissolved by Serengdonrub, to be replaced by an Inner Mongolian Party Activities Steering Committee, subordinate to the Chinese Guomindang central executive committee. Yet despite the Guomindang conquest of North China, the Inner Mongolian status quo of despotic government by the

⁹¹ Altan'-orgil, *Kökeqota-yin teüken monggol surbulji bicig*, vol. 3, *Anggi-yin qaricag-a* (Qayilar, 1989), 545-6, 548.

nobility, continued Chinese colonization, and banditry, was not challenged.⁹²

Within the "new" faction, dissension also soon broke out. At the 1927 Special Congress, Amagaev had gotten the support of the student delegates by endorsing their resentment of Serengdonrub's sometimes harsh party discipline. At the same time, though, Amagaev's new policy of patient base-building conflicted with the young students' demand for immediate and direct support of revolution in Inner Mongolia. Even before the end of the Special Congress, many of the members of the old Inner Mongolian Youth Party studying in Ulaanbaatar, became critical of the slow party-building tactics of the "New" Central Committee. This group, soon dubbed the "youth faction," was convinced that with only a small effort promising areas (like Khölön Buir) could be detached from Chinese control.⁹³

The next year, a group of youth led by Mersé began a rebellion there in August, 1928. Thousands of Khölön Buir people supported the rebels, but the Mongol officials of the area, including Erkhimbatu and other old party members, were alienated by the radical anti-feudalist line being propagated by the insurgents. Unable to present a united front to the Chinese authorities, the rebellion was quickly suppressed, with hundreds of refugees crossing the border into Mongolia and thousands more being turned back at the frontier line. The party's numbers and prestige in Khölön Buir plummeted, while disillusioned leaders of the uprising, like Mersé, left secret party work to try to work legally in the new government of China.

From the beginning of 1929 to 1931, the party leadership in Ulaanbaatar tried to recover from these failures. Instead of rebellions, they concentrated on propaganda publications and the penetration of Guomindang cells in Inner Mongolia. Ties with the remaining Ordos party organizations were maintained precariously and Inner Mongol students from Moscow and Ulaanbaatar were sent back to link up isolated cells. The party's program turned more radical, reflecting the collectivization drive in the Soviet Union and the hostile relations between the USSR and the Republic of China. Now the line called for alliance with the Communist Party of China and reliance on the

⁹² "Nei Meng dangwu baogao," *Minguo Ribao* (Shanghai), March 30, 1929, 2.

⁹³ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-18: 50; 7-1-20: 39; 7-1-27: 25-28.

"genuine poor people" (*jingkhini yaduu buurai arad tümen*); party pamphlets promised there would be no more senseless uprisings. The party's line on independence-versus-autonomy was finessed with a concentration on the *right* of self-determination.⁹⁴

Yet from late 1930 to early 1931, several developments seem to have convinced the Comintern that a separate ethnic party in Inner Mongolia was not a viable development. There was only modest success in expanding the secret party apparatus (and this occurred mostly in Tümed and Chakhar regions). The latter was a predominantly Mongol region, but in the Tümed area, ethnic Chinese dominated both demographically and culturally and many of those who adapted best to the new policy of patient underground party-building were Sinicized, Chinese-speaking Tümed Mongols.

Independently of the party, Mao Baatur, the popular militia leader in Alashan who had fought the Citizen Army on behalf of the legitimate banner prince, began to turn against the conservative government and secretly sought support from Mongolia. At the same time, Mao Baatur was allied with Hui (Chinese-speaking Muslim) rebels in Ningxia and Qinghai. The party center was very interested in linking the Üüshin party regime with Mao Baatur and the Hui rebels, but the sectarianism and ethnic exclusiveness of PRPIM seemed to be preventing such a broad alliance.⁹⁵ The Chinese Communists too were demanding that all revolutionary activists in Inner Mongolia ought to be brought under the supra-ethnic Chinese Communist Party, just as had happened in 1929-1930 with the Korean Communists in Northeast China.⁹⁶

At the same time, civil unrest in Mongolia, stemming from the government's inflationary and collectivization policy, was reaching a crisis point. The government was forced to close the border to stop the flow of refugees and it claimed the public discontent was the result of

⁹⁴ *Dotogadu Monggol-un edügeki bayidal ba tus nam-un jorilg-a-yin tuqai tungqaglan jarlaqu bicig* (Dolon Nuur: July 1, 1929), 13-16.

⁹⁵ See the 1930 debriefing of Ordos *duguilang* activists, MPRP Central Party Archives: 71-18: 61-64, and the late 1929 pamphlet by Temürkүү, "Öbör Monggol-un aq-a degüü nar-tagan uqagulugsan bicig" in Edünkesig, Buyan, Dorungg-a, *Ordos arad-un duguyilang-un ködelgegen-ü matériyal-un emkidkel*, vol. 1 ("Ordos History" Editorial Committee, 1981), 368.

⁹⁶ Chong-sik Lee, *Revolutionary Struggle in Manchuria: Chinese Communism and Soviet Interest, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, 1983), 111-126.

Chinese and Japanese provocateurs.⁹⁷ Finally, in January or February 1931, the Mongolian Internal Security Office arrested partisans of the old "youth faction," accusing them (on very flimsy evidence) of being Guomindang spies and (with rather more solid evidence) of forming a secret group aiming to leave Mongolia and pursue revolution outside of Comintern control. A resulting security survey of Inner Mongols in Ulaanbaatar found most of them, even the party members, to be disaffected and often with suspicious ties to renegades like Serengdonrub or Mersé.⁹⁸ Clearly, disaffection in the Inner Mongolian party ranks was intersecting fatefully with a dramatically heightened sensitivity to presumed security threats in the Mongolian host state.

In this context, the Comintern devised a new policy for Inner Mongolia in July, 1931. The PRPIM would become subject to a Northwest Special Committee, under the Chinese Communist Party and chaired by veteran Chinese Communist Party member Wang Ruofei. In reality, though, the committee would receive its directives straight from the Comintern's Executive Committee in Moscow. It would handle all revolutionary activities in Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Shanxi, and Suiyuan, and would be situated in Ningxia. The Committee's secretary Wang Ruofei (1896-1946) and Ji He (1905-1983) would go first to Baotou and establish the eastern center, while a western center would be established in Ningxia (where liaison could be made between the Ordos Mongols, Mao Baatur and the Hui rebels). For this western branch, the Comintern selected Fan Enpu (c. 1898-1970) and A.I. Oshirov. When the underground Baotou-Ningxia communication route had been established, Wang and Ji would go west to join Fan and Oshirov in Ningxia.⁹⁹

Aleksandr Ivanovich began preparing for the mission, sewing documents into Mongolian robes, and bringing a powerful radio transmitter, three feet long, home to his apartment. The team left from Moscow early in September, 1931, and passed through Ulaanbaatar,

⁹⁷ Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 228, 232-3; D. Tserenbaljir, *1932 ony zewsegt boslogo* (Ulaanbaatar, 1990).

⁹⁸ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-73: 1, 8, 137.

⁹⁹ Du Fan and Wurijitu, "Nei Menggu dashiji changbian," 208; Chen Zhiling and He Yang, *Wang Ruofei zhuan* (Shanghai, 1986), 112-119; Wulanfu Geming Shiliao Bianyanshi, *Wulanfu huiyilu*, 142-146; Wu Shusheng and Hao Yufeng, *Wulanfu nianpu*, vol. 1 (Beijing, 1989), 56-58. On Ji He, see Qiu Zhizhuo, *Zhong-Gong dangshi renming lu* (Chongqing, 1986), 80.

where a Russian, Chernomorduk, was now representing the Comintern. While there, they received the news of the Japanese seizure of Shenyang in Northeast China, and the growing danger of war. Documents issued from the Chinese Communist Party denouncing Japanese imperialism were added to their materials. Two Inner Mongols, Badma and Zhu Shifu, were assigned to escort the western and eastern groups, respectively, across the border under the cover of being merchants. As they approached the Mongolian border the two teams switched to camel caravans. Early PRPIM members had often travelled this route, but as Mongolia became more secretive and the border guard tighter, the often-used merchant cover became less convincing. So it proved in this case.

As Oshirov, Badma, and Fan Enpu were crossing the border from Mongolia into Inner Mongolia, they were searched by Alashan banner border guards, the radio transmitter was discovered, and the group arrested. The Alashan Mongol border troops tied the three up and interrogated them in the station but they refused to talk. The agents were then left outside, trussed up in the cold desert night. Despite their severe frostbite they still refused to divulge the object of their mission. Fan Enpu, however, whimpering and coughing blood, was clearly on the verge of breaking. The border troops sent the men along to the center of Alashan banner where they were interrogated in the presence of the banner rulers. Each was beaten thirty times with a club to soften them up. The next time, Fan (who appeared to be the weakest) was brought in alone. The mere threat of further beatings induced him to confess the entire story, including the real identities of Wang Ruofei and the secret communications with Mao Baatur. Fan was released for his cooperation, but Oshirov, who had resisted torture to the end, was executed.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Despite the loss of the western team, Wang Ruofei did reach Baotou. There he linked up with the Tümed Mongolian underground and prepared the reorientation of party work away from Mongol

¹⁰⁰ On the execution of Oshirov, see Hao Weimin, "Di yi, erci guonei geming zhanzheng shiqi de Nei Menggu Renmin Geming Dang," in *Zhongguo Menggu Shi Xuehui chengli dahui jinian jikan*, 602 and also A. Doak Barnett, *China on the Eve of the Communist Takeover* (New York, 1963), 211. The date in Barnett is erroneously given as 1934.

nationalism and secession and towards a United Front against Japan. On November 22, he too was arrested on the strength of Fan's accusation. Yet the change in approach was accepted among the Tümed Mongols and the PRPIM underground located there was rapidly put under direct Comintern supervision. It seems the Üüshin Banner party committee did not accept the change and its separatist regime survived in isolation until 1935, when the Chinese government finally exerted the effort to get rid of it. Mao Baatur, also on the strength of Fan's confession, was arrested and sentenced to one year. After his release he went to Ningxia to serve under the military governor there.

In Mongolia, the PRPIM Central Committee survived for a few more years. From the moment of the Japanese invasion of Northeast China, though, the struggle of the Inner Mongolian people for freedom from Chinese warlord oppression, a fixture of Mongolian propaganda from 1925 on, vanished, never to return. Instead, the line was changed to be all the people of China fighting together against Japanese imperialism. Nor did the security services relent, fingering yet more impatient young students as continuers of the earlier deviations.¹⁰¹ The date is obscure, but perhaps in September, 1933, the PRPIM Central Committee was formally abolished by the Communist International.¹⁰² Most of the remaining members in Mongolia stayed there--in any case they would not be allowed to leave--and perished in Stalin's hecatombs of 1937-1939.

A.I. Oshirov's life thus spanned almost the complete course of the first People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia.¹⁰³ He was

¹⁰¹ MPRP Central Party Archives: 7-1-73: 1-12, especially 2, 8.

¹⁰² Wulanfu's memoirs say the Central Committee was abolished by the Mongolian People's Republic in about 1933 (Wulanfu Geming Shiliao Bianyanshi, *Wulanfu huiyi lu*, 74). Later he mentions receiving a Comintern directive in September stating that "considering the attack of Japanese imperialism in Chakhar, a new situation has appeared in the nationality struggle in the Inner Mongolia region." The new situation demanded a concentration on getting conservative Mongol nationalist, Prince Demchugdongrub, to resist Japan (pp. 157-8). Probably these two references are different sides of the same coin.

¹⁰³ A group of PRPIM members in eastern Inner Mongolia preserved the party's Eastern Branch underground until 1945 when it reappeared and played a major role in the ensuing revolutionary transformation of Inner Mongolia--see Christopher Atwood, "The East Mongolian Revolution and Chinese Communism," *Mongolian Studies* 15 (1992), 7-83.

intimately involved in its unification and expansion in the summer of 1925 in Beijing, and six years later was carrying out orders for its *de facto* replacement when he was executed. He and his wife were sincere believers in the Communist ideal and sacrificed virtually their whole private lives for it. His young sister, Ina, who lived with him from 1927 to 1931, remembers above all the couple's revolutionary "pathos."

From the time Oshirov joined the revolution in 1920, he broke off all ties with his wealthy family, doing nothing to save it from destruction in the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class." His friends in Moscow were revolutionary comrades like Voitinskii, Voitinskii's consumptive wife Mariia Kuznetsova, and Wang Ming.¹⁰⁴ As Aleksandr passed through Ulaanbaatar on the way back to Inner Mongolia, his sister Radnaa caught a glimpse of him there in the distance, but he never once came to see her. News of his death was not received until two years later, when Grigorii Voitinskii informed M.M. Sakh'ianova and his sister. Aleksandr Oshirov left no children, nor did his wife remarry. When decades later his sister Ina tried to find the old Oshirov home there was nothing left, not even the Oshirovs' home village of Togot itself. The only remains were the grave of Ivan Anatol'evich, buried in the woods.

Yet as his reports show, Oshirov was no zealous dogmatist. Among his comrades, he seemed cheerful and humorous, but perhaps not a very impressive fellow. He lacked the self-confidence and learning that impressed foreign visitors in Amagaev. His career shows that the Comintern agents did not have any automatic authority which made their wishes, or those of their superiors, commands for the local parties. The authority that Borodin and others had in China was a result of the wealth of experience they had in running a revolutionary party. As it turned out, a good deal of that experience was useless or harmful under the conditions of Asia, but the record also shows that the native revolutionaries were no less fallible if not more so.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰⁴ Kuznetsova's strong impression on a group of Chinese working women is recorded in Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in Revolutionary China*, 288-9. Ina Oshirova was also profoundly affected by her soulfulness and maternal solicitude.

¹⁰⁵ In his discussion of the 1927 Canton uprising, often considered the most egregious of the Comintern's mistakes, Nie Rongzhen strongly criticizes the agent on the spot, Heinz Neumann. Yet at the same time, Nie freely admits that the rebellion was not necessarily a bad idea--and that it was

history of the Inner Mongolian party has been hitherto virtually totally ignored but it has also been spared the retrospective glorification of whoever clawed his way to the top to become the glorious Leader. As it appears in the documents, the native leaders Serengdonrub, Mersé, or Öljeijargal were not infallible guides thwarted by blundering foreigners incapable of seeing the obvious, but people who, just like Oshirov, Amagaev and the other Comintern advisers, were learning as they went along, and were battling--more often than not unsuccessfully--their own prejudices and errors.

botched by inexperience all down the line. See his *Inside the Red Star: The Memoirs of Marshal Nie Rongzhen* (Beijing, 1988), 66-73, 76-79.

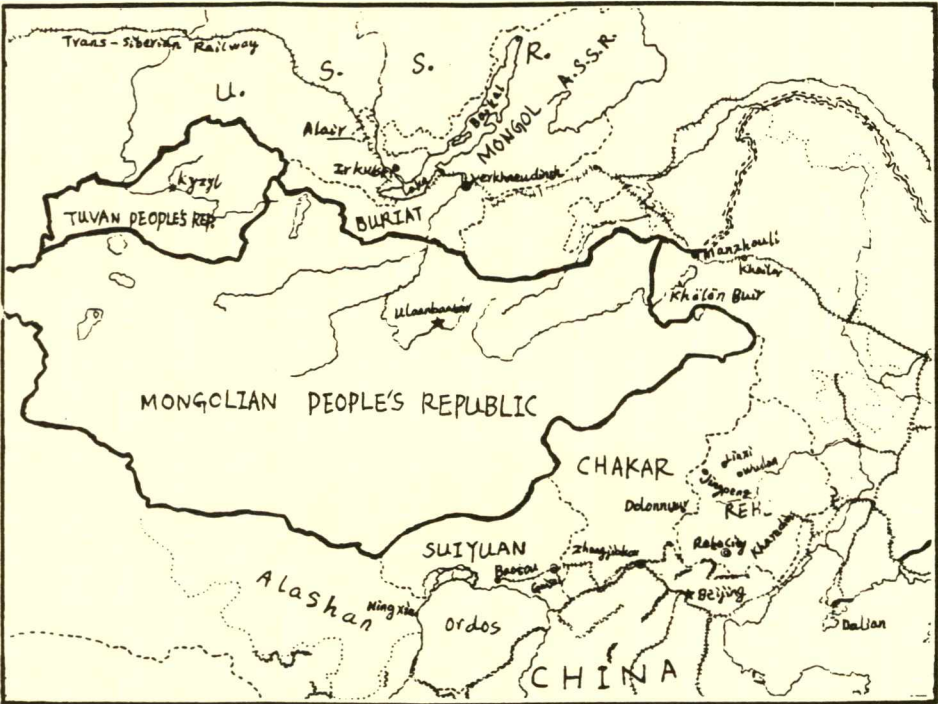


(Left to right) A.I. Oshirov, Vsevolod I. Pudovkin (director), and Valeri Inkizhinov (lead actor), while filming *Potomak Chingis-khana* (English version: "Storm Over Asia"), 1928.

Director V.I. Pudovkin shot much of this film on location in Buriatia. While there, he relied on Oshirov to supply authentic details of Mongolian life. The film's initial sequence, for example, showing guests arriving at the protagonist's yurt was filmed exactly as Oshirov directed. (Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York, 1960: 248-9). Oshirov got much of his knowledge of old Mongol customs and partisan warfare from his experience in Inner Mongolia.



A.I. Oshirov in Moscow shortly before leaving for his last trip to Inner Mongolia (1931).



Buriatia, Mongolia, and Inner Mongolia in 1925