

An Unsuccessful Test

After nearly a year of study, we had completed our classes. Some of my friends were appointed to work in the official organizations of the aimag center, some went to the banner centers and some to the local collectives. At that time, the person in overall charge of aimag cooperative matters was known as the instructor of the cooperative. The person in overall charge of a cooperative within a banner was known as a junior instructor.

Several of my friends and myself were under the control of one of the senior instructors of a cooperative named Sünrev. He received us and told us to go to the Khan Öndör banner center where we would work under the control of a junior instructor of the collective. Within a few days, all the friends I had known for nearly two years had dispersed in all directions. We wrote each other letters and those who were appointed to neighboring areas could get together and discuss things.

One day, I rode out of Tsetserleg town on an örtöö horse owned by the aimag center. I crossed the Tsagaan pass and set off northwards. I had nothing apart from what I had worn at school—a blue cotton summer terleg, an old pair of otter-skin boots starting to tear at the front, and a green cap. It was not very pleasant to leave Tsetserleg town behind with its school where I had studied, and my teachers, friends, and acquaintances there. I kept thinking about where I would be working and the kind of work I would be doing.

I crossed the Tsagaan pass, descended the valley behind it which led to the north side of the Tamir river and arrived at a large square rock called Taikhar. On it were all kinds of Tibetan and Mongolian inscriptions. Some small cups and khadag had been placed on it. A boy was looking after some sheep nearby, and an old man with a long pig-tail, dressed in a blue deel with light-colored cuffs and a steel striker and knife, came galloping towards me on a brown horse.

"Where are you heading?" he asked me. "What is this stone?" I asked. "This stone was brought here from the top of a mountain on the other side of the river. Those are the marks which were made by it, can't you see them?" he said, pointing with his finger, and they were indeed visible. The old man continued: "Well my boy, there is a good reason for this stone being here. A long time ago, a giant snake came down the north Tamir river and dug a hole where the stone lies now and lay down in a circle. As the snake was dangerous, a heroic man called Taikhar decided to destroy it. This hero broke a large piece of rock from the face of a cliff called Khanan on the Tamir river and carried it down to the hole where the snake had entered and placed it over the hole. So, the snake was crushed, and the people of the area rejoiced when they had been rescued from the danger of the giant snake."

The many inscriptions on the stone in Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchu, Chinese, and Turkish were evidence of the worship of it. Foreign and native scholars have recorded the many inscriptions on the rock in their works. In 1960, the Mongolian historian

D. Perlee compiled these inscriptions into a book entitled *The Taikhar Stone*.¹ It is possible that the word *taikhar* comes from *taishir*. It is noted down in the scriptures that the word *taishir* means "great teacher" in an Indian language. Some of our scholars still consider *taikhar* to be a Turkish word meaning "ridge stone." Since the original rock was in the shape of a hunchback, it was also thought that it could have been called *takhir* [cripple] stone in Mongolian.

I was delayed for quite a while talking with this old man. He pointed out the location of the ford in the river for me. I crossed the river and headed towards the Khan Öndör monastery. The Khan Öndör monastery's name referred to the Chin Van, (a Manchu term denoting an Imperial son-in-law) of an administrative banner of Sain Noyan Khan aimag of Khalkha. It was the central monastery of Nayant banner.

The forebears of the Chin Van met with the Manchu emperors and became senior ministerial attendants. In the latter part of the sixth generation, he became the Nayant Van and in the tenth year of the Manchu Badarguul (Kangxi) period, he rose from being a beel (Manchu duke, First Grade) to become an Imperial son-in-law. Nayant Van's father was originally of imperial Manchu parentage. Taking advantage of his wife's lineage, he went to live in a special residence in Beijing and broke the links with his native land.

However, when he returned to his home district for the first time with his wife, his father presented the bride with a most valuable present, one which could not be moved from the area. One day he arranged for many families to be settled in an area around the most beautiful Khan Uul (mountain) in the area, and many thousand horses, cattle, and sheep were pastured there. A group of people were sent to flush the wild animals out of the mountain forests, and gold- and silver-bearing rocks were dug up and prepared. His son and the bride were brought to him, and it is said that the bride was presented with this gift. And so it was that the mountain came to be known as Gūnjiin Uul ("Princess Mountain"). However, the last prince Nayant, a minister, did not visit his home district for a long time and continued to live in Beijing, where he died in the 1950s.

I headed for an enclosure on the west side of the monastery where the home of Dashvandan, the junior instructor of the collective, was located. At the back of an empty ger in the fenced enclosure sat a man writing with a brush on Chinese muutuu writing paper. He was sitting behind a varnished table covered with a red table cloth. He was quite old, wore a light-brown deel, and had a swarthy, oval face. His name was Dashvandan.

When I asked, "May I speak to you?" he said nothing but continued writing for quite a while. Then, he turned to me and asked "Well, what work have you come to do?" I showed him my credentials. The junior instructor of the collective examined my credentials and after a little thought said, "You can become chief of the new collective in Chuluut sum, north of Khan Öndör sum." To get there a person would need to travel a distance of over two örtöö lengths. Due to the importance of the work of the collective, a few important things had to be discussed. He continually repeated the words "That's right now," but said nothing which made any sense. For a while, I just stood there, confused. The junior instructor gave me no explanation but said, "Tomorrow morning you will set off in that direction. Until now no-one has been in charge there, so go and take up

¹ *Tajkhir chuluu*. Ulaanbaatar, 1960. (Studia archaeologica ; t. 1, fasc. 4).

your work.”

As I was a young and inexperienced seventeen-year old, not having done any official work or experienced life, I was unable to ask him for any explanations. The man did not wish to talk very much anyway. When I asked some of the local people, I discovered that the collective to which I was to be appointed was not in the center of Chuluut Gol sum but was a considerable distance away at Shireet monastery. I spent the night with a family in the sum center. The next morning I rode an örtöö horse across several mountains and reached Shireet Gegeen monastery which was located on a south-facing mountain slope on the north bank of the Chuluut river. The Shireet Gegeen Khüree had the so-called Shivee Shireet seal of the old Sain Noën Khan aimag and a khutagt was present there with his disciples.

The first reincarnation of Shivee Shireet appeared ten times in India, followed by six reincarnations in Tibet, and was finally reincarnated in Mongolia for the first time at the ger of the grandfather of the Sain Noën Khan. When this seventh reincarnation died, his teacher, a tsorj lama, was said to have become the next reincarnation. This Shireet Gegeen monastery was a somewhat small monastery consisting of several temples with over a hundred lamas.

The collective's center was half a kilometer from the monastery on the banks of the Chuluut river. The goods held by the collective were located at the center of the co-operative. There was one tiny wooden building which looked like a lama-trader's building. On its right-hand side three gers had been set up in an orderly way. The right-hand ger was very large, with a smoke-hole cover, and the left-hand ger was of average size. The smoke-hole had a rope attached to it and smoke could be seen coming from the chimney.

After returning my horse to the young man who had arrived to do horse-relay duties, I entered the smoking ger. There were wooden beds on both sides of the ger covered with mottled blankets, and a tiny mirror and a silver cup had been placed on a suitcase at the back of the ger. The ger had red curtains made from some woollen cloth which had possibly been used by the lamas of the monastery and appeared to be very comfortable. There were two women there, and at the back of the ger sat the husband, a fat, noisy, jovial character with a black beard and a rough face. He was smoking a long-stemmed pipe, and he took a silver striker and a pipe cleaner from a red silk bag adorned with black brocade. He sat there tapping these things together.

During their work break, the women drank tea and seemed to enjoy themselves in a normal way. When I entered they did not appear to pay me much attention. Then the more senior of the two women asked me, “Well boy, where have you come from?” “I have come from the center of Khan Öndör.” The husband then asked, “Where do you come from? Where are you going?” “My home is in Chandman' Ölziit Uul banner. Not far away. I have just come from there,” I replied. After sitting awhile in silence, the husband asked, “What is there in the center of Khan Öndör?” “Nothing,” I replied. “Are you at school there?” “No.” “What is your name?” I replied, telling him my name.

While I drank my tea the husband went out and came straight back in. “Have you come on foot?” he asked. “No, I came on horseback.” “There is only my horse at the tethering post. There doesn't appear to be any other horse.” “I sent my horse back.” The three of them looked at me in astonishment. Then the older woman asked, “Well my boy, how will you return?” “I'm not going back for the time being.” I replied.

While those three people continued to look surprised, we heard the thunderous

noise of several galloping horses. On hearing that noise, they all went out and the husband went into the old trading building. The other two wives ran outside and went to the north ger where they pulled the smoke-hole cover shut and went in. I followed them and when I entered the cooperative building, I saw several sacks of flour, and some cotton cloth and tea in a corner, all covered in dust. In another corner there were several dozen bags of wool and animal hair which appeared to be stacked at random. One of the people who came in took some pipe tobacco and tea, others took away one or two yards of daalimba [cotton drill] and some raisins. The people who came in addressed the bearded man as "Khaivii".

I left and went to see what was happening in the north ger, which turned out to be the Red Ger. This spacious ger also had blue woollen cloth curtains and quilted mattresses, and some pictures had been hung on the walls showing Lenin and Sükhbaatar on his horse. Some contemporary pamphlets and journals had been stuffed in various places here and there. In the middle of the ger, twenty or thirty books were lined up on a tiny table which was covered with a red table cloth. In addition, there were a considerable number of journals and newspapers. No one other than myself entered the red ger. The two girls were named Doljin and Dolgor.

It seemed as if these three people had finished their work for the day. Khaivii lived five kilometers from the center of our collective. He herded the livestock and went to the center during the day to work as a manager of a branch of the collective. The two girls were the principal and assistant managers of the Red ger. While we were talking, Khaivii asked me what work I had come to do. I told him the reason I had come. His demeanour changed altogether and looking at me carefully, he exclaimed, "Oh! So we have a young boss!"

After they had talked about it among themselves, they made me a meal and some tea and invited me to go and look at the collective. We all went out together, and on approaching the west ger, the woman Doljin drew back the smoke-hole cover of the ger and Dolgor unlocked it. On entering, it looked like the treasury ger of a monastery with its red and yellow cloth trimmings and yellow cloth curtains. Long thin cushions had been piled up three, four, and sometimes five layers high. At the north side of the ger, there was a table with a dusty Chinese abacus, a writing pen and ink pot, and a book with a dark brown cover. There was also a large bulky hearth and an iron stove.

There was a strong smell of damp, making it impossible for people to live there. When I asked about the committee of the collective, Khaivii replied, "I am one of the leaders and at present I am carrying out the chairman's duties on a temporary basis. The secretary is out in the countryside. He has not been seen around here recently and it is not known when he will be back. It has been three years since the collective was established and there are thirty members living in scattered ravines. Two meetings have been held so far. As far as these goods are concerned, after we had confiscated the feudalists' property, this ger with the cushions, a rug, and a gun were handed over to the jurisdiction of the collective. Over a hundred head of cattle and three hundred sheep have been gathered from the members but there are still a number of livestock held by members which have not yet been precisely counted."

When the accounts and the property of the collective members were examined at the time the collective was established, the number of livestock owned by each herdsman was recorded. Thereafter no more than two resolutions were required to elect the leadership. However, only one official document had been sent to the sum administration

and the junior instructor of the collective, and only one or two written replies had been received from them.

When I asked Khaivii how the official business should have been conducted, he replied, "I do not know much about it. On the other hand only you, our leader, have finished school, and you should be able to guide and lead us with the instructions which you have brought." I did not know if he was praising or mocking me. When I asked, "So, what do we do?" he said, "Well, I don't really know. It would be better to summon the secretary." "Will we have a meeting soon?" I asked. "When we order a meeting, not even a few of them turn up. Even when we send two or three members out to go around for a few days ordering people to do so, they do not come, which is a very difficult problem."

It was quite late when Khaivii left. I finished my meal and fell asleep. I got up in the morning and while thinking about what to do next, the girl Dolgor said, "Go into the west ger. Lift the edge of it and let the dampness out." and so I did.

Khaivii had told me that no wages were paid there. "We eat the yoghurt made from the milk of the collective's cows, and one sheep is slaughtered every month. When there is a meeting of all the members, we will slaughter a cow and share out the meat. The leg of a slaughtered cow was dried and saved from the previous meeting. You will probably have to eat that." Due to the pressure of their work, Khaivii, Dolgor, and Doljin were unable to help or advise me. After leaving things for a day, the following day they sent for the secretary and two or three days later, word was received: "In addition to his family having moved a great distance, the secretary is not at home and has gone to look for his animals. On his return we will send him to you." After we waited a few days he had still not arrived and so again we sent someone after him.

The secretary, a man of about thirty, turned up the following day. Having worked as a minor official in the army, he said a lot of things and showed off, but did not know anything at all about the work. "There is hardship back home, and I wish to be excused from my position as secretary at the forthcoming meeting," he told us and left. One day, the leader of the sum and the chairman of the cooperative of the sum center arrived and went to see the managers of the Red Ger, where they enjoyed themselves, enthusing about old times.

I invited the two of them into my ger and discussed my worries. When I asked a few questions, the leader of the sum said, "When you want to hold a meeting, if you summon people through the district leader, who is not far from here, you will attract people more quickly. All twenty of the cooperative's horses are kept by two households which are on the other side of the river. You may obtain mounts there." When the chairman of the cooperative was talking about his experience, he said that going around the members to re-count their livestock was a priority. Afterwards he instructed me to go around the households to recruit new members.

In order to get to talk to those families which looked after the collective's horses, I needed a horse myself, and during the next day or two a collective member brought along an old gelding. I was ready to set off to visit those families except that I did not have a saddle and so I let the horse graze for a day. When I enquired about obtaining a saddle, it seemed that none was available. I was about to set off using an old cushion for a saddle when the woman Dolgor, the manager of the Red Ger, came out and looked at me. "How can you possibly ride bare-back? Here is an old saddle of Doljin's. Saddle up with this and go. I will tell Doljin," she said.

So, having saddled the horse with Doljin's old saddle, I visited several house-

holds. Since they all regarded me as the chairman of the cooperative, I was invited to sit in the place of honor, and they treated me with respect.

There was a very experienced old man in one of the households who turned out to be one of the leaders of the cooperative's committee. He said, "Well, this collective has been established in a so-so manner. After saying that they would bring together a few animals, on the whole, these have not yet been handed over to the cooperative. We did not know how to look after the animals and really did not know what to do with them at that point. The junior instructor of the collective and the leader of the sum are going backwards and forwards over this matter. In addition, they only discuss world matters and they look like people who have forgotten how to look after a few animals. Around here, my boy, you will be sorry to have taken this appointment, but it will be all right if one of the experienced people from the area is elected chairman of the cooperative."

I realized that what he had said was very true. I also went to one or two other households where it was said that the collective was an organization which did no work other than to gather animals and eat them. For this reason, the genuine herdsmen and working people disliked sitting by idly while the unemployed and lazy people appeared to take advantage of this laggardly situation. So, nearly a month later, one of the repeatedly requested meetings was held.

All the leading members, the managers of the Red Ger, and the rest of us spoke at the meeting. It was customary that people make speeches about the world situation and the general situation in Mongolia. The meeting then continued for a day and the next day a cow was slaughtered and eaten. A little airag and milk was brought along, and everyone had a drink together.

The committee of the collective proposed that a new leader be sent to the households to do the work of recruiting new members. The secretary who requested leave should be replaced and a new secretary elected and sent with two people to count the livestock owned by the households. We all went to do our respective tasks. I wandered around the households for five or six days. Regardless of whether there were several gers or just a single ger, I would enter and say, "We are establishing Socialism. You must join the collective."

This was followed by a short discussion about the weather, and then I left. Some of the people sat in silence listening to my speech. Others began to talk about completely different things, about Tsetserleg town and the arrival of summer. Some of them in passing did acknowledge what I had said, but remarked they had to wait for permission before agreeing, perhaps when their brothers had returned from somewhere, or when their sons had returned from the army, or when their father had returned from searching for lost animals, and so forth. Thus, after several days I had still not managed to recruit a single member. The secretary arrived five or six days later, but I had not obtained anything more substantial than a few names of households and the number of their livestock.

I spent some of the time reading books and newspapers in the Red Ger. At other times I played with the children on the river bank. Occasionally, I wandered through the gers and passed my time eating yoghurt.

The Chuluut river was full of all kinds of large and small fish. I had heard of people catching them and grilling their flesh but I had never seen it done. Once, after the Chuluut river had flooded and the waters had receded, many large fish were stranded in puddles from the overflow. After many days without rain, when the puddles dried up, the fish died and were eaten by hawks. This used to produce a bad smell.

I had an idea and decided to find a way to catch and fry some fish. Armed with a basket and two pitch forks, I went to the water's edge with three of my companions. The flood waters had collected there into an oval-shaped hollow five or six meters long and three meters wide in which several large fish were thrashing about. Holding the forks and the basket we chased the fish from the wide end of the pond towards the narrowest inlet where the basket was held by two boys while the other two frightened the fish with the forks. The fish jumped out fiercely and inevitably entered the basket, which was quickly lifted up, although of course, several of them fell back into the water. However, two average-sized fish remained in the bottom of the basket. We lifted the basket with the fish writhing and rolling about. One of them continued leaping and got back into the water. Using the basket and the forks we found a way to restrain the other one. We took it back to the center of the collective, gutted it, sliced it with a knife and fried it in butter.

We all sat down like cultured people and were about to eat the fish, but no one could bring themselves to do so. One of us then invited some people in from outside to try the tasty food. Not one of them could eat it. After the fish had been left on the plate for quite a while, one of my friends invited some young people to eat it without telling them what it was. They tasted it but spat it out. This was the first fish I had ever caught, and although it was of little use, the experience was valuable. Twenty six years later I was on the Suman river in Arkhangai aimag with a rod and hook, accompanied by (Politburo member) Jagvaral. I caught two large fish on that occasion, which made a total lifetime catch of three. I have never fished again.

One day, a summons arrived from Sünrev, the senior instructor at the cooperative in Tsetserleg town. As I galloped into Tsetserleg by relay horse, the leaders of the cooperatives were gathered there from all around and were receiving their wages. It appeared that some had been dismissed and others were being transferred elsewhere. They gave me fifteen tögrög. I did not know whether this was a month's salary, half a month's, or just a reward. This was because when I first went to Chuluut, the leader of the cooperative had said that there would be no wages. I mentioned my worries to the secretary of the senior instructors of the collective. He replied, "The leaders are being appointed from among experienced local people and soon you will be released from your duties. You can go now, I will discuss it later".

I used my money to buy a Mongol deel and an old bicycle from a friend of mine. Then I returned to the cooperative's center. I assembled and rode the bicycle, which disturbed the dogs of the nearby households. Later, the local children and the novice lamas of Shireet Khüree practiced with it until it broke and could not be repaired.

Soon afterwards there was a national holiday. Several hundred people were gathered at the cooperative's center. Speeches were made and a wrestling tournament was held. During the proceedings someone collapsed and died, which caused a great stir. Several days afterwards, my eldest brother Damchaabadgar who had left our area to join the army, returned and came to see me at the collective's center. "A young, inexperienced person like you is not suited to major work like this. You should either return home and stay with me, or else return to school," he said.

Around this time, some lamas from Shireet Gegeen monastery came through our area and asked if we had any lamb skins which could be put inside a deel. They stopped and listened to the meetings before returning home.

Nearly three months later, a tall man named Dovdon arrived from Ulaanbaatar. He was on assignment from the Central Committee of the Youth League and was con-

cerned with spreading information about the regulations governing the Communist International Youth Organization (KIM). He was quite talkative, and discussed educational and cultural matters. He told me that I should go to Ulaanbaatar to study at the Party School, and that he would speak on my behalf at the aimag and Youth League committee.

Meanwhile, a junior instructor of the cooperative came to our cooperative center and said, "Go to Tsetserleg, I want to send you to school there. For the time being I will transfer your responsibilities to Khaivii." Accordingly, he handed a bound volume over to Khaivii and a day or two later I set off for Tsetserleg. On my departure, some of the members of the cooperative gave me some aaruul and khuruud (dried milk curds) and wished me a good journey. Later on, I came across this Dovdon in the center of Tsetserleg Mandal. He said to me, "It is time you went to school, we will meet in Ulaanbaatar. Go and see the committee of the aimag Youth League." The aimag, Party, and Youth League committees were in a room on the second floor of the two-story building which was the aimag recreation hall.

The chairman of the Youth League committee was a man called Chimed of the KUTV whom I knew from my former school days. I went along to the committee of the aimag Youth League. When I opened the door and enquired about Chimed, a young man asked me, "What do you want with him?" and began to interrogate me fiercely. I replied that I had decided to attend school and wished to join the committee of the Youth League.

The young man then replied, "I am now [head of the committee of] this Youth League. A group of people, including the leaders of the Party committee and the Youth League, became rightists, and after expulsion from their posts here were called to Ulaanbaatar. You should go to do a week's Pioneer work in the countryside, where you will deliver documents to the Youth League cells in the two sums. You must give the instructions in person." He then wrote down some notes. I rode by relay horse to the centers of Zürkh and Chandman' sum and delivered the documents and instructions to the leaders of the Youth League organizations. I gave verbal instructions about holding a meeting to enroll country children in the Pioneer movement, and on my way back I went home to visit my mother and my brothers and sisters.

My mother was very happy. "It is nice to have a child go away healthy and return to see us in this way. You can continue to go to school" she said. However, my mother and brothers and sisters did not mention my father, and when I asked about him, after hesitating in silence, they gently told me the news. "Last winter your father fell ill and died. Because he was bringing up many children, he did not have enough food or drink for himself, and went to bed hungry. He continued worrying and exhausting himself, and developed a stomach cancer and died. He was barely 49 years old."

Having told me this they cried and I cried with them. Although we comforted each other, we thought about him from time to time and cried again. When we looked at the things he used to use, we missed him even more, and as he supported the family with wages from his official obligations, he could not really afford to die. I was so sad that I could not repay all the worry that he suffered while raising us. Then, when it was time to go, they all wished me well and my mother sent me on my way and made a libation of milk behind me.

So, one autumn day, I arrived at the center of Tsetserleg and a few days later I climbed aboard an old truck and set off with a group of people for Ulaanbaatar. Javzan,

the wife of my elder cousin Sanjaajav, was also on this truck. She looked after me on the journey, and paid for meals when we stopped along the way.