

## At Middle School and College in the Soviet Union

In the autumn of 1932 I was able to attend school in the Soviet Union. After I obtained some money from the Ministry of Education for traveling expenses and clothing, I went around the cooperative shops with my teacher and friend Battseren to buy a cheap European-style suit, a pair of boots, and two outer shirts which I packed in my suitcase without even unfolding them. After arriving in the Soviet Union, I tried to wear the shirts and the suit but found that they were all too large.

We left Ulaanbaatar with a group of students in a truck owned by the Ministry of Education and reached the town of Altanbulag, having passed through the villages of Kharaa and Yeröö. Altanbulag had a Russian-like appearance and seemed to consist of many streets lined with tiny log cabins. The Soviet consular building was in the center along with the buildings of the Party and other public organizations. There was a small temple on a terrace to the northwest of the town where in 1921 the People's Partisans had liberated the place from Chinese occupation using four machine guns installed there. Interestingly, it became known as The Four-Sided Temple.

There was a hollow on one side of the temple which contained a small two-story building with an enclosure. This was a liquor distillery owned by a wealthy black American woman. When the distillery was taken over by the state it was said that she opened a canteen and made a living through trading. Alongside the distillery was a large enclosure where the customs building was located. The Mongolian-Soviet border was visible a short distance away. We set off to cross the border in the truck. There was a large wooden gate with a blue frame on our side of the border on which the state insignia of Mongolia—the Soëmbo design—was clearly marked. A little further on was another large gate lined with bricks, on the upper edge of which was the Soviet insignia with the letters USSR.

I felt as if I was indeed passing from one country to another when I went through these gates. We showed our papers at the border along with the things we were carrying, and before very long we moved off into the town of Ar Khiagt, also known as Troitskosavsk. Troitskosavsk was a Soviet frontier town located in a wooded area on the north side of the pass. Military barracks, the houses of ordinary people, and Christian churches were all present. From there we went to the bank of the Selenge river where we boarded a tiny passenger boat bound for Deed Üd (Ulaan Üd). Although it was a very novel experience to travel on a ship for the first time, the choppy waves made me ill and I passed the night feeling quite exhausted. We arrived in the city of Deed Üd the following day.

We arrived at the port and alighted from the boat onto the bank where we were met by Törtogtokh, the leader of the Mongolian Rabfak Students' Union and a few other students. They took us away by car. The city of Deed Üd appeared different from the towns and settlements I had seen previously as it was a large, clean city. It consisted

mainly of individual wooden buildings, streets, and open, sandy places.

We continued our journey and stopped at a two-story building on a Mongolian street near the city center. The students of the Mongol Rabfak lived there and had their meals there as well. We occupied a room there where we rested for a day and the next morning followed the regular students to familiarize ourselves with the layout of the city. We spent a few days there wandering around the place.

Above all, we wanted to see the railway and the station. What I saw completely changed any preconceptions I had of a railroad. It was my understanding that a so-called train was a convoy of carriages which rolled along a thick, wide polished metal road, but in fact it was totally different. Although the two thin rails of the track did not impress me when I saw them, I was amazed by the size of the train, its pulling power, and the large number of carriages being drawn.

As we walked past the houses and enclosures, we came across Russians and Buryats. Since we could not speak any Russian, we asked the students accompanying us to interpret for us. We went to watch a shadow theater in one of the parks of Deed Üd.

One day, we accompanied our friends to see a Russian Orthodox church where many people seemed to be standing upright and making a sign by touching a hand to their head and chest and singing songs in loud voices. This was their way of worshipping and reciting readings with their priest. There were a few people dressed in black at the far end of the church who appeared to be conducting the service. The priests were bearded and wore a symbolic cross called a zagalmal on a soft cord hung around their necks. We took off our hats, stood there for a while and followed the worshippers through the church, noting that they were lighting candles. There were many statues and paintings of gods. When I saw all this, although it was quite different from the ceremony and layout of a Mongolian Lamaist temple, it was still clearly a temple of religious worship.

Before long, classes began. It was decided that lessons would be given on the top floor of the two-story building in the town center, a short distance from our living accommodations. During the early 1930's, as there were no native Mongols who had completed middle school, let alone any higher education, it became necessary to train veterinarians, zoo veterinary technicians, engineers, and other specialists. With this aim in mind, a school named Mongol Rabfak was established in a Soviet city. The Mongolian and Soviet governments came to an agreement regarding the education of middle school pupils and the USSR People's Educational Commissariat (now the Ministry of Education) organized the implementation of this agreement.

During the discussions on which city the school was to be established in, the leadership of Soviet Buryatia suggested that the school should be established in its own capital, Deed Üd (Ulaan Ud), and in 1930 the foundations of the school were laid there. The school curriculum was adapted from that of the old gimnaz<sup>1</sup> and the contemporary Soviet Ten-Year school. Russian and Buryat teachers with a higher education and many years' experience of teaching were appointed to teach at this school. During a five year period of study we were to have lessons in Russian, mathematics, physics, chemistry, international relations, botany, biology, zoology, and other interesting subjects. As the first-year courses were extremely hard, we focused our attention mainly on memorizing Russian words, reading, and writing. During breaks in our lessons we played with Rus-

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<sup>1</sup> High school.



sian children with whom we practised a few of the sentences we had been taught.

In winter, the stores provided the children of our school with a somewhat short overcoat and in summer we were given green cotton trousers and shirts. Although the food we ate was good, overall there was not enough of it at the time. When we were being taught by our teachers, they used to tell us, "Above all, you should direct the bulk of your attention to the four subjects—Russian language, Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. Without those you will not be able to advance." As they told us this repeatedly, we made sure we found time to concentrate on these subjects.

From the second year onwards, we began to memorize Russian songs and poems. In particular, we learned A. S. Pushkin's "Anchar", "Prison", "In Siberia", and the short poems of N. A. Nekrasov. At each stage of our class's progress, as well as watching films and learning songs, we decided to carry out some community work. Sengee, who had worked at the Tsetserleg Youth League in Arkhangai, organized a theater group with "Tall" Lkhagvajav, Oyuun, and others. They presented Mongolian plays, including "Queen Dolgor and the commoner Damdin," "The Three Significant Hills" and plays which they themselves had written. I became friends with a Russian boy, Tolya, a Buryat boy, Lev, and a Tungus boy named Gosha. I spoke with them in Russian and occasionally visited them at their homes during holidays.

When summer arrived, the students went to stay in several wooden buildings at the edge of the city where we played football and followed the young Buryats by standing in a circle holding hands and taking part in a dance called "Yookhor." Radnaabazar, one of the students at our school, performed a Caucasian dance and Törtogtokh did a Russian dance. Later, we decided to learn to dance a European dance in pairs. With Radnaabazar in charge, a group of students did extremely well at sports and gave all kinds of performances. They always talked about becoming circus performers.

Pupils such as Sengee and Radnaabazar wrote short plays and poems which were displayed on notice boards. There was a considerable increase in the number of people who enjoyed writing poetry. One of our students, named Batmönkh, used to imitate A. S. Pushkin while reading poetry. In order to do this he bought some old clothes from the commission store which sold second-hand clothes. Dressed in some black clothes with long pleats, over which he wore an open deel and a tsan hat, he made the audience laugh.

Sometimes our school would go to help with the construction of the locomotive and wagon-repair works. The teachers Sh. Luvsanvandan and later, D. Choijilsüren were sent from Ulaanbaatar to teach Mongolian at this school. Though Luvsanvandan was teaching lessons in Mongolian, he strove to learn Russian and did a lot of reading. On rest days he would go around telling us interesting facts on ancient history, literature, and the biographies of scholars. The teacher Choijilsüren discussed Mongolian history and classical and modern Mongolian literature and gave us advice on techniques to use when writing compositions in Mongolian. Both of these teachers advised us to study hard at Russian, Mathematics, Physics, and Biology, and to go on to obtain higher and professional qualifications. Later on, many students followed that advice. The teachers all advised us as follows: It will be good for the country if you all get qualifications and become proficient in foreign languages. However, we already have quite a lot of people who can speak in public.

The math teacher was a huge old Buryat man called Khazagaev. Abasheev, the Russian language teacher, was also a plump old man. The two of them used to tell us that

during the autonomous period they had been to Da Khüree and had taken part in the initial establishment of Mongolian schools there. They had been awarded the Mongolian Erdene Ochir medal for Mongolians living abroad. A group of Russian and Buryat teachers, including A. I. Alekseev, Bazhin, and others, quoted from the works of famous Russian literary authors and so greatly increased our knowledge about this subject.

Our students organized their own work in the community and kept in touch with the situation in Mongolia. The Ninth Party Congress held in 1934 approved the change in policy ("New Turn" policy) and pointed out the new direction of the nation's development. From 1933 to 1937 Mongolia's feudal classes were liquidated and a struggle was undertaken to develop the nation along a non-capitalist route. About this time, the Industrial Combine began production. In addition to the establishment of industries, handicraft associations were organized which began to attract herdsmen and poor lamas.

The automotive transport organization called Mongol Teekh had undergone considerable development, and its branches were operating in the aimag banners. The large foreign companies continued to diminish in number, and in the end were completely excluded from the country. Education, culture, and the press continued to develop across the nation. The Mongolian Theater was established in 1931 and in 1933 the acting troupe "Kharankhuin Zasag" performed in an international competition of revolutionary theater held in Moscow, where it achieved quite a high placing. On its way home, it [the theater troupe] performed at our school's summer camp. This provided a great impetus for the further progress of the free artist E. Oyuun and others.

After the Japanese imperialists penetrated deeply into northern China, we were repeatedly informed about the danger posed to Mongolian independence. A verbal agreement was reached between the Soviet Union and Mongolia in 1934, and in 1936 a protocol for mutual assistance was established which strengthened the independence of our country and was a significant factor in its further development.

We obtained reading material from Mongolia in the form of political texts, newspapers, journals and literature. Around this time, leading Mongolian figures continually came to give speeches. A Youth League cell was established and linked to our school. I was elected its secretary for a few years. On one occasion the Youth League members who were studying in the Soviet Union appointed me as their representative to the Ninth Congress of the Youth League. As this congress was to be convened just two days later, I had to hurry to get there. With my invitation from the Central Committee of the Youth League, I set off on one of the twice-weekly U-2 flights from Ulaan Üd to Ulaanbaatar. I sat in an open, three-seater plane with an aged Buryat woman who was dressed in a warm coat. On seeing that the woman felt unwell I also felt uncomfortable. We descended to an airfield northeast of Altanbulag to recover for a while.

During the stop I met a few German businessmen who were on their way from Ulaanbaatar westwards through the Soviet Union. "Have a good meal and a glass of vodka. Then you will feel better for your onward journey towards Ulaanbaatar," they suggested. I ate well and drank some tea. However, since I could not bear the smell of alcohol, let alone drink it, I did not take their advice. When we flew on again I felt worse. Somehow we managed to reach the airport next to Ulaanbaatar's Maakhuur hill.

On my arrival at the airport, I spent quite a while in a state of bewilderment as I did not recognize anyone and did not know where to go. Then, someone at the airport telephoned the Central Committee of the Youth League, which replied that a car was being sent, so I should wait there. I went for a short walk in the breeze and felt a bit bet-



ter. An "America-8" car drew up with just a driver inside. "Have a seat in the car. I will take you" he said. I got into the car and on the way to the city center I noted its main features.

The Ministry of Transport was near the East Terrace along with other square modern buildings, the Army Club, the Youth League Offices, the Ministry of Defense, the Office of the Party Central Committee and other new buildings which had been constructed. On the northern and eastern sides of the Choijin Lama Temple there were several wooden buildings with tall pointed roofs, as well as several new buildings made of white stone.

The car came to a stop outside the door of one of those buildings. On entering the building, one of the former pupils of the Tsetserleg middle school, a girl called Doljin, greeted me and asked in a familiar way "Did you have a good journey?" She told me that all my relatives were well and that she had married Sodnomdorj, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Youth League. Sodnomdorj was working at the office of the Youth League in my native aimag, and as I knew something about it, he invited me to his home. I had some tea there and then went to the ger where the delegates were staying.

During the congress we listened to the report made by the Central Committee of the Youth League, criticisms were made and a Central Committee was elected. The congress was held in the old Recreation Hall, which was a wooden, ger-shaped building. Speeches were made by leading figures in the Party and government. I have fond memories of this, my first opportunity to listen to participants giving speeches and reading reports at a major conference. While the congress was in progress, I went to enquire after my male cousin Sanjaajav in order to obtain news of my family.

While I was asking about Jügdernamjil's family, he gave me some unfortunate news. After I had left for school, Jügdernamjil returned from holiday and worked successfully along with his wife. Unfortunately, he had contracted a severe recurrent infection the previous year and finally died of it. I was very sad at the death of so young a person.

After the congress had ended, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Youth League called me over before I left and said, "I want to present you with this award for all your work in the Youth League cell," and he presented me with a pocket watch. Until then I had never tried to use a watch, and as I did not know how to use one, I was afraid I might break it. Then I bought some tobacco, sweets and books, and returned to my school. After arriving back I gave a talk about what was new in Ulaanbaatar and about the congress. My friends gathered in my quarters on several evenings to ask about the situation in Mongolia, and they smoked the few boxes of tobacco I had brought back and ate the sweets.

Occasionally we did some subbotnik [voluntary unpaid work done for patriotic reasons] work at construction sites in Ulaan Üd and in the neighboring villages. During the years of my schooling in the Soviet Union (1932-1937), farmers and cooperative workers were successfully growing and harvesting their own crops. Everyone talked about industry in the Urals, Ukraine, and Moscow, where several power stations, steel smelters, automobile factories, and machine tool and equipment factories were being established on a wide scale.

The Second Five-Year Plan of the Soviet people was fulfilled ahead of time, and we became familiar with the triumphs of this period of the establishment of socialism. Our teachers taught us about the opposition to the imperialist capitalists and the danger

posed by their cruel Fascism, and the great deeds and struggles carried out by the Soviet people in the international arena. We also understood these things from our reading of the Mongolian press.

We had interesting discussions on the situation in the Soviet Union and its capital, Moscow. Some Mongolian students who were returning home from their studies at KUTV [Communist University of the Working Masses of the East] and the cavalry colleges in Moscow and Tver' met with us and told us about what was going on in those places. The students who had graduated from the KUTV were appointed to important posts in the Party and in the community.

Some of the students at the school were badly prepared [for such tasks]. As they needed to be taught through interpreters, their educational achievements were poor by the time they returned home. I remember one of my friends who considered our school to be a "great big school," as he put it, and that he "had already finished his math and physics the previous year" and that this year he was "just completing his politics" [i.e. was finishing well ahead of schedule]. I remember my other friends teasing him about saying this.

The first group of my friends who finished their studies at the school included Radnaabazar (who later founded our State Circus), Dashiimaa, who graduated from the Mongolian State University and became a lecturer there, and Yu. Tsedenbal who, having studied in Irkutsk, spent a year in Ulaan Üd before graduating. I was in the third group of students, which graduated after him in 1937. [Following our graduation] we decided we would go to see the sights of Moscow and Leningrad.

On the way to Moscow and Leningrad we passed Lake Baikal with its pure clean water, some long Siberian rivers, the Ural mountains, and various large and small towns, until we reached Moscow, the Soviet capital. From the very first day I heard we were going to visit Moscow, I was eager to get there as soon as possible. The nearer we approached Moscow, the more impatient we became, and just as we entered the outskirts of the city, we got off at a large station where some people from the Moscow City Education Department greeted us and accommodated us in a college building on the edge of the city. Moscow was extremely large, and it was impossible to know in which direction you were heading. It was the sort of city which could make you feel giddy.

We stayed there for several days during which we saw the Metro with its beautiful and palatial stations, the underground tracks, Lenin's mausoleum, Red Square, Museums, and Gorki Park. From there we took a train to Leningrad and visited the place which commemorated the start of the revolution, famous museums of history and art, the Petropavlovskii Prison where revolutionaries with a vision of democracy were made to suffer during the Tsarist era, the Cathedral of St. Isaac with its many marble columns, and the Baltic coast and Gulf of Finland.

After studying in small frontier towns, I felt as if I was in a dream in these two large famous and historic cities. We decided that the things we had seen there would not be forgotten for a long time and we tried to mention them when the opportunity arose.

After finishing school I sat for my exams, and because entry to college was the right thing to do, I went to the Mongolian embassy in Moscow where I talked about this with ambassador Dar'zav. He thought that I should become a composer at the College of Theater. I had never taken part in any plays while at the Rabfak, and as I had no talent for this, I turned down his suggestion. One of the staff at the embassy said I had no option but to go to that college, and so, accompanied by an interpreter, I went to the Arbat square where the college was located.



Accordingly, we arrived at the Lunacharskii National College of Artistic Theater, a large multi-story building. We passed many of its rooms on our way to a room on the third floor which we entered to find a short, dark-haired woman dressed in a blue shirt. On inquiring who she was she turned out to be Anna Furmanova, the wife of the composer Furmanov. I found out from her about the college and the courses which were taken by would-be composers. I decided that these were not for me. I left and returned to the embassy. When I explained what had happened, they replied, "In that case, go to Siberia and enroll at the Irkutsk Teacher Training College." I gladly accepted this advice and soon left Moscow to get to Irkutsk early to do my entrance examinations.

On my way back from Moscow, I continually reflected on the things I had seen in Moscow and Leningrad and regretted that I had not remained to enroll at one of the colleges of those two large cities. I was still blaming myself for not doing this as I arrived in Irkutsk.

Irkutsk was built a long time ago on the Angara, a river with cold, clear water, and which is one of eastern Siberia's most famous streams. There were over 200,000 people living there. The city had many large industries, several theaters, museums, a university, a teacher training college, a mining institute, a college of agriculture, and many specialized middle schools in addition to the general middle schools.

The main street of the city was named after Karl Marx. On both sides of it there were beautiful old two- and four-story buildings. A number of other streets where cultural buildings and schools were located intersected with this street. The administration of our college was located at the far end of Karl Marx Street on the banks of the Angara next to a large garden named after the Paris Commune. When I arrived there I saw a white two-story building connected to a long, narrow building and several smaller buildings within an enclosure. The college administration and the history classroom were accommodated within this building. However, the mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, foreign and national languages, international relations and other classes were held on opposite sides of the city. Each classroom in the college contained four groups of three seats.

I went to see the secretary of the school administration to explain why I had been enrolled there. A report had already been received. "It says here that a student is arriving from Mongolia. That must be you. From here you should go to our classroom accommodation at a place called Temiryazev Street where you will meet with the secretary of the examination commission," he said. I asked where that street was located and walked about a kilometer to a two-story building. I went through the main entrance and opened a door marked "Examination Commission," where I saw a Russian woman of about the same age as me. When I told her why I was there, she answered, "You are too late. Two examinations have been held and the third will be held the day after tomorrow. That one is in mathematics." She explained the rules of the examination to me. I took a copy of the examination program and I spent two days studying math lessons.

Two days later, I competed in the mathematics examination along with three other candidates. Within ten days I managed to sit for the examinations in the remaining two subjects, and managed to gain a place on the college's history course, where I began my studies.

The two-story building where I arrived continued (eastwards) on into a long, narrow building where I was accommodated in a room with four other people. The building was nick-named "The Sausage" by the students due to its long, crooked shape. The

four who were with me were third and fourth-year students, and were quite a lot older than me. They all greeted me pleasantly and joked with me. Some of them were school administrators, others were head teachers of middle schools or classroom teachers. There were some people who had studied for two years at home and began their formal studies in the school itself from the third year onwards.

The students used to go to the countryside during their holidays. When they went home to visit their wives and children they would bring back food and drink which they shared with me. One of them was Aleksandr Merkur'ev. Since he was about my age, I used to ask him for advice. He took a great interest in the current situation in Mongolia. He used to say "Mongolia is one of our good friends" and he became a very close friend of mine. I also learned a great deal from the students about the customs of the Russian people and their history.

By all accounts, the first-year courses were not particularly easy and I spent all my free time studying. I passed the winter and the spring examinations. Included among my many new friends were Foman, Blagrev, Shumilevskii, and Gubenko. I used to sit in the library with these four friends of mine preparing for the examinations.

The academic library in Irkutsk had a wide range of interesting books. Here I had the opportunity to read books on historical subjects, and in particular, textbooks on Far Eastern history and literature. Thus I read with interest the accounts of the 13th century European travelers in Mongolia such as Plano Carpini, D. Rubrick and Marco Polo, and the famous Russian scholar I. Bichurin. Later, I read works about the Orient, especially about China, Japan, and India and the works of the learned experts on Mongolian history such as N. M. Yadrintsev, V. V. Radlov, A. V. Klements, G. N. Potanin, A. M. Pozdneev, famous scholars on India such as O. Rozenberg, O. Sherbatskoi and G. Ol'denburg, and the China specialists V. M. Alekseev, N. V. Kyunir, and the researcher on Arab culture I. Yu. Krachkovskii. I used to quote them in seminars and when giving talks during my course work.

Three people had already enrolled in colleges in the city before me. B. Gombojav had studied at the College of Finance. Lkhamsüren was unable to graduate from college there and returned home. Tsendenbal did complete his studies and returned home. Gombojav continually changed courses and spent many years there. Our classes were taught by professors, lecturers, and other senior professionals. It was interesting to listen to their lectures. There was an extra-curricular group studying historical research and a literature study group, both of which I decided to attend in the evenings.

In addition to Russian, we also studied Latin and English. During the five years we studied the following courses in sequence: ancient history, medieval history, recent and modern history, Russian and Soviet history, colonial history, European literature, Russian literature, archeology, historical source materials, political economy theory, history of the Communist Party, dialectic and historical materials, pedagogy, psychology, teaching materials, military studies, and a general history of art. We also had sports lessons. The teachers conducted seminars in general history, Soviet history and Party history. They regularly asked the students to present reports on these subjects. We wrote articles and compositions on our own in Russian Language and Literature classes which we then discussed and criticized in class. Sometimes, public figures in the city came to give talks and lectures on art, literature, history, and politics.

Around this time, a Mongolian branch of a veterinary hospital was being established alongside the Irkutsk Agricultural and Technical College. I went to give lectures



and talks at that college and I carried out public work assignments from the Komsomol committee. The principal of the college, P. F. Pigelëv, wanted me to take the Mongolian students to do some community work during the summer vacation. I accompanied the Mongolian students of the agricultural technical college on a two-month visit to a village a hundred kilometers away.

I invited Gombojav, a student at the Irkutsk Medical College, to spend the summer with me. We spent a pleasant holiday reading books, newspapers and journals. We also played football, and together we learned songs and music which we performed in public along with Mongolian plays.

We visited the houses of the Russian villagers and learned a lot about their way of life. As the village people regarded us as friendly Mongolian youngsters, they invited us into their homes. The local Russian children came to us to take part in sporting competitions which we held in the evenings. Thus we became well acquainted with our new friends and passed the summer in this village in its natural, wooded location.

During our holiday, the school principal, P. F. Pigelëv, came to visit us on several occasions and offered us friendly advice and instruction. Later on, he became leader of the Irkutsk Youth League. Having been a responsible member of the City Party committee, he advanced further to become deputy director of the Organizational Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and head of a department in the USSR Supreme Soviet. I once came across him unexpectedly while he was working in one of these positions and we talked about our old times in Irkutsk.

We returned to our classes in the autumn, and after spending the winter and spring there, I returned to Ulaanbaatar in 1939 for a holiday. On my arrival, I went to stay with my elder cousin Sanjaajav. I decided it would be nice to watch the army naadam that year. The day before the naadam, my cousin Sanjaajav and his relatives went to a place near where the naadam was being held on the south bank of the river Tuul and erected a ger. I went along with them on the day of the naadam, and we passed the time together eating and drinking airag. During the daytime we watched the wrestling, horse racing, and archery, and in the evening we watched plays being performed.

At that time, European-style dancing was quite popular among the young people of Ulaanbaatar and dancing went on all over the place. Young people, generally dressed in Mongolian deel, gathered every evening to dance on a wooden platform in the naadam square in front of the Army Club. Occasionally, military personnel and Mongolian students wearing European clothing could be seen among them. Being students of a Soviet college, we mingled with these young people, who invited us to pass the time dancing.

Every ministry trumpeted the successes of its respective branches in photographs and charts displayed in 'Red Corners' built from wood and in tents and pavilions in the naadam field. On each day of the naadam, a large number of gers and tents were erected in the naadam field on and behind the north terrace of the river. People from the countryside and the towns could rest here. Kitchens and shops were opened in the tents, where there was plenty of food and drink as well as goods to buy.

Following instructions from Natsag, Departmental Head of the Ministry of Education, I went on duty at the Ministry of Education's Red Corner and while I was there giving brief explanations of the things on display to visitors, Natsag suddenly entered and called me over in a whisper, saying, "As soon as these people have gone, close the Red Corner and put away the photograph of the leaders on the wall. These people were arrested last night and have been taken to prison." The photograph was of Luvsansharav

and Dogsom. So, I followed orders and handed over the display to the next person to be on duty. That evening, I reflected with surprise on how dangerous life was in our country. While we were being attacked by Japan from abroad, what was happening to our leadership seemed strange, but we went along with it, assuming that the Party was doing things properly. However, our worship of this one man [Choibalsan] turned out to be a mistake, as everyone found out in the end.

When the naadam was over, I was summoned to the Ministry of Education where my old acquaintance Natsag declared in a grand manner, "We are moving you to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense." When I replied, "Would it not be more useful to the country if I finished my schooling?" He smiled and said, "I know more than you do. I was just joking when I said you were to join the army. However, you will actually spend a month on a military course teaching Russian."

Accordingly, I went to the Ministry of Defense and accepted my appointment. I went to the summer camp of the General Military College, which was in a bend of the Tuul river on a plain to the northwest of Buyant Ukhua where the national naadam was held. A two-month preparatory course had been established alongside the school for junior officers who would go to train in the Soviet Union.

Every day I taught them about world affairs in addition to the Russian language. We concentrated on the Russian alphabet, sentence construction, and modern conversation. Since that course was the direct responsibility of the general college, it became one of its branches and the course students all lived in army accommodations within the military organization. I too had to wear leather army boots, a green army shirt, trousers, cap, and belt. I was put in a room with a student and a Russian driver.

One evening, the director of the General College was coming and so we had to get on parade quickly. He arrived in an open-top car and was wearing an oriental-style army hat along with his medals. He inspected the parade and went away, never to be seen again. However, the school commissioner, Luvsandorj, continued to meet with the teachers and handed out orders. I became acquainted with Dashnyam, a teacher of national history, B. Lkhamsüren, the Mongolian language teacher, and the teachers of politics S. Ravdan, Lkhündev, and Demchig. Later on, Ravdan became a general.

While we were listening to the singers and musicians in the square at the naadam Army Club, a man who looked like an army officer came up and said, "Everyone stand up! The father of General Demid is coming." Accordingly, we all stood up and looked towards the door and clapped. We were unable to see who was coming, but after people had sat down, an army officer led in an old countryman and seated him right at the front of the audience. Then, we listened to music while looking at the general's father. When the performance ended we left to go home.

A few days after the naadam had dispersed, all the army officers and teachers were ordered to assemble in the large wooden building of the Army Club. Accordingly, the First Cavalry Division of the General Military College and the commanders of the other military detachments gathered with their families at the club until they could barely all fit in. While that was happening, a group of people entered from the side of the stage and everyone present stood up and applauded loudly as General Demid entered at the head of several senior officers. The resolutions of the Presidium of the National Baga Khural were read out by an officer. General Demid then presented many of the officers with medals. Demid was a short man who wore a tiny moustache. One of his eyes was a little smaller than the other. He was a modest man. When the meeting was over, before



the many officers had set off in their cars, we heard General Demid talking to the instructors and advisors in fluent Russian.

One day, which happened to be a rest day, the weather was hot and I took off my regulation leather boots. Dressed in my European-style trousers I went for a walk along the river bank. Meanwhile, the commissar Luvsandorj of the General (Military) College came along on his horse. Recognizing me, he told me to go over to the headquarters. I duly entered the ger which housed the staff headquarters and while I was standing to attention in military fashion, Luvsandorj shouted in a deep, loud voice that he was going to "punish me." I stood in silence listening to the commissar. Outwardly he appeared very fierce, and although he behaved in a threatening way towards people, he was really a good, compassionate man. "You must not walk around in ordinary clothes like this in a military area. It is against regulations. So go and get changed out of your play clothes and don't do it again," he told me.

Soon afterwards I returned to school in Irkutsk. When I had resumed my studies there, I heard that General Demid had arrived by train. When I heard that he had died of food poisoning, I felt sad, as he was someone I had just seen recently. His remains were cremated and transported to Ulaanbaatar for burial. On hearing that he had been declared an enemy, I was astonished and felt disgusted at having grieved at his death.

During the time I was teaching the short course for the soldiers in Ulaanbaatar, and after my return to Irkutsk, I listened to many lectures about the dangers of war. In 1933 a militarist party led by Hitler gained power in Germany, a large European state. It began to arrest members of rising forces in its own country and in particular members of the Communist Party. Throughout this time, Japan had been advancing into China. Later on, after Japan occupied Manchuria, it encroached on the Mongolian and Soviet borders. In 1935 the Italian imperialists invaded Ethiopia, and in 1936 Germany and Italy assisted the Spanish Falange Fascists, and war broke out against the government of the Republic of Spain. In 1936 Germany and Japan formed an imperialist coalition against the Comintern, which became known as the Berlin-Tokyo-Rome Axis.

At that time, the Soviet Union and the Comintern united other international parties and conducted a major effort to prevent the danger of war breaking out. The danger of war was fast approaching the Soviet Union and our motherland, Mongolia. In 1938, the Japanese imperialists attacked the Soviet Far Eastern frontier near Lake Khasan, but were destroyed. Around the same time they also encroached on our own eastern frontier near Bulan Ders and Lake Buir. The newspapers in Irkutsk continued to put out reports about the Japanese attack on the Mongolian border. Sometimes reports from Tass would be printed in large type and posted on buildings. While our motherland was being attacked by the Japanese, we Mongols were worried and spent day and night trying to obtain news of what was happening. Some Japanese spies did infiltrate into parts of our country to carry out harmful and destructive work. We felt anxious when, from time to time, we received news of their capture.

In 1939, the Japanese imperialists fought hard over several months in an attack on the eastern frontier of Mongolia in the area of Khalkhyn Gol. During that difficult time, when an attack was being made on the national frontier of Mongolia, threatening its independence, the Soviet government announced to the whole world that it would offer military assistance to Mongolia. Powerful units of the Soviet Red Army went to the battle front at Khalkhyn Gol and dealt a decisive blow to the Japanese imperialists, thereby preserving our independence.

When I visited Ulaanbaatar in 1939 for a vacation, the city was in a war-time situation, and a general state of anxiety prevailed. Anti-aircraft guns had been installed in some of the buildings of the city. Soviet and Mongolian soldiers could be seen heading eastwards. However, our people were confident that with the help of the Soviet Red Army, we would be victorious, and we expressed our gratitude to the Soviet Army and the Soviet people.

During May, when I was at college, and even in the autumn, after I had returned there, people used to say, "When the Soviet Army destroys the Japanese it will be a help to all of you. We ourselves are also ready and willing to fight for you." In fact, a few of my acquaintances did fight in the battle at Khalkhyn Gol. In April 1939, Hitler's Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, and in September the Germans attacked Poland and progressively began to occupy the countries of Europe. Due to a mistake made by the Western Imperialists, the Soviet-Finnish war began, in which Finland was defeated. Since that time, relations between those countries have normalised and have continued to improve steadily.

The following year, B. Tüdev, N. Luvsanchültem, and D. Tsedev, who had studied at school with me, joined me in the history course and we enjoyed being together again as a group. I met a Russian language student named Zina Zhuravleva who was at the Teacher Training College. We used to study together in the library and occasionally went together to the cinema and theater. On our days off I would visit her at home and meet her brothers and sisters.

When I briefly came back to Ulaanbaatar during the summer vacation of 1940, it turned out that my elder cousin Sanjaajav had died. I spent the summer with his wife and relatives. The wife of my deceased cousin Sanjaajav gave me a few *tögrög* and said "Take this and buy something to send to your mother. Someone from back home is here right now." I duly spent half of it to buy some sweets and had the remaining money taken back home with a letter.

After the military naadam was over, I returned to Irkutsk by car via Ulaan Üd. As well as sitting the final class examinations in the academic year, it was very important for me to do some advance preparation for the national examinations. Apart from my days off, I spent the whole winter studying in the library. On Saturdays and Sundays however, I relaxed by taking Zina to the cinema.

Then, in the winter of 1940, Zina and I settled down together after a small student wedding. We first went to register at the Marriage Registry Office. Then we assembled at the house of one of the students. There were six of us celebrating the wedding, including Zina's girlfriends and B. Tüdev and D. Tsedev from Mongolia. After that we went to Zina's relatives, where many people had gathered for the celebration.

Soon, the spring of 1941 arrived, and one warm day while I was sitting and studying, the administrative secretary rushed into our classroom, and after asking the teacher for permission to speak, turned to me and said "Go and see the principal right away." I was taken by surprise, and for an instant it seemed as if my classmates were looking in my direction, wondering what had happened. I practically ran from the second to the third floor and into the principal's room.

The principal looked at me in astonishment. "Why are you panicking like this?" he asked. "I'm all right, I've just run up the stairs," I replied. The principal asked me to sit down. "In just two hours time, your Minister of Education, Mashlai, will be arriving at the city railway station. The Siberian author, G. F. Kungurov, who is a departmental head



of the Ministry of Education in this region and myself will meet him there. We want to take you as an interpreter."

When we reached the railway station, the head of the Regional Education Department was already there. As soon as the train pulled in, Mashlai, a youngish-looking minister got off, accompanied by a Russian. Mashlai had previously been studying with us in middle school. As his Russian was quite reasonable, he did not need an interpreter for ordinary conversation. I took him to a hotel in Irkutsk, and spent two days with him visiting different places and actually seeing quite a few things.

The evening before Mashlai's return journey, he wanted to meet and thank I. Kachalin, the first secretary of the regional Party committee. At the appointed time, we escorted the minister to the four-story building of the regional Party committee where we entered the room of the first secretary. The chairman was standing behind a desk on both sides of which several leaders of the regional departments were standing in a line. I accompanied the minister along the two lines of people.

When we greeted the chairman he replied, "Honorable Sir, what can we do for you?" Minister Mashlai was taken aback and stood for a while in silence. Then I translated his reply from Mongolian into Russian. "I would like to thank you, chairman, and the staff of the Ministry of Education for the kind treatment of our Mongolian students who have been studying in your city." Neither of them said very much after this, and the ceremony was concluded. As we left, Mashlai told me, "Go and do well in your exams, and you may go to the teacher training college to teach history."

Towards the end of June 1941, on the first clear days of the Siberian summer, I was busy doing my final middle school exams in Irkutsk. I passed the third examination, and although I was quite tired when studying for the fourth examination, I was determined to pass it too. I and my Soviet student friends did our homework and discussed difficult questions. When an examination was approaching, we studied the subject intensively, sometimes staying up late into the night.

One day, we skipped lessons and stayed up late, making ourselves very tired. On my return to the communal sleeping accommodation I thought I would sleep well. While I was sound asleep one of my friends, a Russian student, suddenly pulled the blanket off me and woke me up in a panic, repeatedly saying, "The war has begun, war is starting," and turned up the radio which was hanging on the wall. I got up quickly and listened to the news on the radio with my friend.

We learned that the non-aggression treaty between the Soviet Union and Germany had been broken, and that the Fascist German army had been mobilized. On June 22, 1941 there was an attack by aircraft and tank units on the sacred Soviet frontier. An appeal was made to "cast the enemy out of the motherland and to defend the socialist victory." After hearing this news, the two of us repeatedly discussed what it all meant. Then we went out of the dormitory to see that the teachers and students who were living in the accommodation had gathered in the courtyard. They demonstrated their readiness and determination to defend the motherland and crush the enemy, and they cursed the Hitlerite Fascists for their betrayal.

The school administration immediately ordered all the students, teachers, and workers to assemble, and a tremendous gathering was organized. We vowed en masse to carry out everything needed to crush the encroaching aggressors in accordance with the appeal from the Party. Thus, everyone's thoughts, aspirations, aims, and activities were directed towards the battle with the cruel Fascists.

A state of war had engulfed the whole Soviet Union. Many of my friends at college were unable to complete their schooling as they were to set off for the front. When we saw our friends off we wished them good luck in crushing the enemy, and hoped that they would obtain military decorations on their return. New army units were being formed all over Irkutsk, and they were moving off in trains heading west. Ordinary life was transformed by the war, and there was continuous talk about the situation on the front. As the destiny of everyone there and that of the Mongolian and Soviet people was being decided, inevitably it drew everyone's attention.

We sat our exams right in the middle of all this, and finished college. When the time came to return, I left my wife behind in Irkutsk and traveled on my own by train to Ulaan Üd. I went from there by car across the Soviet border at Khiagt [Kyakhta]. I had passed through this gateway ten years earlier, but my first journey to the Soviet Union now seemed like yesterday. However, I had become accustomed through studying there to life in the Soviet Union, and I thought about my Soviet friends and contemporaries who had gone to the battlefield. The straightforward honesty of the Russian people and their noble character seemed to be like that of our Khalkha people, and I would never forget the good qualities they showed in their work.

After crossing the Mongolian border I looked ahead toward the open plains of the motherland with its blue sky and golden sun rising as if greeting me. After I had crossed the frontier I went to see the director of the aimag education department. Having obtained a few tögrög to spend on the journey from Altanbulag to Ulaanbaatar, I looked for a car, but as none was available, I wandered about for a while outside the entrance of the Selenge aimag Ministry, and spent the night in the house of an old lady, a cook with whom I had stayed on previous occasions.

The next day I was able to set off by car and, after passing through Kharaa and Yeröö, arrived in Ulaanbaatar. On my arrival, I stayed with my cousin's family and learned from them that my mother had died that spring. She was fifty-eight and had died after a serious illness. A year earlier she had been talking joyfully about receiving my letter, together with a little money and some sweets, and knowing that I was healthy and studying well. Although I had not seen my mother for many years, I felt heartbroken and grieved over her death. When I arrived from Irkutsk all I had was two suitcases full of books. I decided to pass the time reading them.