

Down into the Ocean of Life

After I had completed my schooling I went to register at the Department for new cadres, which was under the control of the Ministry of Education. A person who was possibly a secretary told me that Minister Mashlai wanted to see me.

The Ministry of Education was located to the east of two tiny two-story buildings which were on the left of the two-story building which accommodated the Party Central Committee, later to become the City Central Committee. I went up to the second floor and arrived at a room with painted walls. There was an upright stove in the room where Mashlai greeted me, saying, "As we have appointed you as one of the teachers at the Teacher Training College, you should go there right away and assume your duties."

I went to the Teacher Training College that same day and met with the principal, N. Palaan, who said, "You will teach Mongolian History. Plan your program and bring it here to be confirmed. Before classes commence, you will have to help with the painting of the school and its living quarters, and with the repair of the tables and chairs."

I duly spent a few days re-reading the books I had brought, and in addition to preparing a course program, I went to the school every day and spent some hours helping to carry and install the tables and chairs for the classrooms and living quarters. During one of the work breaks I asked the principal for somewhere to live and he promised to give me a room. I got the room and had a few days to prepare for classes.

The room was in the students' lodgings, and had neither lock nor keys. Also, the windows were broken. I cleaned it up, obtained a lock and key and glazed the windows. When I made a fire the smoke billowed out, since the stove would not work. I borrowed an iron military-style bed and a tiny student's bookshelf from the school. I tried for several days to get the stove repaired. The relevant office kept telling me that the repair would be done that day or the next, but I had no success with them. This was the first difficulty I encountered after completing my schooling.

While I was preparing my agreed course program, some cadres of the Ministry of Education called on me, saying that the minister was summoning me. So I went along to Minister Mashlai's room. "The Central Committee is registering those people who have had a higher education. Now go to the cadres' section at the Central Committee," he said. When I inquired at this Department of Cadres located in the two-story building of the Central Committee, the departmental head met me and asked me to complete some details on a form about my grandfather, my father, and myself. Then he told me to see Badarch, who assisted the General Secretary of the Central Committee. On my arrival there he said, "Our leader Tsedenbal has asked for you to come."

I went into a room where my former school acquaintance Tsedenbal congratulated me on successfully completing my studies. He asked about what was happening in Irkutsk, and we talked for quite a while about old times at the school. Then he said, "It is likely that we will get you to work in the government. Marshal Choibalsan wants to

meet you and talk about it. Now you will go to the government building. I will let them know by telephone that you are coming."

I left the Party Central Committee building and went across to the government building (later to become the Teacher Training College), which was located to the left of it. It was one of the largest buildings in Ulaanbaatar. I gave my name to the officer on duty, who wanted me to complete an entry form and demanded identification. I had nothing apart from my school graduation certificate. The officer on duty did not read Russian and reached for the telephone to report that someone had come to see the Marshal, and when this was confirmed, he wrote a permit for me saying, "Take this to the Marshal's secretary."

I went up to the second floor of the building and went along a beautiful, wide corridor. I opened the door of a north-facing room to see a few people sitting there wearing green army uniforms in addition to a considerable number of people dressed in ordinary clothing. Among them was a man of Chinese appearance sitting behind a desk. I wondered if he might have been Choibalsan's Chinese interpreter. However, he actually turned out to be Choibalsan's secretary, Bat-Ochir.

Standing with a group of people who appeared to be commissars was a tall, thin, long-chinned man who had a perturbed, deranged look about him. He kept staring at me and would laugh occasionally. He came up to me in that manner, took hold of me by the chin and looked at me. I was taken aback. Later, when I was introduced to him he turned out to be an unimportant character called Commissar Chojil (father of the author Chimid), an ordinary person playing a trick on me. A short, swarthy young man who was also wearing an army uniform appeared to be writing something behind another desk. [Some people said that] he was P. Shagdarsüren, Choibalsan's secretary. Then the door bell rang.

The short, swarthy young secretary opened the beautiful bookcase-like door and went in. This was the first time I had seen such a door and while I sat gazing at it the secretary reappeared and asked, "Is your name Shirendev?" I replied that it was. "In that case, come this way," he said. I felt quite panicky at meeting such an important person for the first time, the leader of a nation.

As I entered, a man wearing a green single-breasted military jacket without tabs stood up and took a few steps towards me, meeting me in the middle of the room where he shook my hand. I watched him say "How do you do?" It really was Marshal Choibalsan, whose photograph I had seen many times. He congratulated me on having completed my schooling. After listening to detailed accounts of my life and education, and about my brothers and other relatives, he said, "Now you must return the benefit of your ten years of schooling and higher education to the Party and country. You may work as a reviewer of government educational and scientific work."

I was lost for words when I heard the great words of this important person. "What does a reviewer do exactly?" I asked.

He is someone who familiarizes me with questions concerning schools, science, culture, hospitals, and education. Besides that, you can do translation work for me. In particular, I receive news through the press and radio several times a day about the frontline battles now being fought in the Soviet Patriotic War. It would also be good to tell me about important books and literature. Being an educated man, you will quickly become expert at dealing with these matters. It is a fact, however, that you have been cut off from life in the countryside for over ten years now, and so before you start this job you will spend two

months traveling in Ömnögöbi, Dornogobi, Övörkhangai, Bayankhongor, Gobi-Altai, and Arkhangai aimags, visiting two or three sums in each of them, where you will spend two or three days becoming familiar with their work. When visiting the sums you will be seeing different districts and households. I will provide you with a car and you may assume your duties tomorrow. Come and see me once more before you leave the day after tomorrow.

I went back down to the Central Committee building and had to wait for a break in Tsedenbal's work before I could see him. Quite some time later I met with him and explained what Choibalsan had said. Tsedenbal replied, "That's right. I know what your talk was about. There is a lot of work to do to fulfil the Marshal's assignment. Since we have done our work for the day, come to my place and we will have a meal together."

We sat in Tsedenbal's large black ZIS-110 car and set off towards the area of the State Bank. Tsedenbal's young bodyguard Dashdavaa was sitting next to me. We went up some stairs at the extreme left hand side of the bank building and entered through a door. At that time, Tsedenbal had no family and was living with his commissar. The windows in the room had blue curtains and there was a tiny bedroom, at the front of which was a radio receiver. There was quite a large room for books and newspapers and down the corridor on the left was a tiny study. There were not many things in these rooms. Books, newspapers, and journals were scattered about. It was clearly a place for a young single man.

As soon as Tsedenbal arrived, the commissar used a multi-layered ringed steamer to warm up some ordinary food obtained from a canteen. He shared it between the two of us and ate a little himself. After Tsedenbal had eaten he returned to his work and I too went back to my quarters.

Two days later I went to see Marshal Choibalsan and we spent nearly two hours discussing how I was to go around the countryside to become familiar with life there. He said that I was to go to the aimag and sum centers, where I would leave my car and travel on horseback around the households, staying with them and wandering about to experience life there. I would need to walk around the aimag centers. Out in the countryside I would have to eat and sleep with families of differing wealth. In the encampments which had many livestock, the wealthiest family was normally on the southwest side, and the poorest families were camped to the east and particularly the northeast.

[He said that] the lifestyle of the people had changed considerably from when I was last in the countryside ten years previously, and that some knowledge of that difference would be of great help to me in my later work. The aimags which I would be visiting would include gobi, khangai, and kheer zones.¹ He brought out a small map of Mongolia on which he himself marked out the sums I was to visit. I realized later that these sums were special in their natural features, character, and in the lifestyle of the people.

When he found time to discuss these fine details with me, I realized that

¹ These terms refer to three zones with distinctive climatic, hydrographic, soil, and vegetation characteristics. Khangai, as already explained on p. 2n13, is clearly the most desirable zone, with plenty of water and vegetation, pleasant climate, and fertile soils. Gobi (or gov' in contemporary orthography in the Mongolian Republic) is best translated as steppe or scrubland, with the connotation of being able to support enough animals and plants to sustain some human habitation. The Western habit of calling the zone the "Gobi Desert," which conjures up a vision of uninhabitable wastelands, is thus clearly wrong, or at least as much an exaggeration as the nineteenth century practice of referring to the American west's high plains as the "Great American Desert." This "desert" label actually comes much closer to the third term here, kheer, which describes any place that is uninhabited or where life is extremely difficult to maintain.

Choibalsan was truly a man with a rich experience of life. Then I remembered something which had been on my mind and which I had been wanting to say. I had left my wife behind in Irkutsk, and I asked whether or not it would be difficult to bring her here while the war was going on. After listening to me Choibalsan said, "That will probably be all right." He picked up the telephone to talk with the Soviet ambassador Ivanov and conveyed my request. "Your request will soon be granted. There is no need to worry about it," he added. I felt so happy, I stood there speechless.

He then called for his secretary and asked, "Is Shirendev's car ready? Check it out and let me know." Meanwhile, he continued to explain and brief me about the rural situation. The secretary returned, "The black M car is ready with the driver Sundui." Choibalsan turned to me and said, "You can't go into the countryside dressed like that. You need to wear a Mongol deel, army-style trousers, and leather boots." I was worried because I did not have a Mongol deel. I left and went to the home of Chuluunbat, one of my cousin's relatives, where I put on an old brown cotton deel of his, a yellow sash, and a brimmed hat, and then returned to my quarters. The next morning I set off on my intended route.

At that time the whole country was utilizing its potential to the full, especially in livestock raising, wool gathering and developing handicrafts. Also, some even more important goals were being decided upon, such as assisting the Soviet motherland at the battle front and strengthening the national defenses.

We left Ulaanbaatar and headed south towards Ömnögobi. Having been separated from the traditional lifestyle of my motherland during the preceding ten years or so, and never having seen the Gobi myself, this area seemed interesting and beautiful, yet at the same time lonely. I went along thinking constantly about the time I had spent studying in the Soviet Union and the friends I had studied with. Traveling in a car with a driver for the first time over such a great distance was like being in a dream.

Prior to this, my driver Sundui had worked for Finance Minister Dүvchin, Prime Minister Amar, Deputy Prime Minister L. Sereeter, Jamsran, and others. Along the way he talked about the old days. The driver remarked, "Of all the leaders that I have served, only Sereeter is still alive. The others all became enemies of the people and were arrested." My driver felt bad about this afterwards and mentioned, darkly, how unlucky it was to have a car.

Right from the start of the journey the driver was skilful, modest, friendly, and careful, and I valued him highly. I reminisced with him about what I had seen when studying in the Soviet Union. The two of us chatted and enthused about things, passing the time as we traveled on our long journey.

We continued on until we were within seventy kilometers of Dalanzadgad, the capital of Ömnögobi aimag, when we saw an open Amerika-8 car in front of us conveying a single passenger. My driver and I decided to go and meet him. When we slowed down, the other car approached and stopped. Sitting next to the driver was an elderly, military general-like figure sporting several medals. He was dressed in a military uniform with goggles on his cap and he had a somewhat flat, tanned face.

"How are you doing?" I asked "Fine. Where are you going?" he replied. "I'm going to Ömnögobi aimag center." "What business do you have there?" "I'm going to find out about the local situation there." "Where do you usually work?" "I have just been appointed to a government post, as a reviewer." "What is a reviewer?" "I understand that it is almost like being a secretary."

"Do you have any credentials?" I showed him Choibalsan's hand-written credentials stating that I was traveling to become familiar with the work of such-and-such an aimag. He read it, handed it back to me and said, "I understand now. The leader of the aimag is called Dejid and the Party committee chairman is Erdenebilig. You should meet them and accept their advice when it comes to finding out about the local situation."

I thanked him and was about to depart when he asked, "Do you recognize me?" "No," I replied. He looked quite disappointed. "Why don't you recognize me? I am the leader of the Baga Khural, Partisan Dashzeveg," he said. "I have heard your name spoken many times, but this is the first time I have seen your face," I said.

He said farewell and set off. We also went on our way. We reached the capital of Ömnögobi aimag where we spent the night in an örtöö ger, and the next morning we set off for several sums in the Gobi.

This was my first time in the Gobi. The bare sandy hills, open steppe, and sand dunes were natural formations which seemed unusual. I thought about the things mentioned in the works of famous nineteenth and twentieth century travelers in Mongolia such as the great Russian scholars Potanin,² Przheval'skii,³ Obruchev,⁴ Komarov, and others.

I saw swift black-tailed and white antelope which swirled backwards and forwards making the dust fly as they galloped across the steppe. When the beautiful, fleet-footed antelope caught sight of the car on the vast, wide plains they jumped, pranced and galloped with natural, active movements and seemed to run for their lives, all of which I found very interesting.

It was a long way to go from household to household. There were no large groups of gers as in the Khangai. Usually there would be two gers together or one on its own, located a long way from the next one. Outside the ger there would be a horse or camel ready for riding, or else there was a baby camel on a tether bellowing its greeting.

The items used by the Gobi households and the types of milk foods were quite different from those of the Khangai. For example, because these people migrated over long distances, there were no large wooden chests or religious altars like those of the Khangai households. Also, making tea and dried curds with camels' milk seemed strange. For fuel, the households used sheep and horse dung or at best, the shavag. [artemisia bush] Drinking water came from shallow ponds or from cold, deep wells, the water appearing cloudy from the Gobi dust. Though the situation in the Gobi was different due to natural conditions, the straight-forward directness of the people when they talked and the entertaining of guests according to Mongolian traditions were the same as in the Khangai.

As I had not lived in Mongolia for several years, when I was among the ordinary people for the first time again, sleeping in their gers, sharing their food and drink,

² Grigorii Nikolaevich Potanin (1835-1920), *Tangutsko-tibetskaya okraina Kitaya i Tsentral'naya Mongoliya* [The Tangut-Tibetan Outskirts of China and Central Mongolia] (Moskva: Gos. Izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1950).

³ See Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii (1839-1888), *Mongolia, the Tangut Country, and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet, Being a Narrative of Three Years' Travel in Eastern High Asia* (London: Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876).

⁴ Vladimir Afanas'evich Obruchev (1863-1956), *Ot Kyakhty do Kul'dzhi: puteshestvie v Tsentral'nyu Aziyu i Kitai* [From Kiakhta to Kulja: Travels in Central Asia and China] (Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956).

and discussing the old times, it seemed that their enthusiastic talk, working life, and other interests had genuinely progressed in the preceding ten years.

I spent some time in the wide valleys of the Gobi and the deserts where, when glancing up at some majestic mountain-like formation I was surprised to see many large buildings like some kind of town or settlement. On approaching more closely to determine which mountain or which town it might have been, it might turn out to be just four or five camels, a herd of horses, or a few hundred antelope. The fact that such small animals could appear so large from afar fitted in with the natural seasonal mirages of the Gobi, a truly amazing sight.

We spent five or six days with the herdsmen of three sums in Övörkhangaï aimag and asked them for directions to Dornogobi aimag. On the way, we were suddenly stopped by a vast sand dune which we decided to go around by trying to cross another smaller area of sand. We set off, but the wheels of the car became stuck and started spinning, creating a problem for us which took the whole day to overcome. It felt like traveling through a large [solid] ocean wave.

After spending several days in the countryside with many different households, I found lice in my only set of underwear. I wanted to wash them but we did not come across any water. When we stopped the car out in the steppe, I walked a long distance from the car and took off my underclothes but even rubbing them with fine sand did not clean them properly. Then, realizing what I was up to my driver said, "Wipe your shirt and pants with this and leave them in the wind." He gave me a bottle of gasoline which I used, and after leaving them in the breeze for a while, I put my clothes back on. I now felt that they were very clean and I thanked the driver for his wise advice.

By the end of August, the weather in the Gobi was hot, and it became even hotter in the sandy and desert areas. The more we shovelled to dig out the car's wheels, the more the sand collapsed and soon we and the engine had used up our ten-litre water container. This made us even more worried. Inevitably, the driver found a way out and we continued to wander for half a day until we finally arrived in Sainshand, the capital of Dornogobi aimag.

After spending several days in a remote area of the Gobi, seeing neither humans nor animal life, the aimag capital felt like a large, comfortable city. We spent a night here and thought about going into the countryside again. When we talked about the reason for our journey with a departmental chief of the aimag Party committee, he said, "Let's all go together to see the chairman of the Party committee. Then you can tell him about your work." I replied, "We have no business with the Party chairman, we only want to see the countryside and the situation there." "Since you hold an important position in the capital, you must meet the chairman of the Party committee, and you will tell him the reason you are here."

He decided to take me there. The Party committee was located in a single mud building. Along the corridor there were two or three upright stoves. Its two or three doors faced north and south. Cardboard signs had been pasted on the doors with lettering in red paint stating "Organization Department," "General Department," or "Women's Department." Next to one of these doors were the words "Chairman of the Aimag Party Committee" in gold-colored clay paint.

When I opened the door to go in, I saw a tiny room in the corner of which was a

table with a red, hand-made woollen tablecloth. Behind it sat a young swarthy-faced man wearing a grey cotton terleg.⁵ He rose and greeted us, and then asked us about our business there. The young man opened a door which was painted with yellow and white stripes and invited us in. Right in the middle of this comfortable room was an old-fashioned carpet. The walls were lined with bookcases. To one side was a conference table large enough for ten people to sit around. There were photographs of Stalin and Choibalsan on the walls.

A man of about thirty got up and came towards us to shake hands. He was of average height and had a pale complexion. He was wearing a navy-blue military-style shirt and trousers, a broad belt and an Altan Gadas⁶ medal on his lapel. Chairman Dorjgotov was a pleasant character. Although he said little, he was obviously well educated. I later learned that he had studied for three years at KUTV in Moscow. (This same Dorjgotov later became Minister of Trade and Procurement, a responsible position in the government).

Chairman Dorjgotov was interested in our business there and asked me to show him my credentials. I duly took out my credentials and handed them to him. The chairman read them over to himself as if he was not going to give them back to me. Putting them on the desk he asked, "When did you arrive in Ulaanbaatar? Are you a Mongol? Leave your documents with me and I will return them to you later today or tomorrow morning. Now you may go with my secretary and rest at the ger reserved for officials."

I sat in the car with the other young man and after quite a long drive, we arrived at an unoccupied ger in the middle of a straight row of about ten gers. Apart from two beds it was empty. While we were sitting there, someone entered and started the fire to make some tea for us. We drank our tea.

Quite some time later, a young man entered wearing a Mongol deel and said, "Someone wants to meet you." We accompanied him out of the ger and went to a tiny white building which was next to the gers. The sign on the door said "Ministry of Interior Personnel." As we entered one of the rooms, a clever, devious-looking man of thin build and average height introduced himself as Dazanvaanchig and by a roundabout and inquisitive way found out quite a lot about why I was there, the schools I had attended, and my job. He then told me to go back and rest.

When we arrived back at the ger, some food and drink, including Gobi-style airag, were brought in. When I went to call to my driver so that we could eat together they told me, "Your driver has been put up somewhere else and he will be eating there."

I ate my meal and just before sunset I decided to go for a walk outside and have a look at the aimag center. As I emerged from the ger a young man with a green cap and wearing an officer's uniform appeared and asked me, "Where are you off to?" "I want to go and look around outside," I replied. "You should not go very far; one of the aimag leaders will probably want to meet you." "I won't go very far, just around here to get some air." "Stay in your ger," he said with a disapproving look. As I stared in silence standing next to him, I thought it likely that all these gers were the living quarters of the military personnel. I went back into the ger and sat for a while before falling asleep.

I had probably been asleep for over an hour when someone came in and woke

⁵ A cotton-padded gown.

⁶ The full name of the medal should read Altan Gadas Odun, literally the Star of the Golden Stake, referring to the Polar Star.

me. It was the same young man who had not wanted me to leave the ger that evening. "The chairman of the Party committee has asked me if you would like to come over," he said. As I left the ger I asked him, "Are you coming too?" and his attitude seemed to change completely. "No, you can go there yourself," he replied.

Once again I entered that same room at the Party committee. I saw three people sitting together. They were the chairman of the Party committee, a departmental head of the Interior Ministry and an instructor in that department who was a Kalmyk Mongol. The two chairmen, who seemed quiet and formal earlier, were now talking and laughing. The chairman of the Party committee took my credentials out of his desk and gave them back to me with a smile.

They then said, "As we are a border aimag, we have to be careful. Don't worry about it. We should have been suspicious when a previously unheard-of person arrived so suddenly and with such impressive credentials. Your pale, bearded face and slightly different accent reminded us that we have been caught out on more than one occasion by people on horseback or sometimes with a car and carrying all kinds of credentials. We inquired about you by telephoning Ulaanbaatar. When we found out you were who you said you were, we were relieved." They all laughed and told me about their area in detail. I returned to the ger for the night, and the next morning we set off to visit the sums.

Occasionally, antelope would gallop across the road in front of the car. Once my driver shot one of them, brought it to one of the households where we were conducting our business, and with it entertained them at a meal. The lifestyle of the people in this aimag was the same as in Ömnögobi. Talk centered mainly on fattening livestock and helping the army. They were very interested in asking me about the war.

I learned that there was a place not far from the aimag center where a Russian agricultural expert called Shubin was doing some experimental growing of vegetables. Having passed through the aimag center the evening before my departure for Övörkhangai, I decided to visit this place where vegetables were being grown experimentally. The scientist Shubin, who was working at the Institute of Science, lived in a ger with a group of Mongolian friends. They were growing cabbages, watermelons, oats, and wheat in a small field. The crop in this experimental place was excellent, and Shubin led me around the whole field, talking about the plants as he went. He presented me with two large melons and some onions to eat on the journey.

It was strange to leave Ulaanbaatar and travel around the Gobi for several days before coming across a Soviet person again. When a Soviet citizen can come into the harsh conditions of the Gobi and work in the summer heat conducting such a good experiment to raise edible vegetables and grain, I felt that the Gobi could be transformed in the future and made beautiful. When Soviet people could come to work in this way, I wondered how a Mongolian such as myself could be so afraid of a little difficulty in their own country.

I was struck by the things the scientist Shubin had talked about, and I thought that he had begun a scheme to bring plants and vegetation into the vast deserts of southern Mongolia. It was late when we followed the Ongiin Gol on our way towards Övörkhangai and asked someone for directions to the sum center which we were aiming for. The man told us that the sum center was not very far away. "You two should get out and walk; what do you need a car for?" he said. My driver and I asked him about the route. "On your way you will come across a large, uninhabited monastery among the rocks. That was once the Ongiin Khüree and soon after crossing the ridge to the west of

it, you will find the sum center on the north bank of the river.”

Duly following his instructions, my driver and I followed a tiny path, but as soon as it became dark we lost our way. We carried on further and approached a cluster of hills thinking that soon we would come across the Ongiin Khüree. After we crossed ten tiny hills we came up against a crag and could go no further, but neither could we descend, and so we strode on upwards. My driver and I let off a few gun shots and shouted, but we did not hear any dogs barking, and so it seemed that there were no households nearby. We switched on the car's head lamps and ate a little meat and Shubin's melons, which we had brought along with us.

We awoke early the next morning and on looking around found that we had walked up to the top of a high, rocky mountain. We went back down by the route we had taken the previous night and could see the water of the Ongiin Gol. There was some smoke wafting up from across the river. As we approached the smoke we found a lone ger and a dog and a horse tethered nearby. As we came up to the ger, an old man appeared from inside it, dressed like a lama. After asking about the route into the sum center, we asked him about his life and what he was doing there.

It turned out that he had been a lama at the Ongiin monastery. He had been left behind on his own, and he made a living by guarding a household's property. The foundations of the monastery were visible three hundred meters away, next to the cliff face. He led us up a hill to the west of the monastery to point out the way. So we set off. When we invited him to sit in the car, he wandered around outside it, not knowing how to open the door. When the driver opened it for him, he went and sat down cross-legged on the back seat.

We went to the abandoned monastery and spent quite a while looking around it, guided by the lama. Due to the demolition of the abandoned monastery, many of the temple buildings were damaged, and a large number of bronze Buddhas lay scattered everywhere. As we had come across many monasteries on our journey, there was little of interest for us as we walked through it. We arrived at another hilltop further on where we could see a few gers on the north bank of the Ongiin River.

We gave the man a few tögrög and sent him home. We carried on and arrived at the sum center where we spent two days. We washed our dirty underclothes in the Ongiin River and after drying them in the sun, returned to the sum center in the evening where we spent the night. We set off the next day for Övörkhongai aimag. After arriving there we visited three sums where the natural landscape differed from both Khangai and Gobi. There were many sheep and cattle and the milk foods were similar to those in the Khangai. Leaving this aimag, we toured Bayankhongor and Gobi-Altai aimags. After nearly a month and a half we returned to Ulaanbaatar.

Bayankhongor and Gobi-Altai aimags were similar to the Khangai in that both seemed to be cool mountainous regions with plenty of rivers and green vegetation. Since the livelihood of the people in Bayankhongor and Gobi-Altai was similar to that in the Khangai, I had quite a feeling of nostalgia.

Once, when we were going over a long, high, well-known pass called the Egiin Davaa, we accompanied a Pikap car which was carrying a group of military officers. When we talked with those people at both ends of the pass they told us that back in 1932 a detachment of rebels had hidden themselves in the pass and made attacks on the people who were using it. The rebels also set fire to a cooperative and a truck at the bottom of the far end of the pass. They pointed out the frame of the truck, which was still there.

After crossing the Egiin Davaa we headed towards Tsetserleg, passing several places, including the headwaters of the Chuluut River, the Ikh Tamir River, Taikhar Chuluu, and Tsagaan Davaa among others. I had been well acquainted with all these places more than ten years before undertaking this journey. We encountered several beautiful Khangai mountains, forests, and wide rivers where we stopped the car several times to run about and breathe in the clean air, swim in the waters of the Tamir, and stop at households to ask after people I knew. We finally arrived at Tsetserleg late in the day.

Although Tsetserleg had acquired several new buildings, the Zayayn Khüree monastery had ceased to exist. We stayed overnight at a ger hotel and I wandered around Tsetserleg on my own until late. I climbed the hill to the west of the city, and walked along the streets of the town past the buildings and enclosures where I had studied. I slept well that night, proud of the things I had done in my youth. Then I rose early and after quite a long walk in the town center, I went into a canteen where I had a meal before we set off on our way. I thought about the first time I traveled to Ulaanbaatar along this road some ten years previously. As we entered Ulaanbaatar I recalled the mountains, hills, and plains which I had first come across in those early days.

The day after my return I set off to take up my work in the government building. I went to see Marshal Choibalsan and told him about my journey. We had visited fifteen sums across five aimags, and I discussed with him my impressions about the small households. Choibalsan replied, "Well, that's good. You have actually seen a bit of life now, but as you have been studying outside your motherland for many years, you have lost touch with the many pressing problems facing the people of our country. In a few days' time you will spend fifteen days in Büren sum of Töv aimag doing propaganda work."

I traveled to the sum along with Nyamaa, the wife of Sambuu, our ambassador in Moscow. As this was Sambuu's native sum, his relatives cordially welcomed his wife and made her comfortable. I spent the night in that sum. While I was touring the households of the districts on horseback doing propaganda work, having just traveled through several aimags, I regretted that I was unable to quickly bring into focus all the things connected with the lives of the ordinary people here. At that time I did not pay attention to the practical experience of our people and how they were raising and making a profit from their livestock. I only caught some news about the effect on them of the shortage of a wide range of necessities including tea, tobacco, flour, grain and other items.

On my return, my family received the necessary visas and documents and permission to move to Ulaanbaatar and duly set off. I took a Pikap car and met my wife Zina and my son Vitya at Ulaan Üd. Prior to their arrival I had been living with a family that I knew, but on hearing that my own family was arriving, I begged the government administration for some accommodations. They gave us two rooms in a tiny two-story brick building to the east of the Choijin Lama Temple. I obtained two twisted chairs and a sandalwood table from the government building and an iron bed frame and some old blankets from the home of my friend Chuluunbat. I now regarded it as quite a comfortable home.

So, my family arrived, and we had our first home in which to begin our new family life. This place of ours had an upright, coal-burning stove, but there was no hot water, and the rooms were tiny. Nevertheless, to a recently-graduated college student like myself it was an unbelievably palatial residence. My wife and I washed the windows, and as soon as my salary arrived, we gradually began to furnish our home with plates and

cutlery.

Around that time, following invitations from the Mongolian government, some Soviets came to work in Mongolia and made friends with Mongolian intellectuals. Reciprocal visits began to take place. Radnaabazar, the circus director with whom I had studied at school, the playwright Oyuun, and other friends of mine had attained positions of responsibility. On occasion I would get together with them to discuss our school days together.

By that time Ulaanbaatar had changed somewhat, but there were still no paved roads or squares. The largest building was the four-story Number One Ten-Year Middle School. There was a three-story residence for staff of the interior ministry, a government building, the old Central Committee building (now the Teacher Training College and formerly the City Party Committee building). Apart from these, there were no particularly large buildings.

Ulaanbaatar had almost no planted trees. Only the [State] Bank, the Soviet embassy, and the government building had one or two trees planted alongside them. When I had some free time I used to meet with my friends who had studied in Irkutsk, and we would plan how Ulaanbaatar could be planted with trees and its streets and squares paved with stone. On rest days or before holidays we would clean up the city, and we hurried to carry out the assignments of the city Party committee when starting the work of tree planting outside the doors of some of the buildings.

On August 16, 1941 I was appointed as the official government "reviewer." For two and a half years, until February 1944, I learned many things about life. Around the time I began my work, the German and Italian fascists and the Japanese militarists on the one hand and the nations of England, America, and France on the other were competing among themselves to dominate world resources and markets. World War II began in 1939 with massacres of people and the mass destruction of national economies, culture, education, and artistic monuments. On June 22, 1941, Hitler's Germany and its allies attacked the Soviet Union and the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people began.

At the outbreak of this war, I was finishing my education at the Teacher Training College in Irkutsk and I took further national examinations before returning to my motherland.

As I began my work, the Mongolian people and Party, as led by the government, decided to use their own economy and culture to face up to the crisis of World War II, but were vigilant in protecting their country from both Japanese militarism and the Chinese Guomindang. That period was memorable for the maximum possible help given by Mongolia to the Soviet people at the battle front in their Great Patriotic War.

From 1941 onwards, the aim of the repeatedly issued resolutions of the MPRP Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of Mongolia was for the Mongolian people to continue to join hands with the Soviet people to assist the Soviet motherland at its battle front. We took delight in courageously laboring under that slogan. When looking back on the many initiatives carried out by our Party and government at that time, and their implementation by the energetic and determined laboring masses, our people, the Soviet Union, and all progressive peoples were struggling fiercely with the cruellest forces of fascism. This is something which the Mongolian people should be proud of.

While I was working during that two-year period, the foreign policy of our Party and government was to assist the Soviet people in their patriotic war, to guard the sacred frontiers of our country against Japanese militarism, and to protect against the danger

posed by the Chinese army. However, there was an inadequate supply of trained cadres, money, and capital for the implementation of the measures which had to be taken to develop our economy and culture.

The movement to assist the Soviet Patriotic War at the battle front flourished across the whole country. There was involvement of workers, herdsmen, and intellectuals on a wide scale. Money was collected from them, and more and more work was done to help the war effort of our loyal friends, the Soviet people.

The herdsmen made a voluntary contribution of several thousand horses to the battle front. Money was collected to establish the Revolutionary Mongolia tank column and the Mongol Ard air squadron, both of which were delivered to units of the Soviet forces. Delegations headed by leading figures in the Party and government traveled in person to the battle front on several occasions in order to present those gifts.

At the same time, the MPRP Central Committee and the government of Mongolia carried out even more work to ensure that our military commanders were armed with combat experience. The People's Army was armed with new Soviet battle techniques. In addition to improving battle training, volunteer cavalry detachments were organized and trained with the aim of establishing a readiness to defend the motherland and the people. The Mongols will never forget the great importance of all this.

The potential internal reserves of the motherland were mobilized in ways which suited conditions during World War II. The delivery of food and light industrial goods was carried out on a large scale both for our own needs and for the needs of the Soviet Patriotic War. During those difficult times milk and butter plants were widely established across the country, the processing of meat, wool, hides, leather, and fur was increased and improved, and light industries and food industries were established. Despite a shortage of trained cadres in all sectors of the economy, there were further advances in preventive medicine, culture, and science. For example, at that time there were only five or six people who had graduated from a Soviet college and at most only a few dozen had finished technical school in the Soviet Union.

For this reason, young people with scant experience of education and life had been working in the leading organs of the Party and government, or after many years of practical experience they might be working in the aimag leadership or as military officers with, at best, an education from the KUTV.

This shortage of trained cadres was the result of the cruel deaths of thousands of select cadres in the Party, government, army and other branches of the economy, education, and science between 1937 and 1949. This was later revealed from historical documents. We had to pay attention to the training of cadres. In accordance with a 1941 resolution of the MPRP Central Committee, the Party Central School attached to the Central Committee became the Party Higher School. As soon as this school had been established, some teaching was done there by Tsedenbal, the General Secretary of the Party Central Committee, and Sürenjav, secretary of the Party Committee and director of the school. I too taught some classes on general history.

The celebration to mark the opening of the Mongolian State University was held on October 5, 1942 at the Lenin Club. Speeches were made by Choibalsan and Tsedenbal. I also participated in the meeting, and my article entitled "A Great Event" was published in the October 6 edition of *Ünen*.

This was just about the first article I had ever written. It celebrated the inauguration of the university and expressed my thoughts on its significance. Soon after the

university's establishment, I began teaching history classes there. There were additional valuable contributions from the many senior Soviet specialist advisers, instructors, medical teachers, lecturers, and engineers who were working in the Party and government organizations, in units of the People's army and at the economic and cultural institutes. This valuable contribution, which improved the knowledge and skills of the trained cadres, was immortalized in the thoughts of everyone who was present at the time.

By 1940, Kh. Choibalsan was prime minister of Mongolia, the leading member of the main working group of the MPRP Central Committee, Minister of Defense, and Supreme General (marshal) of the armed forces. He was directly responsible for the Foreign Ministry and the Interior Ministry, and had become a super-heroic and outstandingly decorated leader. In addition, he had been a close friend of Sükhbaatar. As he was famous for being a loyal revolutionary, everyone strove to address him in a respectful manner. In so doing, everyone working for him addressed him as "Marshal, Sir!" and bowed to him. However, G. Bumtsend, the most senior member of the government leadership and a participant with Choibalsan in the revolution, used to address him with "You, Choibalsan" in a familiar way. Also Yanjmaa addressed him as "Choibalsan" or sometimes as "Marshal."

As I myself had only just begun to work there, I was completely faithful to Choibalsan. When he carried out work relating to documents, accounts, and official activities it seemed that he was careful to find out the reasons behind the detailed, demanding problems he encountered. Choibalsan had seen much suffering from an early age, and had worked with many different kinds of people. Although he had a quick temper, he recognized the fact immediately, and seemed to regret it afterwards.

While I was working for Choibalsan, I had to perform certain duties every day. I would listen to the radio at appointed times for news from the battle front of the Soviet Red Army, including the areas, towns and settlements which had been attacked and occupied by Hitler's German armies. I noted the units of the Soviet Red Army which were battling and containing Hitler's German troops on many fronts, and which in some places had succeeded in smashing them and driving them back. There was a large map of the western part of the Soviet Union in Choibalsan's office. I used to note my findings on it using red and blue pencils and tiny flags.

When Choibalsan heard the sad news that Hitler's troops had occupied certain Soviet cities, had surrounded Leningrad and were approaching Moscow, he was worried but used to say, "The Hitlerites will soon be crushed and evicted from the entire Soviet Union." True enough, soon the Soviet Union had destroyed and dispersed Hitler's army near Moscow, and important news of the breaking of the siege of Leningrad was joyfully heard by Choibalsan, who immediately telephoned his congratulations to the Soviet ambassador, to the Soviet military specialists working in Mongolia and in addition to Stalin, V. M. Molotov, K. Ya. Voroshilov, and other Soviet leaders, and to the famous generals G. K. Zhukov, I. S. Konev, and his other acquaintances.

In accordance with the instructions of the MPRP Central Committee, and at Choibalsan's request, I gave him a twice-weekly talk entitled "Short History of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party" which lasted nearly two hours. I was very worried about accepting an assignment from Choibalsan on this subject, and I was confronted with the problem of how to explain such a [profound] subject to him. Whatever assignment I was to fulfill, first of all I had to read the related texts and make brief notes on the items I would be talking about. Then, spreading my notes out, I would deliver my

speech.

I had not yet learned much about teaching techniques. Choibalsan, who noted my awkwardness, used to comfort me saying, "Your talks have become interesting. If sometimes you ask me many impressive questions which I cannot answer, you should not worry. Instead, look up the things you don't know, and please tell me about them later."

At the beginning, my inexperienced style of writing was not very interesting. When I gave short talks on the principal questions, sometimes people listened attentively but occasionally, perhaps through tiredness or through thinking about their own work, their attention seemed to wander. They paid close attention during interesting talks on ancient Rome, Greece, and nineteenth-century European culture, science, and education. On the other hand, lectures about the cruel khans and feudal lords did not arouse much interest. They also took an interest in Soviet literary works, in particular I. Erenburg's composition "Storm," and I was asked to explain the content of the work to them. On several occasions I talked about Erenburg's composition at Choibalsan's house.

One spring day I went to the Ikh Tenger residence to give a reading of this literature, and while unravelling its meaning, I was served some delicious yoghurt. After I had eaten it I discussed the meaning of the book, and fell asleep. When I awoke and looked around, Choibalsan had gone. I got up in a panic and the [body]guards on duty poured water on my face saying, "How could he have fallen asleep after eating just yoghurt?" As soon as those young men had informed Choibalsan that I had returned to consciousness, he immediately came out of the living room and returned to the study where he sat down. "Well, let's carry on reading the book," he said, as if completely unaware that I had fallen asleep. When I had admitted that I was wrong to have fallen asleep he replied, "That's alright. I gave you some goat's milk yoghurt, which really does cause sleepiness."

Every Saturday evening, Choibalsan would watch films in his residence, together with his wife, children, and some of his other relatives. He asked me to explain the content of the films to him. I also had to report back to him about the work of the Institute of Science, the People's Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Arts' Committee, and other organizations. I had only just started these activities, and as I did not understand them very well, I visited the organizations to read their relevant publications and the resolutions and decisions made by the Central Committee and the government. I read the reports and explanatory information relating to those organizations, and met with the specialists who were working there in order to obtain advice, and to get a grasp of the work of those organizations.

When I began my work in that official capacity, the following gave me unstinting help: A. V. Rusekov, who was an adviser in the People's Ministry of Education, the Teacher Training College, the professional teaching staff of Number One Ten-Year Middle School, the advisers in the Ministry of Health and various physicians, the adviser of the Arts Committee Ya. F. Ryzhakin, the composer B. P. Smirnov, and the theater instructor A. R. Rabinovich. I translated letters from the Soviets addressed to Choibalsan and helped in the "Mongolization" of the replies. I also gained experience in the drafting of official documents.

In accordance with a directive of the Party Central Committee, I became familiar with contemporary Mongolian literature and art, and I attended a meeting of composers and theater artists where I gave a lecture entitled "Revolutionary Composition and the Aims of Artists." I tried to reflect the situation of our contemporary literature as carefully

as possible. Literature which had already been published was discussed and analyzed. This report was published in a special pamphlet in 1943. While writing the report I read the relevant texts and books in the Soviet literature. The advice I took from Soviet professionals also proved to be useful.

I processed all the congratulatory messages of the Party Central Committee and government as well as all the texts sent from our Party and government leaders to the leaders of the Soviet Party and government. At the same time, my work was greatly assisted by Soviet specialists, in particular the adviser to the Party Central Committee Yu. K. Prikhodov, the government adviser N. V. Tsapkin, and other able friends. Tsedenbal was well versed in Mongolian and Russian, and as he was experienced at making good use of reference texts, Choibalsan had to show every book to Tsedenbal and accept his opinions about them.

Choibalsan used to receive Soviet specialists and hold detailed discussions with them, either individually or in pairs or groups. These specialists used to work in several different ministries, offices, industrial, and cultural organizations. I was asked to interpret for him during these discussions. Choibalsan took me with him as a translator during receptions for the Soviet and Tuvan ambassadors in Ulaanbaatar, for the commanders of the Soviet Trans-Baikal military region, and for the generals of the the Seventeenth Army.

Choibalsan had studied in Irkutsk for several years before the revolution. Having worked with Soviet specialists for many years, he knew some conversational Russian. When I was translating into Russian or translating the words of the specialists into Mongolian, he would sometimes correct me in a clear but uncritical way. So when I was confronted with having to translate words of an agricultural, livestock, and household nature, I always made use of the relevant dictionaries and a "Mongolized" dictionary of sophisticated Russian words. I took great care to ensure that my translations were correct.

As I mentioned before, Choibalsan understood conversational Russian, and when he met with the Soviet ambassador I. A. Ivanov⁷ and other Soviet government people in Moscow, he used to go on his own. It was sometimes said that he also made use of Prime Minister Amar, and later on, our translator at the Moscow embassy, K. K. Il'in. He allowed me to take part in several official receptions.

The main official content of the discussions between the two sides was related to friendship matters. When Choibalsan was attending the meetings of the Presidium of the Party Central Committee, he would discuss many important problems with the members of the presidium in Tsedenbal's room. Tsedenbal, General Secretary of the Party Central Committee, Secretary Ch. Sürenjav and other officials, such as Secretary D. Damba, and S. Yanjmaa, took part in these meetings along with their advisers. Occasionally, I was asked to sit in on their meetings as an interpreter so as to keep the Central Committee and government advisers informed about the matters under discussion. In order to do that I had to translate into two languages, which was confusing. Listening to the discussions about the problems and their solutions taught me much and increased the breadth of my knowledge.

In order to implement the plans of the important laws and resolutions, Choibalsan sent groups of leading people holding responsible positions to aimag districts and

⁷ Ivan Alekseevich Ivanov (1906-1948) was ambassador to Mongolia from 1939 to 1947.

industrial areas with instructions to obtain the views of the people there. When the people in charge of getting these views had returned, the Presidium of the Central Committee occasionally gathered in Choibalsan's office and talked about their findings. Some of them spoke briefly and succinctly about practical abilities, while others told long-winded tales about everything they had seen, but were lazy about tackling the issues.

Apart from Choibalsan and Tsedenbal, other people in a position of responsibility included Bumtsend, the chairman of the Presidium of the National Baga Khural, the Agriculture Minister Ch. Sürenjav, who was Second Secretary of the Party Central Committee and concurrently First Deputy Prime Minister, the secretary of the Central Committee, D. Damba, S. Yanjmaa, First Deputy Prime Minister S. Luvsan, and the acting general of all the armed forces J. Lkhagvasüren.

Bumtsend was over 60 years old, and had a black moustache and spectacles. Despite not being an educated or cultured man, he was a wise man of few words. He was actually a quite good-natured, jovial and pleasant elderly man. Sükhbaatar's wife, Yanjmaa, truly worked hard for the sake of the Party and government. She was regarded as an ordinary, helpful, and plain-speaking person. Sürenjav was viewed as a decisive, determined person in the execution of his duties, both when summoning others to carry out their assignments, and when giving reports and making speeches. These things he had learned to do at the Teacher Training College and at the KUTV. However, although he (Sürenjav) strove bravely to make decisions, he was unable to set priorities and could not get a good grasp of the issues. Although Damba had little schooling, from an early age he had worked with all kinds of people in the Youth League and army. He was very experienced, and although he said little when handing out assignments, he spoke in a precise and organized way. First Deputy Prime Minister S. Luvsan learned to read and write at an early age, and occasionally did some official work. He was particularly adept at financial accounting work, and produced statistics in many different areas to the best of his ability. He also had connections with many people.

In accordance with the 64th resolution of the Presidium of the Party Central Committee of September 5, 1942, confirmed by the other leaders on the staff of the lecture group of the Central Committee, I was to participate in lecturing to the activists. N. Lkhamsüren, Ch. Lodoidamba, and others also took part in this work.

The Party Central Committee and leading members of the government and the leaders of special ministerial offices held lectures and discussions during the congress for local leaders on subjects such as the Soviet Patriotic War, cultural lessons, the sanitation of official buildings, civilized behavior, the arrangement of comfortable settlements, and the planting of trees and shrubs.

The 83rd resolution of the Presidium of the Central Committee on December 17, 1942 appointed me as adviser to the journal *Namyn Baiguulalt* [Party Organization], which was a highly respected assignment. Afterwards, I escorted Choibalsan, the government adviser N. V. Tsapkin, and the Soviet ambassador I. A. Ivanov as an interpreter on a journey through Khentii, Dornod, Javkhlang Sharga (now Sükhbaatar), Bulgan, and Khövsgöl aimags. Before Choibalsan embarked on that journey through the countryside he determined all the sums and households he would visit, but unannounced would directly go to meet the leading people, the workers and ordinary herdsmen with whom he could talk pleasantly about old times. His secretary noted down what he said in Mongolian while I took notes in Russian. As I followed him, I told the Soviet specialists what was being said.

Besides giving advice on work to the people he met, he would briefly speak about the situation on the front line of the Soviet Patriotic War, and he emphasised that the Soviet Red Army would soon be victorious. When he arrived back from the countryside he would summon the Presidium of the Party Central Committee, the leading members of the Council of Ministers, leaders of local ministries and local officials in order to hand out assignments, rectify shortcomings and improve the quality of their work.

A training school for volunteer cavalry detachments was established on the eastern slopes of Zorgol Khaikhan Uul of Önjüül sum in Töv aimag. Beside the many mounted herdsmen who had gathered there from Töv aimag, there were volunteer cavalry detachments from Ulaanbaatar who came and set themselves up in gers and tents, practiced battle and cavalry manoeuvres and engaged in tactical training. General I. Mijid of the volunteer cavalry detachment, his staff commander Darjaa and other commissars, as well as Choibalsan, Tsedenbal, and Soviet Ambassador Ivanov took part in this.

Once, when the Presidium of the Party Central Committee convened a meeting, Choibalsan, Tsedenbal, and Bumtsend started the meeting at 9 pm to discuss an aimag report on the successful wintering of livestock, working with cadres, and a report from the secretary of the city Party committee. The Presidium of the Party Central Committee asked the speakers many questions, and they were still talking at 1 am. Then, the presidium members agreed to conclude the meeting and to defer until the following day the question of the assistance to be offered by the Mongolian people to the Soviet war front.

When the MPRP was organizing the work of explaining the nature of the war to the public, everyone who understood it was interested in the course the war was taking. Party and government workers and those in responsible positions always listened to news of the war and followed the progress of battles, which they marked on maps in blue and red pencil. Everyone felt sadness when the enemy occupied a town or a settlement, but we all felt proud whenever the enemy was beaten or a town was liberated.

An undertaking to send communally-raised and personal gifts to the Soviet Army was widely carried out by industrial enterprises, intellectuals, and ordinary herdsmen. Officials saved money from their salaries, herdsmen donated geldings from their private herds, and workers donated the best products from their factories. In general, all the classes of our country were ready to do their best to hasten victory and show their true loyalty to the struggle of the Soviet people, as revealed in a letter sent to the Party Central Committee, the government, and to the Soviet Army. This was a great moment for the ideals and understanding of the Mongolian people. As the German advance against the Red Army continued, the first column of gifts from the Mongolian people to the Red Army was delivered at the end of February 1942 by representatives headed by Deputy Prime Minister Luvsan and Party Central Committee Secretary Yanjmaa.