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HEROES, EXEMPLARS AND MEDIATORS
The concept of patriotism in the Mongolian
historical novel of the socialist era

Ph.D. thesis
Typhaine CANN

Supervisor:
Dr. habil. Ákos Bertalan Apatóczy

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To my cat, Kleber

Алс хол Зүүнговь суманд суугаа Ээжид минь зориулсан

Et à papa, toujours...

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	- 3 -
Acknowledgments	- 5 -
Introduction	- 6 -
– “Patriotism” in question –.....	- 6 -
Foreword	- 7 -
The researcher and the research: A question of involvement.....	- 7 -
1. Patriotism: a problematic concept.....	- 22 -
2. Works on Mongolian group identification: a selected review.....	- 34 -
3. An attempt to characterize what was the “ekh oronch üzel” at the time	- 43 -
4. The production of national identities at the heart of the reflection	- 44 -
Mongolia state and nation: not a self-evidence	- 44 -
States and nations	- 45 -
4. Representations	- 46 -
Identity dynamics, “inheritance” dynamics.....	- 46 -
5. Method and perspectives	- 48 -
Part one	- 54 -
<i>The research terrain</i>	- 54 -
Chapter one: the sources	- 55 -
1. The corpus	- 55 -
1.1. A word about the selection of sources and the constitution of a corpus.....	- 55 -
1. 2. Main sources: Üürin Tuya and Tungalag Tamir	- 56 -
“Üürin Tuya”, by Byambyn Rinchen.....	- 56 -
“Tungalag Tamir” by Chadraabaly Loididamba	- 60 -
1.2 Other sources.....	- 67 -
Dain and Tulaldan, by Zhamsrangyn Lodoi.....	- 67 -
“Ikh Khuvi Zaya”, by Sonomyn Udval.....	- 69 -
“Erdene Zasgiin Unaga”, Zunduin Dorzh	- 70 -
“Gazar Shoroo”, Magzhavyn Dürgerjavyn Maam	- 71 -
“Tsag Töriin Üimeen”, by Donvoryn Namdag.....	- 73 -
Selective bibliography	- 74 -
2. Sources for literary criticism and historical analysis.....	- 76 -
2.1. Mongolian sources.....	- 76 -
Socialist period.....	- 77 -
Post-socialist period.....	- 79 -
Additional Mongolian sources.....	- 80 -
2.2. Other sources.....	- 81 -
2.3. Fieldwork	- 85 -
Chapter two: a people and their “nutag”	- 86 -
1. A necessary composition with the land.....	- 86 -
1.1. Geography and climate of Mongolia.....	- 86 -

1.2. Relation to the homeland.....	- 88 -
Chapter three: A centuries-long history of reversals of alliances and disunity An historical sketch.....	- 110 -
1. The loss of independence	- 111 -
Inner Mongolia.....	- 111 -
Outer Mongolia.....	- 112 -
2. The spread of Buddhism and its influence on Mongol society	- 119 -
3. Mongolia under Manchu rule.....	- 120 -
4. Autonomy and its loss	- 123 -
As a matter of transition	- 152 -
Part two.....	- 156 -
<i>A literature under duress</i>	- 156 -
Writing historical fiction in socialist Mongolia	- 156 -
Chapter three	- 157 -
Literature at the service of the people’s education.....	- 157 -
1. History, fiction, historical fiction.....	- 157 -
2. The Writer’s Union	- 159 -
3. Socialist realism.....	- 163 -
Chapter four: The History of twentieth-century Mongolia through its literature A telling of History in line with official narrative?.....	- 173 -
1. Feudal society	- 175 -
2. Autonomy	- 194 -
3. The Treaty of Khiakta or treaty of the three nations (“ <i>Gurvan Ulsyn Geree</i> ”).-	199 -
4. The fight for power between lay and clerical feudals and Chen Yi’s sixty-four points.....	- 205 -
5. A deep feeling of humiliation as the trigger of the revolutionary wave..	- 209 -
Chapter five: Heroes, exemplars, mediators Representations of the “new man”, the architect of Mongolia’s future.....	- 211 -
Historical mythology or the cult of the national hero.....	- 218 -
1. The invention of the national hero.....	- 219 -
2. Exemplars and figures of mediation	- 234 -
3. Triangular desire and mimetic rivalry in Lodoidamba	- 259 -
4. From literature to society	- 271 -
Chapter six: From shadow to light or Rinchen’s two shades of Bogd “Instruction as a weapon” both with respect to the context of writing and as a literary subject.....	- 274 -
1. From the heart of darkness.	- 274 -
2. From shadow to light in “ <i>Üürin Tuya</i> ”	- 296 -
3. Two shades of Bogd	- 303 -
Conclusion	- 313 -
Annex.....	- 322 -
Bibliography	- 325 -
Sources in cyrillic	- 334 -

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Introduction

– “Patriotism” in question –

Foreword²

The researcher and the research: A question of involvement

A hermeneutic approach

It is not uncommon for a researcher, in an introduction or even a foreword, to go back over the path that led him to carry out this work, to place it within a more general approach, and to reveal the ambitions and issues involved. These issues are scientific and professional for the most of them, but not exclusively. Such a preamble is often the place where scientists recall the reader that they are also – and perhaps above all – social actors, imbued with a culture, driven by ideals, sometimes inhabited by personal projects that inevitably guide their writing choices. In short, all researchers are involved in a context, an environment, and this involvement leads to interactions that inevitably colour their work. This is true in humanities, where the researcher's subjectivity constantly exerts its influence, but it is also true in the so-called "hard" or objective sciences, albeit to a lesser extent.³

Once that said, in most cases, this "coming out" from part of the researcher is only appended onto his text as a preamble, like a concession to his "self" and out of a concern for honesty with his audience. It may also partly respond to narcissistic motivations, as a few rare academics are keen to point out, as does for example Sergio Dalla Bernardina, whose work has strongly influenced and guided my own way of questioning reality, my "objects of study" and my attitude to my own intellectual "bricolages".

One cannot deny that this question, that of the researcher's relationship with the objects of his investigations, with his research theme, and therefore with his experience, is a slippery slope in ethnology. The geographer and sociologist Martin de La Soudière puts it very well when he talks about the "discomfort of the field".⁴ Caught between their "doubts" and their "desires", researchers are sometimes tempted to keep "double accounts", and to publish, alongside more rigorous academic work, accounts of their experience, more or less romanticised depending on the case.⁵ Although there is a whole body of literature on the subject, one cannot but notice that it has long been relegated to the sidelines.

Yet, the history of the discipline generally remembers the name of Malinowski as the first one – according to the "vulgata" – to have theorized the relevance of revealing the active presence of the researcher behind any attempt to describe and rationalise his "field of observation". In his famous introduction to the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*⁶ one can find, on the one hand the idea that knowledge of otherness comes through individual

² Words, names and place names of Mongolian origin are transliterated according to standard romanization except with the exception of the ж which is romanized as zh.

³ The metaphor of the electron is sometimes used to illustrate this idea.

⁴ De La Soudière M. « L'inconfort du terrain ; "Faire" la Creuse, le Maroc, la Lozère... (A propos des ouvrages Ethnologie au Maroc, réflexion sur une enquête de terrain de Paul Rabinow et vivre dans la Creuse de Jacques Maho) », *Terrain*, n°. 11, 1988, pp. 94-105.

⁵ On this subject, see the very interesting study by Vincent Debaene *L'Adieu au voyage. L'ethnologie française entre science et littérature*, Gallimard, coll/ « Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines », 2010.

⁶ Malinowski B. *Les Argonautes du Pacifique occidental* (1922)..

experience; and on the other hand that such an experience can be described scientifically by staging the ethnologist living it. In other words, the Polish scholar gave a prelude to what could lead to the scientific exploitation of the researcher's subjectivity.

However, as Sergio Dalla Bernardina rightly pointed out in a 2009 article on the subject, despite this promising start, Malinowski had not really moved away from classic objectivism. "If he is interested in the "I" of the researcher as an individual instance which bursts into the text in the first person, it is to track it down and "normalise" it", the instance mentioned here consisting in a set of impressions, personal opinions, states of mind, "external" to the phenomenon observed.⁷ Malinowski's text reads as:

"It is quite clear that in the way of observing and recording on the spot these imponderables of real life and typical behaviour, the personal equation of the observer comes into play much more than when it comes to collecting raw ethnographic data. But in this case too, you have to do everything you can to make the facts speak for themselves". (emphasis added).⁸

The text is no less seminal for having launched the debate. There is no shortage of international references, starting with Gadamer⁹ and Paul Man¹⁰. Yet, for the sake of clarity, because I have a much better grasp of these sources and because they seem to me to meet the needs of this introduction, I shall here confine myself to the French debate.

In France, thus, Georges Devereux and Jeanne Favret Saada paved the way by proposing that the investigator's position should be an inseparable element of the rest of the study. And yet it has to be said that such an epistemological stance remains fairly marginal even today. I hope that the contributions we are about to present will give us a better idea of the various reasons why this stance is not so easy to maintain. In 2014, through the title "Research & commitment", the scientific journal *Communications* set out the theme of a debate that it proposed to a dozen researchers in the humanities, historians, ethnologists, anthropologists and sociologists.¹¹ Readers were thus invited to "look over the shoulder of the researcher",¹² and to ask themselves, along with the researcher, whether it would be strategically appropriate to draw on his or her personal journey in the course of their work as researchers. The subject of their research and their careers are very different from our own, but the questions they raise about the researcher's commitment offer a broad overview of the issue, and this review therefore seems to me to have a legitimate place in an introduction.

⁷Dalla Bernardina Sergio, "« Je interdit ». Le regard presbyte de l'ethnologue", in (Georges Ravis-Giordani éd.), *Ethnologie(s)*. Paris, CTHS, 2009, p. 18-40.

⁸ Malinowski B. 1963, p. 77.

⁹ Gadamer H.-G. "Hermeneutics and Social Science". *Cultural Hermeneutics*. 2 (4), 1975, pp. 307-316.

¹⁰ Man P. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 1983.

¹¹ Sophie Bobbé, Pierre Alphandréy (dir.), « Chercher. S'engager ? », Paris, Seuil, *Communications*, n° 94, 2014.

¹² With reference to Geertz C. "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture". In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973).

The anthropologist Alain Bertho opens the discussion with “Words and Powers”,¹³ an article in which he takes a critical look at his career as a researcher, but also as a former Communist Party activist. Bertho sets out to show that these two facets of his commitment are intrinsically linked and that, to quote him, “the aporias of one have often set back to work the reflections of the other”. He explains this by recounting how his work as a researcher has transformed his life outside academia, and more specifically how his intellectual development has turned his initial enthusiastic activism into a distant commitment. A specialist in urban sociology, labour, schools and electoral processes, he explains how the shock provoked by the suburban riots made him realise the failure of organisations and parties to fulfil the mission of mediation they had set themselves - mediation between the State and what he calls the “banal singularities”, the “multitudes” or quite simply the people. The PCF¹⁴ activist, who had become involved in research in order to talk to people, drew the consequences of the anthropologist’s conclusions, and refused to speak in people’s place, he explains. Alain Bertho writes that, seeing his certainties crumble with the collapse of several worlds¹⁵, his generation could only give in to what he calls “historical bitterness”. Concluding his analysis of the impact that his research has had on his civic engagement, he looks beyond disillusionment to participation, suggesting that researchers in the human sciences could be at the forefront of a creative drive to imagine new places for politics, new spaces for representation. We can quote him: “against the general commodification of the human being, a new ethic of responsibility is taking root at the heart of our practices, as a condition of truth”. So, according to Bertho, the ethnologist of tomorrow could be called upon to become “the scholar who whispers in people’s ears”.

While Alain Bertho remembers being a kind of “kingpin in the construction of an alternative militant space”, Geneviève Decrop compares her “profession” to that of a “craftsman”, constantly subjected to an “uncomfortable tension” between institutional pressures and an intimate questioning, the one that gives meaning to her research, as she intends to conduct it. At the root of her personal commitment, she tells us, is the desire to explore the link between the extreme and the ordinary, between time as it passes (the time of clocks, Chronos devouring his children) and the time of the event that happens (*kairos* in Greek). “The exceptional has an appeal”, she writes, “a power of seduction that our entire culture bears witness to. Meaning is on its side, not on the side of routine and the ordinary”. With this in mind, she chose to write her thesis on the genocide, an “event” that “confronts us with something that pulverises this sharing [and] to which we are obliged to give no meaning”. Geneviève Decrop then slowly unravels the thread of a research itinerary that has taken her from the world of concentration camps to the “imaginary of catastrophe”, and from there to risk management. Although the author admits that she has sometimes found it difficult to “ ‘knit’ together her research subjects”, in this article, she manages to bring them together around the notion of the “extreme event”, which she defines as the “realisation of the virtual” and associates with the question of confrontation with collective

¹³ The reference to Michel Foucault is explicit Foucault M. *Les Mots et les choses*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

¹⁴ French Communist Party.

¹⁵ A former Communist activist, he refers in particular to the collapse of the Soviet bloc and Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history”

death. Avoiding personal outpourings, Geneviève Decrop remains very discreet and is content to justify her commitment on intellectual grounds, **guided by a few founding “peers”**, notably Hannah Arendt, Raul Hilberg and Mary Douglas. Biographical details are almost absent from this text, behind which we sense an almost existential anguish, but whose motives remain secret.

In Sophie Wahnich’s “*Désir d'histoire*”, the researcher’s relationship with the question he is pursuing is one of “mimetic” identification with the object. Whereas Geneviève Decrop chose to place her intellectual path under the sign of the “oxymoron” – in her words – Sophie Wahnich uses the notion of “anachronism” to characterise her approach: a notion which, at the end of her thesis, came to “put soothing words” on a work that had earned her many “warnings” from part of her colleagues and teachers. At a time when subjectivity had no place in the eyes of most of her peers, Sophie Wahnich was forced to acknowledge that her questions were provided by her own history “with all its banal gravity”. As the daughter of a Moroccan Jewish immigrant and the granddaughter of a Jewish family that survived thanks to the help of peasants in the Dordogne, she had thought that she could escape this – “take a step to the side” – by going back in time to work on the revolutionary period. But she was soon recaptured by the present when she opened the archives and came across a decree from 1793 on the status of foreigners. For Sophie Wahnich, who tells us that she is **following a path paved by Nicole Loraux** “far from the beaten track”, the historian’s praxis takes the form of a “ritual of appeasement”, in the face of the tragic nature of a political condition that must be understood in order to hope to dominate it. Her “desire for history” is, in her words, “personalistic”: it must aim “not to establish facts and accreditation processes but to take on a quest for truth that is both personal and political”.

Biographical and political, too, is the personal involvement of Michel Dreyfus, a historian who claims to be a member of the left-wing working-class, and for whom the choice to take an interest in “the existence of anti-Semitism in his own camp” was “difficult” but nonetheless necessary. “Dreyfus” was a name that carried a lot of meaning for the little boy, who felt its symbolic significance from a very early age, when he discovered that he was related to “the captain” whom Emile Zola had defended in “*J’accuse*”.¹⁶ He was eleven years old at the time, and quickly came to terms with the name and the case associated with it, building what he called his “personal pantheon”. While Sophie Wahnich sees individual history as the driving force behind historical research, Michel Dreyfus seems to have followed the opposite path, becoming aware of his identity as a Jew only through a succession of significant intellectual encounters. One example is “*Nuit et brouillard*”,¹⁷ which he went to see with the only Jew in his class, and which he admits brought them closer together, although this cultural closeness is not clearly expressed: “He was Sephardic, I was Ashkenazi”, Michel Dreyfus recalls, but they never felt the need to discuss this difference. Although he claims to have been “aware of [his] Jewishness” from that time onwards, he says that he “hardly paid any attention to it”, insisting that his “relationship with Judaism most often manifested itself unexpectedly”. A biography of Trotsky by Isaac

¹⁶ Zola E. “*J’accuse*”, *L’Aurore* n° 87, 13th of January 1898.

¹⁷ Film by Alain Resnais (dir.), “*Nuit et brouillard*”, 1956.

Deutscher seems to have provided him with the “**model**”¹⁸ of the Jew he wanted to resemble: a “progressive or revolutionary Jew” who would be “particularly capable of intellectually transcending religious and national limitations and adopting a kind of universal humanism”. This ideal seemed to him to be in line with the values of the left to which he himself subscribed. However, the Six Day War, and in particular the explosion of joy on the part of the Right at Israel’s victory, set the cat among the pigeons. What had hitherto seemed self-evident – the enemy is always in the opposing camp – was clearly not, forcing him to engage in an introspection of identity whose implicit aim seems to have been to articulate together the different facets of his identity, to reconcile the political and the biographical (to put it very schematically, the reality being obviously more complex). Reading it, you get the feeling that Michel Dreyfus struggled for a long time against the temptation to mix his personal history with his research activities, but that a clearly irresistible force stopped him in his tracks and forced him to confront head-on the inextricable links between the history of the century and his identity. Finally, he shows how what he proposes to call “ego history” made him sensitive to the long “taboo” question of left-wing anti-Semitism. Noting the extent to which “questioning deeply held personal beliefs” could prove painful at times, Michel Dreyfus tells us that he sometimes felt he was committing “a sacrilege and a transgression”, but that he has not given up on this different view of history, which he says is “the product of work on himself, and of the closeness and distance that have accompanied his journey”.

Yves Dupont’s commitment seems to be less hesitant. The son of primary school teachers from modest farming and fishing backgrounds, he remembers being mocked by some of his colleagues as a “rusticophile” when he first joined INRA¹⁹ in 1975. Yet there was never any question of him denying what he calls his “primordial experiences”. There is a slightly lyrical, “populist” – “Pagnolian” one would say with reference to the French rural author – side to this sensitive text on the farming world, in which the author does not intend to hide his admiration for the figures who marked his childhood: **models of heroism** and devotion in his eyes, who convinced him to place himself on the side of the “losers” but whose integration into this world on borrowed time was already no longer self-evident. “I had to be beyond reproach”, “it was important for us to be able to integrate into the environment and society in which we lived”. The author knows that he himself no longer belonged to the world of his ancestors, and that he occupied an “uncertain position” within it. While the people in town regarded him and his parents as peasants, even though he was still a child the peasants called the teacher’s son “Sir”. Here too, his commitment appears to be the result of a personal journey, the fruit of choice. But whereas Michel Dreyfus claimed that his Jewishness had caught up with him in spite of himself, Yves Dupont seems to have painstakingly cultivated his farming roots. “My parents lived almost like peasants”, he writes. The word “almost” is important here, because at the same time as he was learning to milk the cows and feed the pigs, the “real” sons of peasants were leaving the village school to go to the city to look for work in the administration. Yves Dupont did not want to dispel the “enchantment” that these “primordial experiences” gave him in “a society of

¹⁸ “Models”, here also termed as “mediator“, that will prove to be a crucial concept in our research.

¹⁹ French National Institute for Agronomic Research (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique).

abundance” – in his own words – where mutual aid and respect for the natural balance would have reigned. I quote: “Scrupulously respecting the conditions of reproduction of the species from which we took only what we needed and gave a few pieces to our neighbours”.

Familiar with this world, which he describes as the antithesis of a productivist capitalist society where “second homes proliferate” and rubbish slowly invades the beaches, the young man started to study for a degree in sociology at the University of Caen at the height of the 1968 revolt, and says he was horrified by the leftist vulgate “where the fetishism of the working class had swept away all forms of critical thought”. He then moved on to Nanterre, where he went through the various stages of a university career focused on analysing changes in the rural economy. Without denying anything, Yves Dupont vigorously displays his “backward-looking” approach against that of the “academic researchers” who, in his view, tend to objectify the world without taking into account the lived experience of those who inhabit it, and does not recognise himself in the least in the term “transfuge”, if this is to refer “to the idea of a betrayal of a milieu, a class, a party or a culture”.

If there was one “transfuge” among all these researchers, it would undoubtedly be Sergio Dalla Bernardina, who, in his “Confessions of a Traitor”, goes against the empathetic stance that dominates this issue of *Communications*. This bias lends a slightly polemical tone to the whole, making it all the more stimulating to read.

Is it possible not to like social actors? Sergio Dalla Bernardina asks, before going on to explain why the identification with the “Other” that is supposed to characterise the ethnologist’s approach is, in his view, not at all natural, and may even conceal unavowable or inglorious motives. What does the ethnologist have to be ashamed of? Sergio Dalla Bernardina surprises us a little by suggesting that, perhaps, the “empathetic” stance so many researchers claim is in fact inseparable from the promise of a “narcissistic reward” and may well conceal a paternalistic condescension or even a certain, somewhat dubious voyeurism. Moreover, even in the field of ethnology, not everything is about empathy, he points out, taking as an example the work of the American Edward Banfield, or the “ethnographic” documentary film *Mondo Cane*, where the “cynical spectacle” of the other outweighs compassion and pity. But on the whole, in the Italy of the 1970s when Sergio Dalla Bernardina cut his teeth, the rehabilitation of popular culture was reflected in a genuine project of “interclassist collaboration” (as he put it). He then lost some of that enthusiasm when he discovered that there was a term used by Communist leaders to define young “libertarians” who were sympathetic to their party even though they came from a different background. The expression was “useful idiots”. In the end, the ethnologist tells us about the embarrassment caused by the feeling of guilt that seizes the researcher who, while sharing a moment of relaxation with his informants over an aperitif or a dish of cold meats, knows that he is not there to “help them produce their meaning”. At least not in the way they see it: “Unable to restrict my gaze to the constructive aspects of the worldview of the vanquished”, he writes, “I’ve never been able to keep my eyes off the dark side of traditional societies. I’ve always been struck by the conformism and intolerance of ‘cold societies’, by their capacity to sanction any form of deviance and to forget, to repress, the less honourable episodes engendered by their structural disposition to reject diversity”.

But for Sergio Dalla Bernardina, the difficulty he exposes is not only moral, it is also epistemological, because the “empathetic and critical” postures refer to models that are difficult to reconcile. So how do we deal with the “indecent nature of the ethnographic gaze”? The author suggests a few ways out, before concluding in a pleasant tone by proposing to contrast an ethnology that brings people together, brings them closer and strives to explain their worldview – symbolic ethnology (from the Greek *syn* ‘with’ and *ballein* ‘to throw’) – with another that divides, slanders, denigrates and disunites: from the Greek *diaballein*, **diabolic ethnology**.

On the contrary, there is nothing diabolical about Isabelle Arpin’s sociology: although she poses the question of the relationship between interviewers and interviewees in much the same terms, her position differs markedly from that of the above mention scholar. Starting from a very Bourdieusian analysis of the situation, she questions the room for manoeuvre available to the researcher who wants to maintain a critical eye, while respecting certain rules of ethics with regard to his informants. She reports on a “life-size experiment” that led to the implementation of “participatory” science around questions relating to “methods of investigating and managing nature” in an ecologically sensitive context. In concrete terms, the aim was to study “the production of distance from wild animals, in this case the wolf, in a protected area (the Vanoise Nature Park). Isabelle Arpin reiterates the observation made by Sergio Dalla Bernardina: the terms of the exchange have changed and, increasingly, respondents read what scholars write about them, sometimes feeling hurt and even going so far as to sue them. Aware of the stakes involved in maintaining good relations with all the players involved, the sociologist assesses the advantages and disadvantages of an “ethnomethodological” approach, which is based on the presupposition that the social players are not “cultural idiots” and that their involvement at the various stages of the investigation helps to move it forward. This time it is no longer the people being observed who open the door to the researcher, at the risk of being trapped, but the researcher who invites his informants to his table to offer them the opportunity to discuss his results, even if it means having to modify them. This is exactly what happened in the case analysed by Isabelle Arpin, who admits that she had to reduce the critical scope of her text from the draft initially proposed. Nevertheless, she believes that this revision has not affected the sociological aspects of her research - on the contrary, it has even enabled the researchers to “[clarify] the aim and objectives” of their work by helping them to “identify the central idea”. “By ensuring that we did not enter into their field of expertise”, she writes, the respondents “led us to deepen the sociological work, which is our own field of expertise”. The text is quite distinct from the other contributions, in that the sociologist does not use her background, or the more personal aspects of her biography, to put forward an interpretation of her biases. Nevertheless, her contribution echoes the previous one and reiterates the same “obvious points” (“the respondents reconsidered their statements when they learned that they would be published”). However, while expressing certain reservations about entrusting informants with the task of dictating the investigator’s work, Isabelle Arpin chooses to adopt a fairly resolutely empathetic stance.

Having had the opportunity to find herself in the shoes of the “other”, that of the “interviewee”, Sophie Bobbé takes up an idea already put forward in Isabelle Arpin’s

contribution, concerning the existence of a “moral contract” between the researcher and the interviewee, to ask how the interview affects the interviewees. “We all tend to think that the interviewee knows the editorial outcome”, she observes, “but experience has shown that the interviewee often forgets the presence of the recording equipment as they reveal their secrets”. Thanks to Sophie Bobbé and after hearing the “Confessions of the Traitor”, we discover this time the anxieties and questions of the person who agrees to lift the veil on very intimate aspects of their existence, faced with a stranger they may never see again once the recording equipment is switched off and the interview session is over. Is the person who has opened his door to the ethnologist aware that he is exposing himself, and that this nakedness makes him vulnerable? If it is impossible to prevent “the unexpected from happening”, how can we ensure that the words fixed by the research do as little harm as possible to the people who brought them to light? Sophie Bobbé emphasised the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The fact that she found herself “in the other person’s shoes” left her with the feeling that the interview situation was outside time and reality. The hesitation and guilt she admits to feeling (having returned to her position as interviewer) seem to her to be linked to this “asymmetry”, “to the fact that the end of the research, the restitution, the submission of a report, are not enough to ‘settle the score’. Between the empathetic and the critical stance, there remains perhaps the question of debt”, she concludes. Sophie Bobbé proposes to define the role of the committed ethnologist as that of a “slightly disenchanted tightrope walker”, who must be “aware of what is at stake” between him and his interlocutors in order to walk towards them with full knowledge of the facts and satisfy his curiosity without risking injury.

Two interviews, with ethnologists Emmanuel Terray and Alban Bensa, round off this issue of the journal *Communications* devoted to observation techniques and the interview method, as essential components of the way in which researchers experience their fieldwork and understand their subjects.

Why did Emmanuel Terray come to anthropology? He answers that his commitment was based on three decisive readings: *The Capital* by K. Marx, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* by Cl. Lévi-Strauss and *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Freud.²⁰ And each time he experienced the same “wonder” in the face of a “singular performance”: “the impression of dealing with empirical chaos, inextricable, disordered, and of seeing the author reduce this chaos, reintroduce reason”. Added to this was the weight of the historical context: the Algerian War and decolonisation. He recounts how he chose to follow in the footsteps of Balandier, who, alongside Lévi-Strauss on the one hand and Germaine Dieterlen and Solange de Ganay on the other, was the dominant figure in the world of anthropology at the time. For Emmanuel Terray, “working with Balandier meant narrowing the gap between his investment as a researcher and his investment as an activist”: it was the promise of an “anthropology in the century”, in history “in the making”. His first experiences took the form of research carried out in Africa (during his military service), inspired by Denise Paulme’s work on African genealogy. He seems to have learnt his trade as an anthropologist directly in the field, guided by the advice of Jean-Louis Boutiller, then a researcher at Orstom, a “benevolent and enlightened tutor”, as he puts it. After recounting

the milestones in his career as a researcher, the ethnologist turns to the question of his career as an activist. He interprets the strength of his “left-wing” commitment as the result of an adolescent revolt against family values, which were firmly anchored on the right. But for him “research activity and militant activity are two distinct things” that must “correspond to different times” in the life of the same man. Political logic, he reminds us, is Manichean: it “involves judgement and aims to “coerce, dupe and bend” “enemies”. The logic of research aims at something quite different. He is therefore convinced that the researcher must try to become aware of the way in which his personality influences the way he looks at things, so as to give himself the means to neutralise the effects, a point on which he states that he disagrees with Alban Bensa, thus opening up the dialogue and enabling the transition to the next exchange.

And indeed, Alban Bensa takes a diametrically opposed view. After briefly recounting how he found himself in Kanak territory after completing a thesis in religious sciences in Europe in a rural environment: language and his meeting with Georges Haudricourt, Jean-Claude and Françoise Rivierre, he agrees to lift the veil on the reasons for his militant commitment. “I thought at the time that the solution to the “crisis of the West” lay elsewhere, in societies that I magnified, just as others at the same time were magnifying the peasants, for example at Larzac”, he explains, ethnology being for him, at the time at least, a way of seeking “alternative values to our own” through the intermediary of peoples who had preserved the use of them. He readily admits that he approached New Caledonia with “very classical” ethnological preconceptions, but insists that the reality he was immediately confronted with shocked him, experiencing in New Caledonia a “human and scientific experience embedded in a harsh colonial universe far removed from the enchanted world of primitive societies”. And it was a feeling of revolt, a revolt for which he felt absolutely no predestination, that pushed him to take the decisive step that led to action: in an interview requested by a journalist from *Libération*, he deliberately watered down the situation: “It was not necessary to warn the enemy of the actions in preparation”. The word – enemy – is a strong one, and by using it in this context, Alban Bensa is implicitly referring to Carl Schmitt, and is therefore in stark contrast to Emmanuel Terray, for whom the researcher must distance himself from the activist. It was a researcher that the journalist had come to interview, and it was a researcher who remembers making a “political” decision when he chose to “become an accomplice in the Kanak project of subversion”. Alban Bensa has become a militant, perhaps not in spite of himself but in an unexpected way, and he is proud of this position: “I considered that the colonial situation they [the Kanaks] suffered was intolerable and I intended to contribute to the essential political and social transformation of New Caledonia. I don’t see how this attitude of being a fellow traveller could have hindered my research or my objectivity, quite the contrary; it didn’t prevent me from doing genealogies, transcribing stories, thinking about segmentarity and chiefdoms, and moreover following in action the metamorphosis that was underway”. One of the arguments put forward by the ethnologist, which invites reflection, is that ethnology has often found itself complicit with colonisation and the maintenance of the established order. Was this inevitable? If the answer is no, then we might well ask whether ethnology is not also necessarily a factor of change. Perhaps it is a question of dosage.

In a very courteous way, these last two contributions open up a debate already latent in the other articles, a discussion that deserves the attention of any researcher, student or citizen curious to know how “scholars” come to terms with their intimate convictions, what scandalises them, their feelings. So this issue is anything but a narcissistic display of the states of mind of researchers who dwell nostalgically on the high points of their careers. It raises essential questions about the subjectivity of analysis, about the way in which researchers manage or fail to manage the political animal that slumbers within them and, beyond that, about the element of the unforeseen that characterises the future of any act of communication.

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This overview seems to take us a long way from Mongolia and from our subject of investigation, and yet it raises in its many facets what I believe to be an essential question of research, that is, the question of the researcher’s commitment or relationship with his subject. As we can see, this question arises regardless of the subject of the research, albeit in different ways each time. There are, however, a few recurring points: the need for reasoned introspection – in other words, a distanced look at one’s biography and career path on the part of the researcher – the role played by models, guides or “**mediators**” (real encounters or encounters mediated by the research), and a reflection on the relationship with the interlocutor (the so-called “informer”), an “**empathic**” or “**critical**” relationship, i.e. an **emic** or **etic** posture to put it another way. On the basis of the model provided by this review of articles, let us lend ourselves to the exercise, bearing in mind that it must not be a question of letting the researcher’s “self” take precedence over reflection on the other,²¹ but of critically questioning the interactional relationship between one and the other that accompanies and influences all research.

My involvement in Mongolian studies preceded rather than followed my ethnological “vocation”. In many ways, my intellectual path can be seen as chaotic, a bricolage whose meaning escapes many, if it is always clear to me. To use a metaphor, I could be like a burglar who, faced with a closed door or one that is difficult to push, chooses to enter through a window. No doubt that this can mean ending up in a room other than the one he is aiming for, and imply to have to make a long diversions before reaching the initial objective, sometimes lingering along the way, driven by an irresistible curiosity.

My first contact with Mongolia dates back to 2005, and was already the fruit of heterothelia (from the Greek *heteros* other and *telos*, the goal: the fact of achieving a goal other than the one aimed at). As a student at the Institut d’Études Politiques de Lille (IEP), I only had entered the prestigious school as a strategy, trying to cobble together a story that would convince and reassure my teachers and family about my university career. Yet, fascinated as a teenager by the history of the Northern Irish conflict, my real aim was to go to Ireland. I will have to explain the connection very briefly, as it was probably only “obvious” to my romantic and idealistic mind at the time. The truth is that in première (the year before the one of the baccalauréat in France), my classmate was a girl whose elder

²¹ A risk against which Gérard Toffin warns us in his book *Ethnologie. La quête de l’autre*. Paris, Acropole, 2005, 156 p.

sister, a student at a French IEP, had gone to study for a year in Chile as part of the compulsory international mobility programme in third year. As I didn't know much about French higher education, I set my sights on the only university that I knew for sure offered its students the chance to study abroad. The story of inventing a vocation for myself as a war reporter, although it ended up convincing me, was initially intended solely to justify my choice of direction (I was rather brilliant in mathematics and physics-chemistry, and was destined for a scientific career in the eyes of my family and teachers). So I entered the IEP in Lille on the basis of a competitive entrance examination after a year's preparation, which I did via the "Classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles littéraires" (CPGE), to discover, but only once I was enrolled, that there were no partnerships with Irish universities. My "wishes" at the end of my second year (we had to express a few range of them in view of this international mobility year) included a year's study at Aberdeen University in Scotland, and several applications for work placements in embassies, having turned my attention to Asia. Indeed, that same year, I had made friends with some Chinese students, my room-mates in the residence, and started to learn Mandarin. Finally, it was a civil-servant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who phoned me one day to tell me that the French Embassy in Ulaanbaatar had accepted my application.²² I was nineteen and landed on the second of September in Mongolia, about which I knew almost nothing, after a stop-over in Beijing, the first time in my life that I had taken a long-haul flight.

Two encounters left their mark on my life, putting my foot in the stirrup, to use a metaphor that fits well when talking about the so-called "land of the horse", and giving me a lasting attachment to Mongolian studies. The first one I will mention is that of Al Jacobee, an American philosophy professor who specialised in the German idealists but came to Mongolia to teach English. An atypical character, Professor Al was of Sicilian origin, the nephew of one of the godfathers of the Boston mafia, who said (I don't think I need to doubt his word) that he had once seen Ariel Sharon in his home when he was a child. Long, relatively impassioned conversations about this country that we were, so to speak, discovering together (he was sixty-five, I was nineteen, but the age difference wasn't a hindrance), served as a catalyst for my involvement in Mongolian studies. Endowed with great erudition but also very independent in his approach to research, he did help me gain a little confidence by encouraging me to let my intuitions carry me forward and not to let them dictate the direction of my thinking. On the contrary, he encouraged me to cultivate a way of interpreting reality by means of **analogies**, to link what I observed to references that were sometimes the most unexpected. That year, I read Plato's *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, and Schopenhoe's *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*²³ and *The World as Will and Representation*²⁴ in English,²⁵ and each time looked for resonances that helped him to think about Mongolia (this is a simple example, I won't venture to elaborate on it here). I shall come back shortly to the way in which this line of

²² Transferred to Ulaanbaatar, he will hold the position of First Counsellor at the Embassy for the duration of my internship.

²³ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde), 1813

²⁴ *The World as Will and Representation* (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung): vol. 1, 1818–1819, vol. 2, 1844

²⁵ I started to read *Being and Time* by Hegel but I never finished it.

reasoning, that is by means of analogies, influenced the direction of my subsequent research. But first, I would like to mention another crucial encounter, with Mr Chrismant, who was then the French ambassador to Ulaanbaatar.

Given his position, Mr Chrismant could in many ways be seen as an outsider. A keen student of history and languages, he spent his free time constantly learning new ones, starting with Mongolian as soon as he arrived in the country (which, despite what might seem to be common sense, is not common practice among the French diplomatic corps). Rumour had it in the French-speaking community that he had a grounding in some thirty foreign languages and mastered about fifteen of them. A five-day mission to Arkhangai, during which we visited several French-funded animal health projects, was an opportunity for me to get to know the man behind the job. Mr Chrismant was of Russian and aristocratic origin, an Orthodox Christian. This is no doubt a biographical detail, but one that immediately raises the question of our relationship with the French identity that we were inevitably labelled with in the country as I will try to show soon. Humanistic, curious and open-minded, he immediately encouraged me when I told him I wanted to learn Mongolian, even though this was not at all the objective of the course as conceived by the IEP. The expectations of the internship were not so well defined especially because I had almost no contact with the teacher who was supervising it from France during my stay. It has to be said that Mr Chrismant himself, a brilliant high school graduate, had “deliberately” narrowly missed out on the *ole Nationale de l’Administration (ENA)* so that he could “by default” take the competitive entrance exam for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which he aspired to do without saying so,²⁶ just as he hid the two or three language degrees in which he was enrolled alongside his “official” course so that those around him wouldn’t fear that this would have an impact on his success. Looking back on his career, it’s hardly surprising that he knew long before I did that my choices of direction were not what I was looking for; and no less surprising that he had the audacity to let me follow my own path rather than trying to force me back onto the tracks laid out by the IEP. “Read, educate yourself, take your time, that is how you will be useful to us”, he used to say to me when I was hesitating about the place I should take within the Embassy. On the contrary, the IEP did not think that I had benefited at all from my placement, and my report and the oral exam were disastrous (I got 4 in the written exam and 8 in the oral exam out of a scale of 20) the jury told me that my work was not up to the standard that could be expected at university level. I had put a lot of work and effort into the report, and this conclusion meant that it was only a matter of time before I left the school. I resisted for a year, trying to get through to the diploma, but failure after failure, failed presentations and bad mark after bad mark, I ended up failing the exams. My father may have been right at the time when he told me “you did it on purpose” (to fail, he meant). My heart was no longer in the work and without even taking the second exam I left the school just a year before I was due to graduate, horrifying everyone around me, who was only half reassured when I was accepted for a Master’s degree in Brest, the city where I was born, the “equivalences” allowing me to enrol for a double degree and take a Master’s degree in English with a major in “French as a Foreign Language” and another in Ethnology.

²⁶ Our conversation goes back nearly twenty years, so I am hesitant about the names of the schools, but it is the course of events that matters.

I made no secret of the fact that the aim of this change of direction was to take me back to Mongolia: French as a Foreign Language would hopefully enable me to return as a teacher or, if it proved unsuccessful (I use the term “unsuccessful” because it was only my “plan B” at the time) the diploma in ethnology would have been a trigger for involvement in projects to develop cultural tourism connected with Mongolia. The Master’s programme was called “Cultures and Societies”, with a specialism in “Identity Dynamics”, and it offered two options: research or professional careers. However, I soon found myself drawn towards the first of these two paths, and at the same time towards ethnology to the detriment of FLE.

One of the most salient aspects of my stay in Mongolia – where this tendency to compare and reason by analogy came into play – was the fact that I was confronted with the problem of Mongolian identity, which brought me back to my own “quest” for identity and, beyond this intimate and, I would say, existential questioning, to the problem of Breton identity (a favourite subject for someone training as an ethnologist at the University of Brest). Paradoxically, but I use the term “paradoxical” with reservations, the fact of being, in the eyes of the Mongols, melted into the mass of the “French community” reaffirmed rather than attenuated my feeling of belonging to the region of Brittany and the culture and language associated with it. The Breton identity vis-à-vis the French identity is, like the Corsican, Basque, Occitan or Alsatian identity – and I could go on – one of those ethnological questions that cross the centuries, constantly renewed. To go into too much detail here would be to go too far, but to sum up roughly, the comparison between the Mongolian and Breton issues was stubbornly obvious to me on a number of points, all intermingled together. In both cases, there is an oscillation between self-deprecation and pride, which seems to be reflected in a process of reappropriation/reinvention of the past – which ties in with the theme of “reversing the stigma” – the historical context of a centre/periphery balance of power. And this unbalanced historical relationship largely explains this ambivalence in the expression of the sense of self, coupled with a painful and complex emotional relationship with language. On this last point: in 1941, the Mongols underwent a brutal change of script that irrevocably transformed their traditional language; in the first half of the twentieth century, French was imposed on the Bretons and the use of Breton in schools was banned. I will come back to the way in which this authoritarian measure, taken decades before I was born, gives meaning to my research, and I would even venture to say that it is the keystone. If I went into more detail, I could draw many more parallels, starting with the relationship with rurality, but that is not the point here. What I am trying to show is that my “reading” of the Mongolian reality that I was able to observe in the “fieldwork” was not completely “external”, not just “distanced”, but **mediated** through the prism of what I knew about the Breton identity issue, some of it from books, some of it from my own history.

So it is not absurd that, having taken a master degree in ethnology with the aim of investigating the “identity dynamics” at work among Mongolians, I began by doing fieldwork in Brittany, with a first-year master dissertation on the relationship between identity and alcohol in “popular” bars, limiting my observations to the one in the commune where I lived. Over the years, I have come to see my path as moving back and forth between Brittany and Mongolia, between two histories that are separate in many ways but between which my reasoning encourages me to weave links. I did my second year of Master research

in Mongolia, again with the support of Mr Chrismant, who was still at the Embassy at the time and enabled me to follow the language and culture programme for foreigners at the National University of Mongolia (MUIS) during my second placement at the Embassy. I returned to Brittany for my doctoral thesis, working on the reappropriation of a past “**mediatised**” by shipwrecks, which many amateur divers (or not) are trying to have recognised and promoted as part of their “heritage”.

I defended my ethnology thesis in December 2014 and, that same month, came across a Mongolian migrant woman in the streets of Brest, who had come with her family in precarious conditions – to say the least – and with whom I soon became friends. If it had not been for that meeting, my path would probably not have been the same, and I would probably never have set about translating *Tungalag Tamir*. It is this translation that forms the basis of this research, not the other way round. By this I mean that the translation work carried out in parallel with the thesis was not conceived as a tool for the research; on the contrary, it was the research that came along to shed light on the translation. The rest is bricolages. Without going into too much detail, there is something I would like to say here about my relationship with text and language. I mentioned above the complex relationship that Bretons have with their language. There is something I cannot really explain it, which might be the result of some kind of collective “trauma” internalised and passed on by the generation of our grandparents and great-grandparents.²⁷ I don’t see French as my real mother tongue, despite the fact that it was through French that I discovered the world and that it is also the language into which I now translate.

I grew up with the feeling of a “stolen” language, one that my grandparents spoke between themselves but refused to pass on to me. My great-grandmother’s refusal was categorical: she had suffered too much from being forbidden to speak it at a time when – and this has become a symbol – it was written on school frontispieces: “It is forbidden to spit on the floor and to speak Breton”. Between my two mother tongues, one inaccessible and perceived as “stolen”, the other familiar but not assumed as such, Mongolian acted as a calming **mediator**, a living language (much more so than Breton is today) that was therefore accessible and had never been imposed on my ancestors. A language that I could adopt, or that could adopt me, as the case may be. If Sophie Wahnich spoke of a “desire for history”, I would be tempted to speak of a “need for language”. That sums up my emotional relationship with my subject as honestly as possible.

There is one final point that I feel needs to be raised before we really get into the discussion, and that is my position with regard to the pairing of etic/emic, or hermeneutic/objective; it is quite clear from the foregoing that my research is not devoid of a certain – or even strong – empathy. And yet my research posture is much more in line with that claimed by Sergio Dalla-Bernardina mentioned earlier, perhaps because the fact of observing Mongolia through the prism of my relationship and the relationship of the Bretons to their identity, makes me particularly attentive to all that is unavowable, unspoken and irrational in these constructions of identity. I shall quote him at the end of this foreword, because the problem he raises in the lines that follow is precisely the one I have to deal with myself:

²⁷ On this subject I would refer to the stimulating essay by ethnopsychiatrist and practitioner Philippe Carrer, *Ethnopsychiatrie en Bretagne*, Nouvelles études, Coop Breiz, Coll. “Semi poche”, 2011.

[...] This disturbance in my empathic approach, preventing me from a priori solidarity, from necessarily being “in tune” with the witnesses I was able to meet, destabilised my way of conceiving research, perennially torn between a “hermeneutic” stance, seeking to respect the intentions of the informants, and a “critical” stance, not giving up on the analysis of unconscious mechanisms. But, as I said, this personal difficulty [...] was also a difficulty of a moral as well as an epistemological nature, with the two “empathic” and “critical” positions referring to models that are difficult to reconcile.²⁸

²⁸ Dalla Bernardina Sergio, “Les confessions d'un traître . Du caractère indécent de l'enquête ethnographique et de la manière de s'en sortir”, *Communications*, 2014/1 n° 94, p. 97

1. Patriotism: a problematic concept

First published in 1967, *Tungalag Tamir* (The Clear Tamir) by Chadraabalyn Lodoidamba is an important resource for who intends to account for the birth and stabilization of Mongolia as a modern state and to grasp part of the associated identification feeling, i.e. the expression of a shared consciousness.

Specialists of Mongolian literary studies agree to see in Lodoidamba's novel a masterpiece of Mongolian literature, and a representative one of the national literature of the twentieth century. Alongside Byambyn Rinchen and Donrovyn Namdag, Ch. Lodoidamba is indeed considered as one of the three fathers of Mongolian realism, the predominant school in literature in socialist time, or to put it crudely the sole accepted by the regime.

The argument developed in this study originated in 2015 when I started to translate *Tungalag Tamir* into French. The many questions that arose throughout the work implied not only to study the history of the period lying as a background to the story also to be cautious at the context of writing, so to grasp possible underlying themes and approach as closely as possible the deep meaning of the text. This dive into history encouraged further readings, selecting other books of the socialist period, namely *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga* (The Horse of the Erdene Zasag) by Z. Dorzh, *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* (A Great Destiny) by S. Udval, *Tulaldaan* (Battle) and *Dain* (War), by Zh. Lodoi, *Üüriin Tuya* (Dawn) by B. Rinchen and *Tsag Töriin Üimen* (In the Turmoils of Time) by D. Namdag.

Socialist realism in Mongolia, which we could call “Mongolian realism” was defined as patriotic by the Mongolian theoreticians of literature, a label that, in line with the ideological stance of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), marked a clear cut distinction between the required patriotism and the dubious, if not threatening, nationalism. In the introduction to his *Overview of Mongolian Literature (Mongolyn uran zokhiolyn тойм)*, Ts Damdinsüren – a leading figure in language and literary studies – insisted on this opposition. He wrote:

“Nationalists do not favour friendship between their own nationals and others but hostile behaviour. Instead of giving the main role to contemporary working class representatives, nationalist writers used to concede it to noyons (lords) and khans (princes) of ancient times. This was an evidence of their nationalist ideology. We do have to distinguish nationalism from patriotism. To love one's motherland, to hold one's people in high esteem, to preserve one's cultural inheritance, this is patriotism, this is not nationalism.”²⁹

“Үндэсний үзэлтэн нар өөрийн үндэстнийг бусад үндэстэнтэй найрамдах замаар биш, дайсагнуулах замаар ажилладаг байна. Үндэсний үзэлтэй зохиолч нар бол одоогийн хөдөлмөрийн хүмүүсийг уран зохиолын гол баатар болгохын оронд хуучин хаад ноёдыг гол баатар болгохыг л эрхэмлэдэг байсан. Энэ бол үндэсний үзлийн илрэл байжээ. Үндэсний

²⁹ My translation. Дамдинсүрэн, Ц. *Монголын уран зохиолын тойм*: 3 т. /БНМАУ Шинжлэх Ухааны Академи, Хэл зохиолын хүрээлэн; ред. Ц. Дамдинсүрэн, Д. Цэнд. — Улаанбаатар : Улсын хэвлэлийн хэрэг эрхлэх хороо газар, 1957—1976, p. 10-11.

үзлийг бид эх оронч үзлээс заавал ялгах хэрэгтэй. Эх орноо хайрлах, ард түмнээ хүндэтгэх, соёлын өвийг хямгалан ашиглах явбал эх оронч үзэл мөн бөгөөд үндэсний үзэл биш”,

The use of the terms “*ündesnii үзел/ ündesnii үзелтен*” and “*ekh oronch үзел*” translated as “nationalism” and “patriotism” immediately calls for our vigilance. Familiar with the study of discourse – and who very often, rather than talking about things cautiously stick to **the representations we have of them** – historians, anthropologists and ethnologists have pointed out the singular, not to say “abusive”, use of the terms “identity”, “nationalism” and “patriotism”.

This focus on “nationalism”/ “*ündesnii үзел*” in the countries associated with the Soviet Union, was even paradoxical since, as we can see from this quotation from Damdinsüren, “nationalism” was violently denounced there (as were all those suspected of professing it, this was notably the case with Rinchen), and at the very same time it was at the heart of Soviet institutional policy.³⁰ In a review of Uradyn Bulag’s book *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, Louisa Shein emphasized this point, which Bulag has developed extensively on the subject of Soviet policy towards Mongolia. Shein writes:

“Uradyn Bulag has written a history that begins in the 13th century and emphasizes the 20th, one that describes how Mongolia emerged as a nation and its ongoing struggles over geopolitical positioning during the post-socialist transition. Based on fieldwork in the capital of Mongolia—Ulaanbataar—and other sites in Mongolia, Bulag recounts the complex history of how Soviets made a unitary national-ity out of a complex landscape of nearly 20 Mongol ethnic groups. Soviet nationality policy and practice led to the official recognition of an indigenous group, the Khalkh, as the pure ethnic core of Mongolians. This recognition was an attempt to foreclose Mongolia’s identification with foreign Mongols within China’s borders. During the Soviet period, the Soviets framed both the Buryats within Soviet territory and the Inner Mongols within Chinese borders as impure, as non-Halh, and hence as non-Mongol”.³¹

To confine ourselves to the research work that will be used and commented on in our study, I would also mention, with regard to the use that the Soviets made of the concepts of “nation” and “ethnic group” in their policy of managing a “territory” extended to the States that came under their control, the work of Boglárka Mácsai, in which the author remarks in a note:

“The term multiethnic is characteristic of the rhetoric of the political elite of Bashkortostan; [...] Beside the construction of the multiethnic nation, however, another nation-building process can also be discerned, which aims to create a Bashkir ethnic nation. The books on the history and culture of Bashkortostan mainly present the Bashkir literature, history and culture, making only minimal mention of the rest of the ethnic groups (Graney, 1999: 624-625). Katherine E. Graney opines that this kind

³⁰ Rogers Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account”, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Feb., 1994, pp. 47-78

³¹ Bulag, Uradyn. “Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia.” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1999. (Book review by Louisa Schein for the American ethnologist, date unknown, pp. 502-503.

of preference of the titular nation and its acceptance by the other ethnic groups is based on a Soviet-type arrangement in which the eponymous nation was defined as the legal owner of the given republic (ibid.: 626).³²

These are just a few examples that do not directly concern our field, but which show that, despite a highly critical discourse, the “communists” largely exploited the “nationalist” feelings of those they intended to control, when this served their interests. In an article reviewing the many “theories of nationalism” being debated at the time of publication (the article dates from 1999), Joseph Llobera also pointed to this ambivalence.³³ Referring to the so-called “economist” theories, among which he unsurprisingly ranks Marxist theories,³⁴ the anthropologist explains:

“Marxist theories envisage nationalism as a modern phenomenon and posit a more or less explicit causal connexion between the development of capitalism and the appearance of nationalism. [...] To understand their attitude towards nationalism it is essential to know that they subordinated the survival of nations to the progressive march of history: some peoples were fossils from a long gone past and were therefore objectively counter-revolutionary. It is obvious that for Marx and Engels the nation was not a central category of social existence, but rather a transitory institution created

³² Quoted references : Graney, Katherine E. (1999): “Education Reform in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan: Sovereignty Projects in Post-Soviet Russia”. *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 611-632. by Mácsai Boglárka, “The Cult of International Heroes in Post-Soviet Bashkortostan”, in Vargyas Gábor, *Passageways. From Hungarian Ethnography to European Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology*. Budapest, L’Harmattan – Department of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, The University of Pécs, 2009, p. 361.

³³ Llobera J., “Recent theories of nationalism”, Barcelona, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 1999.

³⁴ Wishing to familiarise myself with a debate directly relevant to our subject, I initially relied heavily on Llobera’s article for its overview of the authoritative references at the time - the references of which I will give below - but then questioned the relevance of such a catalogue, which distanced us from our subject without really helping us to understand what the various players meant by nationalism. The profusion of “theories of nationalism” to which almost every author seems to have wanted to add his own by giving it a new label never really convinced me, even though I found many interesting and stimulating comments and reflections for my own purposes. So in the end I decided to take a long look at the table he proposes, but mainly to suggest the extent of the debate and its complexity, which seems to call for caution or even the abandonment of the terms “nationalism”, “patriotism” and “identity”, at least as analytical concepts. After presenting the so-called “primordialist” theories (Shils, Geertz, Isaacs, Van den Berghe, Shaw & Wong, the list goes on) and “instrumentalist” theories (including those of Barths, Nagel and Olzac, and creating a sub-category for a theory of rational choice proposed by Banton and Hetcher), Llobera lists a whole series of theories known as “Modernization theories”, including: 1. Social communication theories (Deutsch, Rustow, Rokkan, Anderson) 2. Economistic theories (Marxist-inspired, Classical, Internal colonialism (Hechter), Uneven development (Nairn), World-system (Wallerstein), Hroch, Non-Marxist inspired (Gellner), Politico-ideological theories (Breuilly, Giddens, Brass, Mann) to end with the “Evolutionary theories” (Armstrong, Llobera), without the relationships between these major groups of theories appearing very clearly, at least from my point of view. So as not to make the note even heavier, I will refer to the bibliography for references to the names cited. In the body of the research, I shall confine myself to mentioning those points which seem to me to be directly relevant to our subject.

by the bourgeoisie, hence the passage in The Communist Manifesto to the effect that the “proletariat has no fatherland”.³⁵

And he adds:

“At the turn of the century the vindication of the rights of nations changed the political panorama to the extent that to the Marxists of the Second International the national question was central in their political agenda”.³⁶

A quick overview seems in order here, since we will be using the terms “nationalism” and “patriotism”, but only - **and I stress this** - for want of a better term and only to give an unsatisfactory translation of the Mongolian expressions “*ünesnii үзел*” and “*ekh oronch үзел*”, which are themselves seen only as elements of discourse.

The “theories of nationalism” and the question of “identity”: a overview

When it comes to the notions of “identity” and “ethnicity”, as well as “nationalism”, “patriotism” and even “State” and “Nation”, one is easily overwhelmed by the sheer number and diversity of sources available. But this profusion seems less the mark of a stimulating debate than of confusion, to the extent that Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have not hesitated to speak of an “identity crisis” in the social sciences.³⁷ Traditionally, an essentialist perspective, often described as “primordialist” when applied to “nationalism”, has been contrasted with a constructivist or “instrumentalist” approach. But in an article published in 2000 in which they criticised the abusive use of the notion of “identity”, the two authors pointed out that this opposition between perspectives - essentialist vs. constructivist - was not very operational:

“It may be objected that this overlooks recent efforts to avoid reifying “identity” by theorizing identities as multiple, fragmented, and fluid. “Essentialism” has indeed been vigorously criticized, and constructivist gestures now accompany most discussions of “identity”. Yet we often find an uneasy amalgam of constructivist language and essentialist argumentation. This is not a matter of intellectual sloppiness. Rather, it reflects the dual orientation of many academic identitarians as both analysts and protagonists of identity politics. It reflects the tension between the constructivist language that is required by academic cor-rectness and the foundationalist or

³⁵ Llobera R. Joseph, “Recent theories of nationalism”, Barcelona, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 1999. digital version : https://www.icps.cat/archivos/WorkingPapers/WP_I_164.pdf?noga=1 (p. 13).

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, *Theory and Society*, Springer, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), pp. 1-47.

essentialist message that is required if appeals to “identity” are to be effective in practice”.³⁸

Most of the works consulted seem to confirm this remark, which I think is very apt, and I for one do not feel immune to such a flaw.

Primordialist theories take for premise the assumption that group identity is determined by attachments conceived as both primordial and irrational.

The primordialist perspective was first enounced by Edwards Shils, who expressed in 1957³⁹ the idea that “ethnic bounds are ‘**natural**’, fixed by the basic experiences that human beings undergo within their families and other primary groups”.⁴⁰ Clifford Geertz elaborated this assertion a step further in 1973 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, where he defined “primordial identities” as **ineffable** but **coercive** bonds, deeply rooted in the **historical experience** of human beings and based on **blood, race, language, region and religion**⁴¹. While primordialist theories have been sharply criticized for their propensity to preclude the possibility of sociological analysis, “socio-biological ones” even emphasis the “natural” dimension of the “primordial attachments by asserting the biological character of ethnicity.⁴² In this perspevie, the word **nationalism** expresses together a love of country, the assertion of natural identity and national dignity but also the xenophobic obsession to obtain these things through violence and sacrificing other nations. Socio-biologists insist on **the irrationality** of the mechanism that produces nationalism.

Therefore it would be unfair to distort their argument by failing to precise that van den Berghe, for example, never asserted that etnicity is grounded on common descent but on **the belief of common descent**. The difference is not insignificant.

The constructivist perspective (coined by Llobera as “instrumentalist” take the opposite stance, assuming that identification processes are conscious and rational.

From this perspective, nationalism, regionalism, and all the range of socio-cultural phenomenon encompassed by the word ethnicity are **dynamic** and determined by economic, social and political trends. Thus, constructivists reject the idea that group

³⁸ Brubacker and Cooper, 2000, p. 6.

³⁹ Shils E., “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory”, *British Journal of Sociology* 7/1957, pp. 13-45.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Llobera, *op.cit.*

⁴¹ Geertz Cl., *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Free Press, 1973. Harold Isaacs also added his contribution to this primordialist perspective with *Idols of the Tribes* in 1975 and proposed to call “basic identity” the result for each individual, of “being born into a group at a historical time”, a “basic identity” constituted by eight elements:

- The physical body (skin colour, type of hair, size, facial traits).
- The person’s name (individual name, family name and group name).
- The language one learns first to speak and with which he discovers the world.
- The religion one is indoctrinated into.
- The history and origins of the group one is born into.
- One’s nationality or ethnic affiliation.
- The geography of the place of birth.
- The culture that one inherits.

⁴² For example Van den Berghe P., *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, New York, Elsevier, 1981 or Shaw P. and Wong Y. *Genetic Seeds of Warfare: Evolution, Nationalism and Patriotism*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989.

identity is a “given”, that is, an innate character that would be “primordial” or “natural”. Those who support the stronger line do even not hesitate to assert that ethnic affiliation is nothing but a **“ploy to promote economic interests” and argue consequently that “individuals are ready to change group membership if that suits their sense of security or their economic interests”**.⁴³ This is in particular the Marxist stance.

Through his book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Culture Difference*,⁴⁴ Fredrick Barth has probably become the most influential theoretician⁴⁵ to develop a constructivist approach of ethnic identification. Barth has been largely inspired by both the British social anthropology and the interactionist theory of Erving Goffman, this later considering behaviour as “a manipulative game of play acting in which we “manage” the impression or image we create in others and vice versa”. Drawing from this premise, ethnicity is explained as the result of processes of ascription and self-ascription acting at the same time. Barth’s major contribution to the debate was to show that the observation of the **boundaries defining the group** and the analysis of their **fluctuations** was key to the reflection on group identification. We may say that where essentialist approaches are mainly endocentric, focusing on mechanisms of identification without saying too much about the influence of the **other** in the process, interactionist ones analyze identification in terms of differentiation from the said other.

In the constructivist perspective, ethnies are group organizations that refers to culture and emphasise the differences between their own and those of other groups. The “boundaries” separating them are both social and symbolical. Yet, here the the cultural features are not, on the contrary, they are **chosen** by groups and individuals to establish a “boundaries”. In other words, they are to a large extent arbitrary, and ethnical feelings are mobilised, not so much by popular will but to a great extent by **“ethnic entrepreneurs”** of leaders,⁴⁶ in particular through legal framework and specific policies, alongside with the use and the threat of force. Applied to the modern nation, the state disposes of vast machinery (schools, media etc.) to control and manipulate information and to imprint particular ethnic/national worldviews”.⁴⁷

Yet spite of its huge resonance, the constructivist perspective has been subjected to various criticisms. Barth’s analysis in particular was reproached its lack of historical depth and its tendency to obscure the processes of ethnic fusion and fission.⁴⁸

⁴³ Llobera, *op. cit.* No pagination.

⁴⁴ Barth Fredrik, *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture Difference*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1969.

⁴⁵ He is also famous among the French scholars because the translation of his main work by Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart and Philippe Poutignat introduced in France a debate on ethnicity that for culturo-academic reasons had remained a terra incognita so far. Through their work, they also proposed to the French the first classification of what we call here “theories of nationalism”. Cf. Poutignat P. and Streiff-Fenart J., *Théories de l’ethnicité*. Followed by *Les groupes ethniques et leurs frontières*/ Fredrik Barth, translated by Jacqueline Bardolph, Philippe Poutignat et Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, Paris, PUF, coll. Quadrige, 2008.

⁴⁶ Llobera, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Competition theories” (Nagel J. & Olzak S. (eds.), *Competitive Ethnic Relations*, New York, Academic Press, 1986) and “Rational choice theories” (Hetcher, Banton).

Many further developments have followed as attempts to refine these basic characterizations and to solve the problems they posed, in particular when it came to apply them to specific contexts or terrain.

Very briefly “Modernization theories” adopt a constructivist perspective to study the emergence of nationalism conceived of as a co-process of the transition from traditional to modern society which ideological roots they find in the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. The centralized bureaucratic, territorial and sovereign entity that modern national state is, would be the result of this unprecedented transformation. The focus on communication here is key and is not devoid of interest for us as we will study the way the Mongolian Regime used literature and education as well to promote identification to the State.

Deutsch for example defined the nation as a “group of people who communicate more effectively and more intensively with one another than with people outside the group” and advanced the hypothesis that “an accentuation of social mobilization would enhance the importance of language and culture, and hence, nationalism”.⁴⁹ As for Anderson, his famous definition of the nation, in *Imagined Communities* in 1983⁵⁰, reads as follow:

A nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both limited and sovereign”.⁵¹

According to his model, print language affected national consciousness by creating a unified language, which allowed a major part of the population to read the same texts and thus to feel connected together. Printing has also favoured the fixation of the language, hence the idea of the antiquity of the nation.

Theories labelled as “economistic” and in particular Marxist-inspired ones are based on the assumption that nationalist consciousness is a false one, being forged by the circles of power to hide economic interests while serving as a support for exploitation and class domination. These Marxist theories envisage nationalism as a modern phenomenon and

⁴⁹ See also Rustow D. A. *A World of Nations: Problems of Political Modernization*, Washington, Brooking Institution, 1969 or Rokkan S., *Economy, Territory, Identity*, London, Sage, 1983.

⁵⁰ Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, New Left Book, 1983.

⁵¹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 15.

postulate more or less explicitly a causal connection between its emergence and the development of capitalism.⁵²

As the Marxists could not turn a blind eye to the successive waves of nationalist movements that have shaken the whole twentieth century, after the Second World War some of them attempted to develop renewed theories of nationalism along modified Marxist orientations (labelled “international colonialism”, “uneven development” “world-systems”).

Another contribution that got some resonance was that by Gellner. In his model, while undermining the traditional social structures, the process of industrialization gave primacy to cultural elements with – here again – a particular focus on communication.⁵³ Nationalism is then envisaged as the unavoidable outcome of an industrial society which requires a spatially ductile labour force. Moreover, only the state can provide the kind of “cultured persons” required by the process of industrialization, and this is operated through the fixation of an official language and the control of the educational system (this is an interesting point when considering the Soviet approach on nationalism).

Undoubtedly, the events of the sixties and seventies, when socialist countries fought against each other along nationalist lines, proved that nationalist attachments could not be overlooked as if they did not exist, no matter whether primordial or constructed. Indeed, as the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier who advocated for the integration of the Marxist perspective into anthropologic thinking, asserts symbolic and imaginary ties deeply influence people’s behaviour as soon as they believe in them. In Godelier’s words, the “imaginary bonds that people establish with other beings, with things and with their own conditions of existence are not so for those who believe in them and act

⁵²Originally, in the Marxist scenario, that is, historical materialism, the nation is a transitory institution created by the bourgeoisie that will eventually disappear with the edification of socialism. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, the claim for the rights of nations changed the political panorama to the extent that it became impossible for the Marxists to avoid the national question. In his essay *Marxism and the National Question*, published in 1913, Stalin defined the nation as a “historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture”. Lenin published also several articles between 1913 and 1922, and as indicated by the titles, “Critical Remarks on the National Question”, “The Rights of Nations to Self-Determination”, “The Socialist Revolution and the Rights of Nations for Self-Determination”, adopted somewhat a more flexible stance, endorsing the principle of self-determination of oppressed nations. Lenin V. I., “Critical Remarks on the National Question”, *Prosveshcheniye* N° 10, 11 and 12, 1913; “The Rights of Nations to Self-Determination”, *Prosveshcheniye* Nos. 4, 5 and 6, April-June 1914; “The Socialist Revolution and the Rights of Nations for Self-Determination”, *Vorbote* N° 2, April 1916 / *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata*, N° 1, October 1916. (Marxists Internet Archives). Quoted in Llobera, *op.cit.*

⁵³ Gellner., *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1983.

accordingly”.⁵⁴ Many others insist on the power of imaginaries and beliefs, notably the theorists of nationalism who have developed theories labelled as “politico-ideological”.

*Brubacker’s contribution to the analysis of Soviet attitude toward
“nationalism” and “nationhood”*

Brubacker’s article “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account” is timely in considering the attitude of the Mongolian government (and beyond it the “eye of Moscow”) to the question of the construction of the Mongols’ identification with their state. Going against many of the “sovietologists” as he calls them, he argues that “*the institutional crystallizations of nationhood and nationality in the Soviet Union were by no means empty forms or legal fictions*”⁵⁵. To him :

“The Soviet institutions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality constituted a pervasive system of social classification, an organizing “principle of vision and division” of the social world, a standardized scheme of social accounting, an interpretative grid for public discussion, a set of boundary-markers, a legitimate form for public and private identities, and, when political space expanded under Gorbachev, a ready-made template for claims to sovereignty”.⁵⁶

As for the reference he makes to “nations”, and this fits exactly the stance I would like to take here he insists:

“It is not to reify nations; it is not to treat them as fixed and given; it is not even to presuppose that they exist”.⁵⁷

Moreover:

⁵⁴ Godelier M., *L'idéal et le matériel*, Paris, Fayard, 1984, p. 20. Among many others Anthony Giddens on his part defines nationalism as “the existence of symbols and beliefs which are either propagated by elite groups or held by many of the members of regional, ethnic or linguistic categories of a population and which imply a community between them”. Giddens A., *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, London, Macmillan, 1981, p. 190-191. *The Nation State and Violence*, Cambridge, Cambridge Polity Press, 1985; *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, University of California Press, 1984. See also Brass P., *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, New Delhi, Sage, 1981 or Mann M, “The Emergence of Modern European Nationalism”, in Hall J. And Jarvie I.C (eds.): *Transition to Modernity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 137-165 (p. 162), see also *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993;

⁵⁴ See also by Giddens: *The Nation State and Violence*, Cambridge, Cambridge Polity Press, 1985; *The*

⁵⁵ Brubaker Rogers, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account”, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Feb., 1994, p. 47.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem.*

“Soviet and post-Soviet “national struggles” were and are not the struggles of nations, but the struggles of institutionally constituted national elites - that is elites institutionally defined as national - and aspiring counter-elites”.⁵⁸

His work will therefore be of particular interest when we look at the way in which Mongolian elites promoted identification with the nation (yet not under the expression “*ündesnii үзел*”, as we saw but “*ekh oronch үзел*”). Mongolia was not part of the USSR, but it was very close to Moscow and subject to the very strong influence of the Comintern.⁵⁹ This description of the multidimensional policy steered by the Soviet government to channel the idea of nationhood will be very useful when we come to the action taken in Mongolia through the “Union of Mongolian Writers” and the way it operates:

“These included the Soviet system of ethnoterritorial federalism; the elaborate codification of, and pervasive significance attached to, personal nationality; the cultivation of a large number of distinct national intelligentsias; the cultivation of distinct national cadres, allowed, for the most part, to live and work in “their own” national territories; the deliberate policy of nation-building, aimed at the consolidation of non-Russian nations, pursued in the 1920s and early 1930s; the cultivation and codification of a large number of national languages; and the development of an elaborate system of schooling, including higher education, in non-Russian languages”.⁶⁰

“ekh oronch үзел” or “patriotism”

I will say only a few words about “patriotism”. Not that I consider patriotism and nationalism to be just two words for the same thing, but the problem generated by the use of this term is no different. What matters to me here is to try to describe or characterise the representation that the Mongols had of it (at the time under consideration), and the way in which they constructed and promoted it so that it could be shared collectively - and with what success.

While “patriotism” is a theme that appears in a good number of research studies, there is no field of research comparable to the “theories of nationalism” we have been talking about. Case studies include Robert Schatz, Ervin Staub and Howard Lavine’s 1999 study “On the Varieties of National Attachment: Blind versus Constructive Patriotism”,⁶¹ Tomas Blank and Peter Schmitt’s “National Identity in a United Germany: Nationalism or Patriotism?”⁶² And Ulrich Wagner, Julia C. Becker, Oliver Christ, Thomas F. Pettigrew and Peter Schmidt’s “A Longitudinal Test of the Relation between German Nationalism,

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ On this question see the very interesting book by Irina Morozova Morozova Irina, *Socialist Revolutions in Asia, The social history of Mongolia in the twentieth century*, London & New York, Routledge, 2009.

⁶⁰ Brubacker, 1994, p. 52.

⁶¹ Robert T. Schatz, Ervin Staub and Howard Lavine “On the Varieties of National Attachment: Blind versus Constructive Patriotism”, *Political Psychology*, Mar., 1999, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Mar., 1999), pp. 151-174

⁶² Thomas Blank and Peter Schmidt “National Identity in a United Germany: Nationalism or Patriotism? An Empirical Test with Representative Data”, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Special Issue: National Identity in Europe, Jun., 2003, pp. 289-312.

Patriotism, and Outgroup Derogation” in 2003.⁶³ Their objective is not so far from ours, although the method differs, namely “to investigate these dimensions of national attachments” through the way in which they are expressed by the sources (in their case questionnaires submitted to population samples). I will not repeat the distinction made by Schatz, Staub and Lavine between “blind patriotism” and “constructive patriotism”, terms which seem to me to be biased from the outset.

I would like here to mention a rather ancient article by the French historian Jacques Godechot, which I found stimulating.⁶⁴ His questioning concerns the use of words in a historical perspective. Let me summarise briefly. He draws on both the history of mentalities and the history of language to “reveal subconsciousness, states of mind, and therefore diverse mentalities”. He explains this as follows:

“It is good historical practice to use the words that contemporaries used to describe certain phenomena characteristic of an era”.⁶⁵

And he continues

“It is abnormal and illogical to use the word nationalism to characterise certain states of mind, certain tendencies of the 17th century, which contemporaries designated by other words”.⁶⁶

Godechot’s article presents an interesting study of the transformations undergone by the terms “nation”, “patrie”, “nationalism” and “patriotism” in France in the eighteenth century.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ulrich Wagner, Julia C. Becker, Oliver Christ, Thomas F. Pettigrew and Peter Schmidt, A Longitudinal Test of the Relation between German Nationalism, Patriotism, and Outgroup Derogation *European Sociological Review*, JUNE 2012, Vol. 28, No. 3, June 2012., pp. 319- 332

⁶⁴ Godechot Jacques, “Nation, Patrie, Nationalisme et Patriotisme en France au XVIIIe siècle”. In: *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, n°206, 1971. pp. 481-501.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 485

⁶⁶ Ibidem

⁶⁷ In a letter to Ustéri, dated 30 April 1763, Rousseau gave a definition of the patriotic spirit that was very different from Voltaire's, and which already heralded the nationalism of the nineteenth century: “The patriotic spirit is an exclusive spirit, which makes us recognise as enemies anyone other than our fellow citizens. Such was the spirit of Sparta and Rome”. He was more nuanced the following year, in his *Economie politique*, but he took the opposite position to Voltaire. For him, it was love of the country of birth - the patrie - that made

Transposed to twentieth-century Mongolia, I will adopt this principle by referring to the terms “*ekh oronch üzel*” and “*ündesnii üzel*” (translated as “patriotism” and “nationalism” for convenience).

Since the aim of all this research is precisely to characterise, through the prism of the literature of the period, what the Mongols meant by these expressions, I shall refrain from starting at the end by putting forward any definition.

men virtuous, free and happy, whereas Voltaire believed that the patrie was not the country of birth, but the country where reason reigned. “Do we want people to be virtuous? Let us begin by making them love their homeland: but how will they love it if the homeland is nothing more to them than it is to foreigners, and only grants them what it cannot refuse to anyone else? It would be good if they did not even enjoy civil security, and if their property, their life or their liberty were at the discretion of powerful men, without it being possible or permitted for them to dare to demand the laws. Then, subject to the duties of the civil state, without enjoying even the rights of the state of nature and without being able to use their strength to defend themselves, they would consequently be in the worst possible condition for free men, and the word "patrie" could only have an odious or ridiculous meaning for them” (20). Thus, with Rousseau, the word homeland increases its revolutionary charge: it’s the country of one's birth, but on condition that one is free and happy there”. In Godechot, *Ibid*, p. 488. The association of this patriotic spirit with virtue, the aspiration to happiness and freedom is found in our sources, suggesting that there is a link between the term “patriotism”, which was very much in vogue in France at the time of the Revolution, and “*ekh oronch*”, which characterises the ideal of twentieth-century Mongolia, which was also revolutionary.

2. Works on Mongolian group identification: a selected review

The past few decades have seen an increasing profusion of works on “nationalism” in Mongolia, inevitably amplified by the fact that the very question was almost banned from the debate or at least viewed as very suspicious all along the socialist era. Not surprisingly then, Mongolian “nationalism” is often depicted as a new brand phenomenon.

U.Bulag

Among these many contributions we must mention the works of Uradyn Bulag. Although his research focuses on the case of Inner-Mongolia, as he considers that the roots of modern nationalism take their seeds in history, and ethnicity as relational, he can not but refer to Outer-Mongolia as well. In his words:

“My thesis is that the Mongols’ being a minority internal to China is not an immemorial fact, but a result of the process of being cut off from ties with the third other peoples and countries, including their own co-ethnics in Mongolia and Russia.”⁶⁸

Uradyn Bulag adopts an instrumentalist stance to analyze how China incorporates part of “Mongolianness” to tackle issues it is currently faced with. In his book *Collaborative Nationalism*, he uses the theme exploited by a bestseller by Jiang Rong – *Wolf Totem*⁶⁹ – as a point of departure and argues that the fancy its publication aroused in China is symptomatic of existential anxieties that open up space for a new envisioning of its identity, with cascading consequences for these of its close “others”. Thus, nationalist feelings of the Inner-Mongolians but also identity perceptions of the Outer-Mongolians become meaningful problematic for his questioning. Settled at the time of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the *Wolf Totem* allegory is constructed on opposition between Mongolian nomadic tradition and Chinese agricultural civilization, one that is often crudely taken for granted. “Nomadic Mongols are, under his [Jiang Rong] pen, invaluable to the Chinese, for they have injected much-needed virile blood (shuxue: lit. blood transfusion) into the Chinese, through repeated invasions and conquests throughout history” analyses Uradyn Bulag. The Chinese identity appears there as “infused with femininity”, which for understanding reasons can be problematic even in nowadays society in which women (but also sexual minorities, we will come back to it later) tend to be at honour. So by incorporating the Mongol minority the identity strategy consists in attempting to claim the Mongol heritage of conquest, of Chinggis Khan and of the Mongol Empire on its own.⁷⁰ Exploiting the French Anthropologist René Girard’s theory of the triangular mimesis, Bulag asserts that while appropriating the Inner Asian heritage, Chinese nationalism “progressively eradicat[es] key markers of its distinctiveness such as language, religion,

⁶⁸ Uradyn E. Bulag, *Collaborative nationalism : the politics of friendship on China’s Mongolian frontier*, Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2010, p. 12..

⁶⁹ Rong Jiang, *Wolf Totem*, Penguin Group, 2008.

⁷⁰ Yet he precises that it is not a newfangled tendency in China.

and, ultimately historical memory.”⁷¹ However, according to his theory – one mostly inspired by Bruno Latour’s “Actor-Network Theory” and Marilyn Strathern’s theory of relatedness⁷² –, imperialism, nationalism and ethnicity being defined as relational, the minorities, and among them the Mongols, are not passive: identities are negotiated through dynamic processes which provides them opportunities to grasp.⁷³ What he calls collaborative nationalism is an approach according to which “nationalists are not necessarily dogmatic lone fighters but may collaborate with forces they identify as friends who share “common values” against a putative common enemy.”⁷⁴

To summarize, Uradyн Bulag’s development is in line with instrumentalist theories but refreshed and enriched by reference to theoretical concepts that have proved operational in the large scope of human sciences, such as intersubjectivity, triangular mimesis. Moreover, his analysis endows a main importance to affects. His works not only provide a theoretical frame to address identity making at large but also key elements to give some perspective to current tendencies observed in Mongolia as regard to nationalism, by envisioning them through a network of ethnic claims in interaction with one another.

O. Myadar

The political geographer Orhon Myadar also addresses the nationalist tendencies that researchers have identified in Mongolia and which have been growing since the 1990s and the country's transition to a liberal democracy supported by a market economy.

Myandar examines the mechanisms that, in this context, are shaping a new identity for Mongolia. Her observation, shared by many researchers, is that this identity dynamic is crystallised in a romantic vision of nomadism that fails to take account of the complexity of the relationship that Mongolians have with their space and territory. I will be focusing here in particular on two articles in which she develops this issue and which complement each other convincingly: “Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads”⁷⁵ in 2011 and “Territorializing national identity in post-socialist Mongolia: purity, authenticity, and Chinggis Khaan” in 2014.⁷⁶

From the outset, the titles indicate a particular focus on representations, giving the geographer’s work an obvious anthropological and ethnological significance. In Myadar, “national identity” is conceptually defined as “a social construct, produced and mediated to reflect shifting power arrangements and ideological commitment of the state. The process is therefore a dynamic one that operates through the constant renegotiation of identity boundaries, which places Myandar’s work in the great family of research inspired by Fredrik Barths. Let us recall that for Barths, the determination of the social and symbolic boundaries by which a group marks its distance and difference from another is

⁷¹ Uradyн E. Bulag, *op.cit.*, 2010, p. 4.

⁷² See for example Latour Bruno, *We have never been modern*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993; Strathern Marilyn, *Partial connections*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991.

⁷³ Uradyн E. Bulag, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁷⁵ Myadar Orhon, “Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads.” *Inner Asia*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2011, pp. 335–62.

⁷⁶ Myadar Orhon, Rae James Deshaw, Territorializing National Identity in Post-Socialist Mongolia: Purity, Authenticity, and Chinggis Khaan, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 55, z. 5, 2014, pp. 560–577.

based on the selection of “cultural traits” from the repertoire available to that group, a repertoire built up over the course of its history, which depends at least in part on its material conditions of existence, in other words its geography and the way it uses its space.

Orhon chooses to refer to Antony Smith to designate these symbolic markers, and thus uses the concept of “ethno-symbols”. In the case of Mongolia, she singles out five in particular: language, land, race, religion and the reference to Chinggis Khan.

In “Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads”, Orhon uses the prism of nomadism to examine the mechanism by which Mongolian identity is constructed.

By documenting her research with precise data, she highlights the prevalence of a romantic imaginary that associates Mongolia with wide open spaces and unlimited possibilities for travel: travel operators, she shows, willingly exploit this cliché to 'sell' getaways to tourists in search of authenticity. The introduction to her article is explicit and provides a forceful description of this imaginary world:

“Endless open land stretches into apparent infinity across much of the Mongolian landscape. Looking at such a “horizonless milieu”(Deleuze & Guattari 2002: 379), the mind easily gallops off to imagine that Mongolian land is unbounded and limitless. Random gers, 1 roaming herds here and there, surrounded by nothing but nature’s own sculptures, further contribute to the romantic notion that Mongolia is an unbounded land, where nomads wander free. Indeed, this romanticised image of Mongolia is the primary attraction for the majority of vacation travellers who choose Mongolia as a destination for, among other things, its open spaces, nomadic lifestyle and because it is an exotic and unspoiled destination (Mongolian tourism association [Mta] 2002). Indeed, the chance to see “real” nomads, unspoiled by modernity, has made Mongolia a top exotic destination for travellers, or culture collectors, longing for escape (Stuart 1997: 2)”.⁷⁷

Her article aims to “deconstruct this myth” by showing that these representations contrast with the reality experienced by Mongolians, including herders. To quote her:

This article problematises these essentialised projections of Mongolia and unbinds Mongolia from the reductive mould of a ‘nomadic nation’. It further questions the very existence of ‘unbounded land’ and the notion of ‘free-roaming nomads,’ both of which are intimately attached to the modern construction of Mongolian identity. It then seeks to explain the persistence of the nomadic myth despite its tenuous underpinning”.⁷⁸

She insists on the fact that this mechanism should not be seen solely as the influence of the gaze of the “Other”, the projection of their aspirations by Westerners nostalgic for a

⁷⁷ Myadar, 2011, p. 335. References : Stuart K., *Mongols in Western/American Consciousness*, Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 1997. Deleuze G. & Guattari F., *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, (trans. brian Massumi). Minneapolis (MN) & London, University of Minnesota, Press, 2002.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

lost paradise: it is in fact the result of a more complex interplay combining the projection of outside views with that of the representations that the Mongols construct of themselves. In the same vein as Uradyn Bulag, she describes a process of co-construction of identity:⁷⁹

This article explores deeply permeated stereotypes associated with nomadic identity both in Western consciousness as well as the fictional self-representation and staged primitive authenticity that Mongols themselves employ. Understanding the binary essentialisation of Mongolian identity is important to anchor the roots of the ongoing reproduction of the discourse of nomadism in the context of land politics in contemporary Mongolia.⁸⁰

F. Billé

Another researcher whose works should be taken into consideration is Frank Billé who explores the influence of sinophobia in the making of Mongolian identity as well as its consequences. As his observations deserve interest for our research, we shall develop a little.

In his article “Faced with extinction: Myths and urban legends in contemporary Mongolia” (2008), Billé studies the definition of a Mongolian identity via an “othering” process directed against China and focuses his attention on rumours and urban legends that circulated in the country at the beginning of the new millennium. Like Bulag, he adopts an almost intersubjective approach considering that “A group defines itself in opposition to others (a we/they contradistinction) and attributing positive qualities to oneself and negative ones to the other is often part of this self-definition”, to quote him.⁸¹ Fieldwork observation, indeed, let the impression that given their limited population, a characteristic even magnified by the fact that they dwell on a very extent country, the Mongols tend to fear that sooner or later their “race” will disappear to the point of outright extinction, and more precisely they attribute to the Chinese the deliberate intention to absorb it by mischievous means and policies. While the statements fuelled by this anxiety should not be understood in terms of truth, they must be taken into consideration as discursive practices because they do have an impact on the Mongolian society and lead pressure on

⁷⁹ To quote a source with which I am familiar and which, like Bulag, drew heavily on René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, I would like to mention Sergio Dalla Bernardina and in particular his article “L'invention du chasseur écologiste : Un exemple italien », *Terrain*, 13 | 1989, 130-139”, or “Pas légal, mais presque. Autochtonie et droit de chasse dans le discours sur le poracoconnage en Haute-Corse”, based on the results of a survey of hunters’ perceptions and representations of poaching in Nebbiu (Haute-Corse), carried out between 1986 and 1989. (in: *La chasse en Corse*, Ajaccio, P.N.R.C., 1996.) Sergio Dalla Bernardina’s work, based on extensive documentary work, shows how the arrival of tourists in Italy and Corsica in the eighteenth century changed the way the locals saw themselves, in particular by making the image of the “hunter” a desirable model, whereas until then they had defined themselves as peasants. My ethnology thesis deals with the same mechanism, and sets out to show how the 'maritime identity' of Brittany (western France) was forged - a region that, although almost surrounded by the sea, turned its back on it for a long time (I cannot develop here) *L'invention du paysage culturel sous-marin : le traitement en patrimoine des épaves de la mer d'Iroise et ses ambiguïtés / Typhaine Cann ; sous la direction de Sergio Dalla Bernardina. Thèse de doctorat : Ethnologie : Brest : 2014.*

⁸⁰ Orhon, 2011, 336

⁸¹ Billé F. “Faced with extinction: Myths and urban legends in contemporary Mongolia”, *Cambridge Anthropology* Vol. 28, No. 1, 2008, p. 1.

its citizens to defend and protect the purity of their “blood”. This is a central question of Frank Billé’s research, one which he develops not only in the above mentioned article but also in “Nationalism, Sexuality and Dissidence in Mongolia” (2014),⁸² and “Different Shades of Blue: Gay Men and Nationalist Discourse in Mongolia” (2010),⁸³ as well as in “Sounds and Scripts of Modernity: Language Ideologies and Practices in Contemporary Mongolia” (2010).⁸⁴ As we can infer from the titles, Billé is particularly interested in oral discourse as a way to transmit, or create, information and knowledge. Oral histories have been extensively researched in Mongolia, as he notices, and the reason for this interest from part of the researchers lays on the fact that, traditionally,⁸⁵ “rumours and gossips are form of knowledge transmission central to Mongolian communication”. Billé classifies the narratives he studies – which he terms “paranoid” – as clustering around three main sub-themes, namely a threat to territorial independence (the body of the nation), one of physical extinction through destruction of the body, and threat of physical extinction through miscegenation as well as through barriers placed on reproduction.⁸⁶ And referring to Bulag, he points out that “these various sub-themes or strands are interconnected and coalesce into a general notion of a body”.⁸⁷ The fear of loss of territory has been amplified all along the post-socialist era by the mining activities conducted in the country by foreign companies. Focusing on the Chinese case only, Billé notices:

“According to both mainstream newspaper articles and fringe discourses of nationalist groups, the Chinese are plundering the country’s resources and taking everything with them. [...] Mongolia after the Chinese is depicted as a land hollowed out. In this narrative, the borders haven’t moved but the valuable part of the country has been transferred across the border. This exploration and theft of the soil is portrayed as being carried out in a furtive and underhanded manner. [...] Given the value and symbolism of land in the Mongolian cultural region, the ruthlessness of extraction and the fact that the land is then abandoned render those activities akin to rape”.⁸⁸

The simile he points out is not accidental. Indeed, as he argues later – and develops further in “Nationalism, Sexuality and Dissidence in Mongolia”–, “in the strand of the extinction discourse hinging on the reproduction aspect, the place of women is absolutely essential”. Concretely, the Chinese state is suspected by many Mongols to have programmes encouraging Chinese men to go to Mongolia and have sex with Mongolian girls in order to produce Chinese babies. The social pressure put on women as

⁸² Billé F., “Nationalism, Sexuality and Dissidence in Mongolia” in *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, eds. Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie. London: Routledge, 2014, pp.162-173.

⁸³ Billé F., “Different Shades of Blue: Gay Men and Nationalist Discourse in Mongolia.” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol.10, n° 2, 2010. pp. 187-203.

⁸⁴ Billé F., “Sounds and Scripts of Modernity: Language Ideologies and Practices in Contemporary Mongolia”, *Inner Asia*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2010, pp. 231–52.

⁸⁵ We will precise this point later, the use of the term “traditionally” being here a shortcut to express a general idea.

⁸⁶ Billé F. 2008, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Bulag Uradyn, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, New York, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 151.

⁸⁸ Billé F. 2008, p. 6-7.

“reproducers” has been for long and at large commented by anthropologists⁸⁹ and in Mongolia the current role as such attributed to them by nationalist narratives is not so much a new phenomenon but rather the extension or the actualization of “a general process harnessing women’s reproductive powers for the good of the nation”.⁹⁰ Questioning the origin of the “physicality” of the Chinese threat, Billé recalls that “at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, foreign travellers’ and subsequently Soviet historical representations did speak of a risk to the Mongols survival as a group”⁹¹ and he explains:

“Partly the threat of extinction was one of physical disappearance: the pervasiveness of syphilis and the high proportion of lamas in the male population suggested an imminent disappearance, both on account of a high mortality rate and a lack of reproducers.”⁹²

This last point may also account for the coexistent pressure lead on “sexual dissidents” namely gay men, whose case the researcher focuses on in his article “Different Shades of Blue”:

“As men, they enjoy considerably more freedom to enter into romantic and sexual relations with non-Mongols than do women, but as gay men, their intimate aspirations do not dovetail with the national interpretation of masculinity.”⁹³

A quite long quotation may help us picture this “national interpretation of masculinity” as documented and studies by researchers:

“It is also important to note that Mongolian society attaches a great deal of social capital to (hyper)masculinity, namely strong resilient bodies, wrestling, and the capacity to drink alcohol. The Mongolian summer festival of naadam (also known as the ‘three manly games’ – eriin gurban naadam), the customs of which articulates precisely on virile qualities of strength and endurance, is a particularly good illustration of this cultural inclination. Further, as Hamayon⁹⁴ has noted, wishes, lullabies, and blessings bestowed on children unequivocally evoke, irrespective of gender, masculine attributes such as heroism, skill, and strength. Notions of masculinity also seep through discourses about ‘Others’, namely the Russian and Chinese. Whereas the Russians are perceived to be Mongol-like (mongolchuud shig)

⁸⁹ See for examples works by the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier and particularly *La production des grands hommes : Pouvoir et domination masculine chez les Baruya de Nouvelle-Guinée*, Paris, Fayard, Coll. « L’espace du politique », 1982, 370 p.

⁹⁰ Billé F. 2008, p

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 17.

⁹² Ibid, p. 18.

⁹³ Billé F. « Different Shades of Blue » 2010, p. 190.

⁹⁴ Hamayon R. “Le pouvoir des hommes passe par la “langue des femmes” : Variation mongole sur le duo de la légitimité et de l’aptitude”, *L’Homme* XIX (3-4), July–December 1979, p.122

on account of their physical resilience and capacity to withstand alcohol, anti-Chinese sentiments tend to be couched in narratives of physical weakness and deficiency.”⁹⁵

To conclude, Billé asserts that “in a country with a tiny population like Mongolia, reproduction equates a patriotic act” and one of resistance against a “Chinese” whose “historical personage emerged as the main actor in an extinction process articulated both on economic exploitation and on the Mongolian body itself – introduction of syphilis and encouragement of Buddhism in Mongolia in order to subdue the warring spirit of the Mongols and control the population more easily”, this theme being reinterpreted and recontextualised over space, as the forms the threats adopt are in constant evolution and reflect current themes and preoccupations.

Billé’s works is a good example of the difficulty to distinguish strictly what is rational and exploited to serve a purpose from what is subjective. At a first glance his observations tend to advocate for an essentialist interpretation of the Mongols’ discourse grounded on alleged ineffable, primordial or even biological attachments that would be natural or given, with the reference to the “purity of Mongolian blood” or to its “gene pool”. But he insists that these are “discursive practices” and it is not even sure that those who spread (or transmit) rumours “believe” in them. The very question of “belief” is a problematic one for anthropologists. As the French researcher Roberte Hamayon remarked in an article entitled “The anthropologist and the paradoxical duality of Western ‘belief’” (“L’anthropologue et la dualité paradoxale du “croire” occidental”):

“The term “belief” has constituted, for anthropologists, since the beginning of their discipline, such an epistemological problem that many of them no longer dare to use it”.⁹⁶

Billé notes:

“Rosnow and Fine argue that one should not assume that most people in a rumour’s audience believe in it but they do consider the question and then lend credence to it.”⁹⁷

Hence, the problem has to be rethought in terms of impact and here we can’t but recall pioneer works by Searle⁹⁸ on the pragmatic of language or Austin’s famous *How to Do Things With Words*⁹⁹. To finish with commenting on Billé, another argument not to range his work among instrumentalist theories is his insistence on the fact that these fear and the discourse they engender are “paranoid” and as such, irrational. Thus, one can’t infer that Mongolian nationalists are deliberately manipulating peoples’ mind, the whole mechanism appears to be much more complex.

C. Kaplonski

⁹⁵ Billé F. “Different Shades of Blue”, 2010, p. 192

⁹⁶ Hamayon Roberte N, “L’anthropologue et la dualité paradoxale du « croire » occidental”, *Revue du MAUSS*, vol. n° 28, no. 2, 2006, p. 427.

⁹⁷ Billé F. 2008 p. 3.

⁹⁸ Searle John, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, University Press, 1969

⁹⁹ Austin J. *How to Do Things With Words*. Cambridge (Mass.) 1962

Many of the issues aroused by Frank Billé rejoin Christopher Kaplonski observation. In his book *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia*, subtitled “The Memory of heroes”,¹⁰⁰ Kaplonski studies the round turn taken in the reading of Mongolian history after the transition toward a liberal democracy in the nineties. Introduced by a few words on the seemingly “rebirth” of the memory of Chinggis Khan with the fall of the socialist government, his thesis suggests that what observers see as a total re interpretation of the past is not so much as so. His problematic reads as follows:

“We must ask, however, if the socialist were successful in imposing their view of history, where was this new historical knowledge to come from? Was it unearthed in secret archives? Was it invented? Was it imported? Or perhaps had it actually been present in official accounts all along”.¹⁰¹

For Kaplonski what is presented as “new knowledge” was rather a new public admissibility of people’s private knowledge of history:

“The major shift was not in the overall stock of historical knowledge itself, but rather in the public presentation of and debate about that knowledge. In other words, what was presented as new knowledge wasn’t really that new”.¹⁰²

Kaplonski’s main argument leans on the supposition that any discourse, during the socialist era, was liable to contain “elusive transcripts”,¹⁰³ an analytical concept elaborated by Caroline Humphrey’s after James Scotts’ “hidden transcripts”.¹⁰⁴ While “hidden transcripts” are discourses expressed in particular areas “cordoned off” from the public discourse and thus in such a position to challenge it as well as the power relation inhered in it, “elusive transcripts” are more subtle in the sense that they are inserted in the public discourse itself, though encoded in order to be deniable if needed:

“Humphrey suggests that rather than hidden transcripts, what existed under socialism were “evocative transcripts”. These are texts, oral and written, that are ambiguous and thus readable in such a manner that it is possible to recover oppositional as well as official meanings. They are deniable if need be, but also recognizable.”¹⁰⁵

This elaboration of Scott’s original concept is due to the complexity of state socialism where, in Václav Havel’s words, “all were to some extent both complicit in the

¹⁰⁰ Kaplonski Christopher, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.4.

¹⁰² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰³ Humphrey C., “Remembering an Enemy: the Bogd Khaan in Twentieth Century Mongolia”, in R. Watson (ed.) *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, Santa Fé, School of American Research, 1994, pp. 21-44.

¹⁰⁴ Scott J. C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press, 1990.

¹⁰⁵ Kaplonski, *op. cit.* p. 11.

maintenance of the system and victims of it”.¹⁰⁶ In Mongolia, those who are now often seen as dissidents, such as Ts. Damdinsüren or B. Rinchen, remarks Kaplonski, were at time also establishment figures. In order to demonstrate the possibility of alternative versions of history in socialist Mongolia, Kaplonski proposes three case studies, focusing on the way in which the images of three historical figures, namely those of Chinggis Khan, Sükhbaatar and Zanabazar, have been reinterpreted after the collapse of the socialist regime. As for the method, he carried out fieldwork drawing upon interviews with “intellectuals and cultural elite of Ulaanbaatar”, a group selected as being the “bearers of the official social memory” and, he adds, “the bearers of forms of the unapproved social memories as well”.¹⁰⁷

Kaplonski shares this focus on the “intelligentsia” with the Mongolian anthropologist Tsetsentsolmon. In her article “The “gong beat” against the “uncultured”: contested notions of culture and civilization in Mongolia”¹⁰⁸ she proposes to explore the notions of civilization and cultural heritage in contemporary Mongolia, and to show how they became central to the new nationalist politics of the post-socialist regime. Here I will just briefly outline the main lines of her research since we will have many more occasions to develop in the course of the discussion, the issues she arouses being also central to our overall reflection.

Tsetsentsolmon’s work corroborates Kaplonski’s intuition that somewhat of a discourse of dissidence on history might have coexisted with, or even surreptitiously been blend into the official stance. She documents her thesis by quoting resolutions issued by the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP) in order to show that following a period of denial, a trend of self-criticism allowed a limited but significant recognition of a “pre-socialist culture” and of its richness. If “nationalism”, as opposed to “patriotism” was overtly vilified during the socialist era, in fact, she explains “nationalist sentiment along history and culture had not been completely eradicated in earlier stages of socialism”. Moreover, starting from 1956 members of the national revolutionary elite such as Rinchen and Damdinsüren, who had both served prison sentences under Marshal Khorloogiin Choibalsan, were able to teach and publish their views:

“These intellectuals and their followers rejected the blanket application of the “uncultured” concept and called for the preservation of “cultural heritage””.¹⁰⁹

Tsetsentsolmon does not see this as the expression of dissident positions but as an immixture of nationalist like feelings within the party’s Marxist-Leninist line, restricted to the cultural area. This is rather specific to Mongolia in the Soviet orbit:

“It was also a movement of a more self-confident and cosmopolitan national elite who were aware of the national cultures of other socialist elites, particularly Russia. By the

¹⁰⁶ If this reaches a climax in state socialism systems, in reality, we can also maintain that it is true of any relation of power. For a detailed development of this issue see Godelier Maurice, *op.cit.*, 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Kaplonski, p. 23-24.

¹⁰⁸ Tsetsentsolmon B., “The “gong beat” against the “uncultured” : contested notions of culture and civilization in Mongolia”, *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol.15, n°4, 2014, pp. 422-438.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 424.

1950s, Mongolia was less reliant upon direct Russian guidance and was taking its place alongside other nations in the Soviet orbit. It was time to gain some recognition and respect, then, for uniquely Mongolian forms in art and literature. Far from being some sort of critical or dissident position, the glorification of national heritage reflected the official party doctrine of this period”.¹¹⁰

Thus, in accordance with Kaplonski’s thesis, she supports the idea that what is considered as a total reversal in Mongolian identity politics after the collapse of the socialist regime is not a real breakdown but an amplification of a trend already sturdy enough.

I chose to present these researchers’ works because the themes they highlight and the issues they arouse will reveal to be essential in our development. Many other works on Mongolian nationalism and identity making would deserve attention can be mentioned, yet without elaborating. On the Mongolian nationalism in China, let us mention the works of Li Narangoa (“Nationalism and Globalization on the Inner Mongolia Frontier: The Commercialization of a Tamed Ethnicity” (2007); “Mongol Nationalism, Chinese colonialism and Japanese imperialism in Inner Mongolia, 1936-1945” (2009)¹¹¹) those of Christopher Atwood in a historical perspective (“National Party and Local politics in Ordos, Inner Mongolia ”¹¹²). As for works on ultra-nationalism, which has tended to assert itself over the last thirty years, partly favored by the opening of the country to foreign capital and therefore also to migratory flows, we can refer to Mendee Jargalsaikhan (“Lingering anti-Sinic sentiments in post-Communist Mongolia: Why dislike the Chinese?”, 2015)¹¹³, the list is of course not exhaustive.

3. An attempt to characterize what was the “*ekh oronch üzel*” at the time

In line with Kaplonski and Tsetsentsolmon’s conclusions, this research is an attempt to highlight the complexity of the discourse on history under the socialist regime in Mongolia, by paying attention to what will later be seen as rupture but also to reveal its continuity.

If I chose to use the term “patriotism” (*ekh oronch üzel*) rather than nationalism in this section, it is because it was the one that was accepted at the time, nationalism being banned from the discourse. A word of clarification is in order here on the use of terms or expressions, translations of their Mongolian equivalents borrowed from the discourse of

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 429.

¹¹¹ Narangoa Li, “Nationalism and Globalization on the Inner Mongolia Frontier: The Commercialization of a Tamed Ethnicity”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Japan Focus, Vol. 5, n° 11, Nov 2007; Narangoa Li “Mongol Nationalism, Chinese colonialism and Japanese imperialism in Inner Mongolia, 1936-1945”, *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 38. 227, 2009.

¹¹² Atwood Christopher, “National Party and Local politics in Ordos, Inner Mongolia”, *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 26-27, 1992. pp. 1-30

¹¹³ Mendee Jargalsaikhan “Lingering anti-Sinic sentiments in post-Communist Mongolia: Why dislike the Chinese?” *Voices from Central Asia*, n°15, January 2015.

the time (“obscurantism”, “awakening to the light”); they should be read as quotations, certainly not as the expression of a point of view on our part.

Grounded in a selection of novels belonging to a current termed as “socialist realism”, this reflection will lead us to explore the staging of *a* patriotism that was supposed to be endorsed by *the* people: the proletarian, the commoner, the simple soldier. We must however be vigilant because those who wrote these novels, belong to the intellectual category. When they present us a herder or a soldier and thought they try to remain faithful to the psychology of these representatives of less instructed categories, they are unavoidably influenced by their own cultural and literary experience of the world. In other words, even when a novel assumes to express the point of view of, say, a poor herder, this point of view is mediated by the discourse of an intellectual. And by “intellectual” we mean here those social groups identified by Mannheim as those “whose special task it is to provide an interpretation of the world [...]”¹¹⁴

In the introduction of his *Overview of Mongolian literature*, Ts. Damdinsüren quoted Gorky to support the opinion that “artists are the hearth, the eyes, the ears and the bearers of the sensibility of their class, of their country”.¹¹⁵ His point is that being involved within the society of his time the individuals can’t pretend to remain remote from it. *A fortiori* historians, but authors as well, are impregnated by the world view and the ideology of their time. This makes sense, and the intellectuals, the artists, are often shrewd observers of their contemporaries. Yet, being at what we can call the “vanguard” of their time, they unavoidably represent and express feelings, ideas and *a priori* that are not opposite but may still be slightly different from those of the majority. Therefore, when studying the expression of Mongolian identity and the staging of Mongolian patriotism in the national literature of the twentieth century, we can’t but qualify any conclusion we could draw by insisting on that our object of reflection is not “patriotism” per se but *a certain discourse on patriotism*.

4. The production of national identities at the heart of the reflection

As we have seen through this brief overview, with the collapse of the socialist regime, the ideological stance promoting patriotic behaviour has given place to an inflation of nationalist feelings alongside with a claim for a reappropriation of a Mongolian identity that would have been undermined by the Marxist-Leninist doxa. While looking back to the past, with this study of Mongolian literature of the twentieth century, it is this dynamics – that is to say the production/reproduction of identities – that we aim to grasp.

Mongolia state and nation: not a self-evidence

¹¹⁴ Mannheim K, *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. L. Wirth and E. Shils, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1936. Quoted by Kaplonski, op.cit. p. 24.

¹¹⁵ Му траУран бүтээлч нар бол өөрийн орон, өөрийн ангийн мэдрэл, чих, нүд, зүрх нь мөн”

While “nationalism” clearly points to the concept of “nation”, “patriotism” is more closely linked to this of “State”, a large part of its history drawing back to the French Revolution with the emergence of the “modern State”.

States and nations

The concept of “State” is perhaps somewhat less problematic than this of “nation” for basically, it allows an institutional definition. In the terminology of international politics and international law indeed, the State is “a form of political organization in which a group of people who share the same history, traditions, or language live in a particular area under one government”,¹¹⁶ to quote the definition adopted by the United Nations. Thus, in modern international law, it is the stable legal organisation of a territorial political community in a form which enables it, to form part of the international community. In the light of this definition, it appears as an abstract construction of law and politics, a normative category. The problem remains, however, to understand and account for the emergence of a State: when and under what conditions does a group, whether made up of one nation or several, decide to claim statehood for itself and to demand recognition from others?

In the case of Mongolia, Charles Bawden is sceptical about speaking of a State before the twentieth century and the national revolution of 1911, at least in the modern sense of the term but he acknowledges for a “feeling of belonging together”. Let us anticipate a little on the hearth of this study by quoting a brief excerpt of *Tungalag Tamir*, staging an exchange between Erdene, the protagonist of the novel, and his friend, the Russian Bolshevik Pyotr:

“Speaking about Mongolia, Erdene liked to say “Our Mongolian State”. Pyotr would retort:

- Your country is not a State. You have freed yourselves from the plundering of the Manchus to put yourselves under the control of the Russian plunderers. The Tsar created this puppet state only to be able to plunder it quietly”.¹¹⁷

As Bawden, Pyotr refuses to call Mongolia a State (*uls*) because it lacked the independent sovereignty attached to the notion. Let us notice that this scene takes place after Mongolia’s declaration of independence of 1911, which Pyotr, as his comment suggests, considers a sham. The following passage also deserves attention for it is directly in line with a further remark of the historian:

¹¹⁶ [nation states \(unesco.org\)](http://unesco.org)

¹¹⁷ “Эрдэнэ «манай монгол улс» гэж ярих дуртай. Гэтэл Петр « танай **орон** бол улс биш. Манжийн дээрэмчдээс салаад, оросын дээрэмдэлд орж байгаа орон. Оросын цагаан хаан танайхыг ганцаараа дээрэмдэж байх гэж тоглоомын улс байгуулсан хэрэг»”Lodoidamba,

“We, when we have brought down the Empire in Russia, when we have established a just and free government, will help you. And we will make your country a real state.”¹¹⁸

Indeed, to Bawden, concomitantly to the collapse of the Manchu Empire, the Russians will to benefit of an independent Mongolia as a buffer along parts of the frontier with China has played a major part in Mongolia’s birth as an autonomous entity liable to claim sovereignty and to join the “concert of nations”. He nevertheless insists that “had the Mongols not had the capacity for self assertion, preserved under long years of subjection to an alien power, it would no doubt have proved impossible for the Russians to create and shore up for very long an artificial Mongol State”. This feeling of common belonging is hinted at in the first excerpt quoted when Erdene, a Mongol, do not hesitate, him, to call his country (*oron*) a State. To Bawden, this sense of identity was rooted in the posterity and the memory of Chinggis Khaan on the one hand, in the spiritual unity conferred by the universal acceptance of the Buddhist faith on the other. He thus asserts:

“It is of great historical interest that the Mongols were able to keep alive, first some sense of group solidarity and later their newly gained but precarious independence, until it became possible to stabilize their frontiers, to create from the rump of the nation a viable state, and to profit by the exaltation of nationalism in the middle of the twentieth century to achieve international recognition of this new Mongol state within frontiers agreed with neighbours”.¹¹⁹

This is the history we will read in selected pieces of Mongolian national literature of the twentieth century, or at least a version of it, our purpose being to grasp the “feeling of belonging together” through its various expressions.

In this research, when referring to the “State” as the support of “patriotic feelings”, we mean constructed contemporary political entities rooted in long standing historical processes but which need, to emerge, not only a claim for self-determination but also international recognition.

4. Representations

Identity dynamics, “inheritance” dynamics

At this point of our introduction, we should specify our approach to history and social memory, insisting on the importance that we will attach to representations.

For something like seven decades now, history with a capital “H” has been contested in its hegemony onto the discourse about the past by non-academic approaches elaborated

¹¹⁸ Бид оросын хаант засгийг устгаад, эрх чөлөөт засаг тогтсон цагт та нарт тусалж, танай улсыг сайхан орон болгоно гэж Петрийн хэлэхэд, Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Bawden, 1968, xvi.

around the notions of “social memory” and “heritage”. Non academic ones, these currents lack the status of discipline history enjoys. Yet, more flexible in their method and not restricted to approved scholars, they have met great enthusiasm even though their lack of characterization has also encountered rise of eyebrow when not harsh criticism.

This is not the place to enter into the details of the huge and eventful debate about the pros and cons of heritage studies. For an introduction to the issue, one can refer to Babelon and Chastel’s *La notion de patrimoine*, or to more critical resources such as David Lowenthal’s famous *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* or Françoise Choay’s *L’allégorie du patrimoine*, the list could obviously be much longer.¹²⁰ Whereas history is supposed, at least theoretically, to remain a sanctuary, non submitted to political or mercantile logics – but this study will also prove that it is not automatically the case, namely when state censorship plays an overt and active role in its writing – the listing, promotion and protection of the cultural “heritage” of humanity as well as this of any group or people, say its “invention”, clearly is. Nevertheless, the positive side of the growing influence of “heritage making” is that, contested in their authority on the discourse about the past as we said, the historians set themselves to rethink their discipline, to renew their methods and concepts and to open it to field rather unexplored until then.¹²¹ This demand for an evolution of the discipline met already existing trends such as this initiated by the Annales school of French social history with the pioneer works of Fernand Braudel on the “history of sensibility”, of Lucien Febvre on the “history of mentalities” and, following on from them, works by Alain Corbin.¹²² Undoubtedly, humanities and social sciences have evolved for the better during the second part of the twentieth century, allowing more dialogue and sharing of experience between its different branches and opening a large space for the study of representations which is at the core of identity dynamics.

In this research, we will take the same stance as Uradyn Bulag that is considering identities as relational and intersubjective constructions elaborated around more or less

¹²⁰ Cf. For example: Cuisenier Jean, *L’héritage de nos pères, Un patrimoine pour demain ?*, Paris, Editions de la Martinière, 2006; Choay Françoise, *L’allégorie du patrimoine*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1992; Chappé François, *Histoire, Mémoire, Patrimoine, Du discours idéologique à l’éthique humaniste*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, coll. « Art & Société », 2011, 424 p; Babelon Jean- Pierre & Chastel André, *La notion de patrimoine*, Paris, Liana Lévi, Coll. « Opinion art », 1994 [1980]. 142 p; Hartog François, *Régimes d’historicité, présentisme et expérience du temps*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2003; Heinich Nathalie, *La fabrique du patrimoine, de la cathédrale à la petite cuillère*, Paris, Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, Coll. « Ethnologie de la France », 2009. 286 p Lowenthal David, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Jeudy Pierre-Henri, *La machinerie patrimoniale*, Paris, Sens & Tonka Coll. « 10-vingt » Série « essais », 2001; or my own contributions Cann Typhaine, *Secrets d’épaves, plongeurs, archéologues, collectionneurs*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes. Coll. « Essais », 2016; Cann Typhaine, *L’invention du paysage culturel sous-marin : le traitement en patrimoine des épaves de la Mer d’Iroise et ses ambiguïtés*, Anthropologie sociale et ethnologie. Université de Bretagne occidentale - Brest, 2014.

¹²¹ This was also the case for anthropologists, Clifford James, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Harvard University Press, 1988; and the special issue for the twentieth anniversary of the anthropological journal *L’Homme* in 1986, *l’Homme*, vol. 26, n° 97-98, 1986

¹²² To mention just one representant of this trend, let me just quote works by Alain Corbin, a pionner in this respect: Corbin Alain, *Le Territoire du vide, l’Occident et le désir du rivage (1750-1840)*, Paris, Champ Flammarion, coll. « Histoire », 1990. 399 p; *Le miasme et la jonquille, L’odorat et l’imaginaire social, XVIII-XIXe siècles*, Flammarion, Coll. « Champs histoire », 2008. [Aubier Montaigne, 1982]. 425 p; Corbin Alain (dir.), *L’avènement des loisirs 1850-1960*, Paris, Flammarion, Coll. « Champs histoire », 1995, 472 p.

conscious and constantly evolving representations. Strictly speaking, I do not believe in the “real” existence of “natural”, “primordial”, “ineffable” attachments of the primordialist theories but as I wrote above, I do believe in them as symbolic, affective representations which, as such, have a great impact on people behaviour and thus on societies and on the making of their history¹²³. Representations of the self, of the other, of the world are at least as powerful as material conditions of existence in the process accurately analyzed by Maurice Godelier in his book *L'idéal et le matériel : pensée, économies, sociétés*:

“Contrary to the other social animals, the men are not satisfied to live in society, they produce society to live; during their existence they invent new ways of thinking and acting on themselves as on the nature which surrounds them, they thus produce culture, make history, the History”.¹²⁴

My approach is not an instrumentalist one in the sense that I am sceptical about the thesis which considers social actors as rational beings that would produce this reality called history through evaluation of their environment and calculation of their needs. Thus, I feel totally in tune with the ethnologist Sergio Dalla Bernardina when he writes:

“What I figure out [...] is the image of an unaccomplished humanity which, while tending towards reason, remains confused and contradictory. I like the idea that the subject of the human sciences can be apprehended not as a coherent actor who evolves within an ordered universe whose codes must be detected, but as a kind of *trickster*, a deceptor engaged in a perpetual tinkering to reconcile norm and desire, irenic impulses and antisocial impulses: a sort of bifront Janus torn between the need for lucidity and the necessity to lie to others and to himself, an ambiguous character who finds in ritual practice and in mythical production his expressive instruments and his frames of legitimation. In short, a desiring creature whose unconscious is not only cognitive.”¹²⁵

5. Method and perspectives

This research is both a study of the history of Mongolian modern literature and one of the history of modern Mongolia through this literature. As far as Mongolian literature is concerned, this double aim proves possible if not inevitable. Indeed, as we will see all along the reflection, the writing context had a strong influence on the subjects and themes addressed by the authors, as well as on the ideals they promoted.

As indicated before, the origin of the project points back to the discovery of this piece of Mongolian modern literature through the reading of the novel *Tungalag Tamir* (“The Crystal clear Tamir”) by Chadrabaldyn Loidodamba. This was such a revelation that I decided to translate it into French, a work that I started around 2015. *Tungalag Tamir* is a

¹²³ Godelier Maurice, *L'Imaginé, l'imaginaire & le symbolique*. Paris, Cnrs Éd., 2015, 280 p

¹²⁴ Godelier Maurice, 1984, p. 9.

¹²⁵ Dalla Bernardina Sergio, *La langue des bois : l'appropriation de la nature entre remords et mauvaise foi*, Paris, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, coll. “Natures en Sociétés”, n° 1, 2020.

fine example of the colourfulness of Mongolian modern literature, reason why I found it worth-while to give access to it to the French readership. As far as this novel is concerned and if I may allow to express here a personal judgment, its artistic value bears the comparison with many Western writings.

Other readings will follow: these are the few novels that make up the corpus of this research, namely:

- *Üüriin Tuya*, (Ray of Dawn), 1951/1954 for the first edition (3 tomes), 1971 for the second, by Byambyn Rinchen

- *Tungalag Tamir* (The crystal clear Tamir [River]), 1961, by Chadraabaldyn Lodoidamba.

- *Dain* (War), 1973, 1977 and *Tulaldaan* (Battle), 1983, both by Zhramsrangyn Lodoi.

- *Gazar Shoroo* (The land), 1977, 1981, 1982, 1989, by Magzhavyn Dүgerzhavyn Maam.

- *Ikh Khuvi Zaya*, (A great destiny), 1978, by Sonomyn Udval.

- *Tsag Tөriin Üimeen* (In the Turmoils of Time), 1985, by Donrovyn Namdag.

- *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*, (The foal from Erdene Zasag [region]), 1988, by Zunduin Dorzh.

- *Tsagiin Salkhi* (The wind of time), 1991, by, Magzhavyn Dүgerjavyn Maam.

For the historian, historical literature deserves interest at two levels: as discourse on the past and as artistic works rooted in Mongolian culture.

First, as a discourse on the past, historical novels stand as secondary sources that give insight into the state of society and the course of the events at the time depicted perhaps more lively than academic sources. Introducing his *Overview of Mongolian Literature*, Ts. Damdinsүren wrote:

“Man is a creature of art. For millenaries and millenaries man has been creating priceless artworks: sculptures, art craft, music... Literature is one of these art forms. Alike science, art means studying humanity. But if the purpose is the same, the ways are different.

While science makes evidence and proof its main support, this is not the case with art, art is representation spiritual life. To quote the Russian literary critic Belinsky: science proves, art shows.”¹²⁶

This echoes Balzac’s introduction to *La Comédie Humaine*:

¹²⁶ “Хүн бол төрөлхтөний уран амьтан юм. Хүн төрөлхтөн уран барилга, уран эд хогшил, яруу хөгжим зэрэг урлагийн үнэт зүйлийг хэдэн мянган жилийн турш бүтээсээр ирсэн байна. Уран зохиол бол ийм уран бүтээлийн нэг зүйл юм. Уран зохиол бол шинжлэх ухааны адилаар, хүн төрөлхтний амьдралын судлал мөн. Гэвч уран зохиол, шинжлэх ухаантай яг адил биш, зорилго адил боловч арга нь өөр юм. Шинжлэх ухаан бол хүний амьдралын судлахдаа нотолгоо баримтыг гол болгодог юм. Гэтэл уран зохиол бол нотолгоо баримтыг гол болгох биш, оюун сэтгэлийн дүрслэн бодох аргыг гол болгоно. Оросын их шүүмжлэгч Белинскийн хэлсэн нь: Шинжлэх ухаан бол нотолдог, уран зохиол бол үзүүлдэг гэжээ”. Ts. Damdinsүren, op. it. p. 5.

“The work to be done was to have a triple form: men, women and things, i.e. people and the material representation they give of their thoughts; and finally, man and life. When reading the dry and off-putting nomenclatures of facts called histories, who had not noticed that writers have forgotten, in all ages, in Egypt, Greece, and Rome, to give us the history of morals? [...] But how to make interesting the drama of three or four thousand characters presented by a Society? How to please the poet, the philosopher and the masses who want poetry and philosophy in striking images? While I conceived the importance and the poetry of this story of the human heart, I didn't see how to execute it.”¹²⁷

And indeed, the works of Balzac, Hugo or Zola, to mention only several French writers, are important sources of reflection for the one who wish to understand the history of France in the 19th century. A reference to these authors does not seem inappropriate in this introduction to a research focused on Mongolia and its literature because, as we shall see, “Mongolian realism” was strongly linked to a Soviet-style “socialist realism” that was itself heavily influenced by nineteenth-century European realism.

Secondly, as artistic works rooted in Mongolian culture, Mongolian historical novels are part of their “intangible heritage”, a concept that has gained importance worldwide since the end of the Second World War as we saw earlier.

When talking about the cultural heritage of the Mongols, literature is not what comes first in mind. Moreover, foreigners who studied literature in Mongolia in the nineteenth century tended to consider that there was not such thing as a genuine Mongolian literature but a mix of influences, from Tibet, India, China from the most part. But in fact, there is and there was a Mongolian literature. This is not to deny that it had borrowed some of its features to others but throughout the century, it had also retained and revitalize elements of its own, let's say “endemic” ones, and the syncretism between these external influences and a colourful “heritage” to which oral tradition constituted the stronger pillar made for its richness and originality. Ts. Damdinsüren's *Overview of Mongolian Literature* and *The Hundred Best Samples of Mongolian Literature*,¹²⁸ were a first step to redress this unfairness. Yet, this claim for a national heritage in literature could only happen after 1956 when the socialist regime committed itself to repair the errors of the past concerning the denial of Mongolia's pre-socialist culture. And indeed, in his *History of Modern Mongolia*, the historian Charles Bawden gives another reason for the lack of visibility of Mongolian literature than foreign disregard. As he shows, the twentieth-century communist regime sought to deny any intellectual advance in Mongolia before its own rise.

¹²⁷ L'œuvre à faire devait avoir une triple forme: les hommes, les femmes et les choses, c'est-à-dire les personnes et la représentation matérielle qu'ils donnent de leur pensée; enfin l'homme et la vie. En lisant les sèches et rebutantes nomenclatures de faits appelées histoires, qui ne s'est aperçu que les écrivains ont oublié, dans tous les temps, en Egypte, en Grèce, à Rome, de nous donner l'histoire des moeurs? [...] Mais comment rendre intéressant le drame à trois ou quatre mille personnages que présente une Société? Comment plaire à la fois au poète, au philosophe et aux masses qui veulent la poésie et la philosophie sous de saisissantes images? Si je concevais l'importance et la poésie de cette histoire du coeur humain, je ne voyais aucun moyen d'exécution. Balzac H, *La Comédie Humaine*, Paris, France Loisir, 1985, p. 13.

¹²⁸ Ц. Дамдинсүрэн, *Монолын уран зохиолын дээж зуун билиг оршвой*, Улаанбаатар, Шинжлэх Ухааны Академийн Хэвлэл, 1959.

He writes:

“It is a strange but unhappily true fact that the officials of the MPRP, which at least till 1956 lost no opportunity to spread the slander that Mongolia never had any culture before the revolution of 1921, were at the same time organizing search parties, as late as 1955, to go round the countryside confiscating and destroying the old books which people still kept and cherished from the old days.”¹²⁹

Bawden acknowledges that in Manchu times, the policy of isolating Mongolia economically and politically also involved cultural isolation. But “the complete sterility and mass illiteracy” presented as the lot of Mongolia by some modern Mongol apologists was according to him a myth forged to support their Marxist reading of history. To illustrate his point the historian continues:

“The library of Europe alone contain enough examples of cheap copies of stories and poems, both native and translated, written out on brown Chinese paper of poor quality well thumbed, greasy and torn, to prove that **the Mongols were lovers of books**, not ignorant savages, and that there was material for them to feed their curiosity on.”

The Mongolian scholar Luvzandamba,¹³⁰ did not explicitly mention such destruction campaigns, but they are well known from historical sources and witnesses moreover we can read below his lines that the question of a *tabula rasa* had indeed been raised. At the time when Luvzandamba wrote his article, official discourse already had acknowledged some value to “pre-socialist” literature (oral and written). However, if authors were to use it as a source of inspiration, they had to select elements of it that supported a progressive (*i.e.* socialist) reading of evolution and purify it from its “backward” feudal scurreries.

Mongolia underwent a radical ideological upside down in 1990, with the transition toward a liberal and democratic free-market society, at least publicly for we saw, with Kaplonsky in particular, that the radicality of this change ought to be questioned. Through the replacement of the pre-existing Writers’ Union¹³¹ by a new “National Free Writers’ Union”, which came into being on September 27, Mongolian writers proved their disgruntling with a system of control they claimed to be victim of, and expressed their intention to “fight for the sake of freedom of creation, pluralism, and free competition [...]”.¹³²

¹²⁹ Bawden Charles, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, New York, Praeger, 1968.p. 86.

¹³⁰ Luvsandamba was writing in 1985, *i.e.* at a time when ideological politics had softened slightly since the publication of Bawden’s book. С. Лувсанвандан “Монголын уран зохиолд социалист реализмын арга бүрэлдэн хөгжсөн түүхэн туршлага” Монголын орчин үеийн уран зохиолын түүх, тэргүүн боть Улаанбаатар, Улсын хэвлэлийн газар, 1985.

¹³¹ The Writers Union was the officially recognized union founded on the basis of the group of revolutionary writers (*khuvisgalt uran zokhiolch naryn bülgem*) established under the Ideological Division of the Central Commission of the People’s Revolutionary Party on January 9, 1929. Cf. Tsetsentsolmon.B, “Between “Hobbled” (*Chödörtei*) and “Free” (*Chölöötei*): The Mongolian Literature in Transition”, Ulaanbaatar, National University of Mongolia, *Acta Mongolica* Vol.17, 492, 2018.

¹³² *Ibid.*

What then has been the fate of those works written under the firm control of censorship and state propaganda supporting a pro-socialist version of Mongolian history? The very act of translating this literature – not to even mention the choices to be made in the course of the work – is not entirely neutral, and gets us involved in the vertiginous but fascinating debate of making and remaking history.

The literature we will study here has not suffered campaigns of destruction such as evoked by Bawden. As far as one can judge from nowadays editing market, it even seems that it encounters a certain revival, with the reediting of the most famous ones of them (*Gazar Shoroo, Tungalag Tamir, Tsag töriin üimeen, Khaluun salkhi*¹³³).

What can this apparent revival of interest be the sign of? The question remains. Something we can remark up from now is that these novels have in common to carry on a message of future and hope, a hope perfectly expressed by the title of Rinchen's novel: *Üüriin Tuya*, "The Light of Dawn". These stories tell us about a people's struggle against oppression, about its fight for freedom, independence, justice and social progress. These are universal themes that any reader is likely to make his own. Besides, they may have a particular resonance in today's Mongolian society where the social division is tangible - with the rise of extreme nationalist sentiments - and the decay of public services and public insurance denounced.

Through the personal, familiar and social dramas of their characters, our authors - each of them in his own style - give the reader a very relentless picture of the old system which stand as a legitimation of the struggle that will eventually bring about the establishment of a Soviet-style socialist regime. One of the main achievements of the People's Republic, as staged in the novels, was the setting of a **popular instruction system**. I would like to lay the stress on this point because its place is prominent in at least two novels of our corpus, namely *Tungalag Tamir* and *Üüriin Tuya*, and not insignificant in the others. Education and knowledge are seen as weapons for the people in their struggle against the so-called "black and yellow feudalists", *i.e.* the nobility and the Church, and against the obscurantism in which the latter intentionally kept them.

The recurrent pattern of "Backwardness" in the novels meets a certain echo in the discourse of many Mongols of today when talking of their own, some through a mix of self-denigration and pride - the so-called "stigma-reversal" pinpointed by sociologists - other with obvious disgruntling. The latter is especially the case of those Mongols who left their country, many of them to settle illegally in Western countries, and who blame the poor quality and the corruption of Mongolian educational system as one of the first reasons for their departure. At the same time, history, literature - and knowledge, generally speaking - are highly valued and it is not uncommon for our informants to quote V. Hugo, H. Balzac, A. Dumas, A. Christie or others, proving that they have read some of their works, not a few of which have been translated into the Mongolian language.

My previous research gave me the occasion to observe a similar ambiguous mix of self-esteem and self-denigration, going along with high valuation of science and literature, in the culture of region where I live, Brittany. It would not be preposterous to wonder to what extent the comparison bears.¹³⁴

¹³³ Fieldwork observation, 2021.

¹³⁴ Carrer Philippe, *Ethnopsychiatrie en Bretagne, Nouvelles études*, Coop Breiz, Coll. "Semi poche", 2011.

The struggle for educational progress portrayed in the novels on the one hand, and the Mongolian literature of which these novels are the product on the other hand, give us a picture of Mongolian culture that contrasts with the Epinal image widespread in the West. Our research can be seen as a “mise en abyme”,¹³⁵ exploring both the historical context described in the novels and the context in which they were written. Mongolia has its own literature and tradition of literary analysis, and my aim in this study is to question the impact of this “high culture” on Mongols’ self-image. When writing about Mongolia’s history, the authors of our novels have produced the present of their time, which from then on has become part of the history of Mongolian literature, of Mongolia.

¹³⁵ I could not find a better translation for this expression. In French “mise-en-abyme” is a phrase whose meaning encapsulates the endless cycle of comprehending and interpreting meta-fictional reference. An example in art would be the double mirror effect, which is present in paintings like Velazquez’s “Las Meninas,” or Jan van Eyck “Arnolfini Portrait”.

Part one

The research terrain

Chapter one: the sources

1. The corpus

Grounded on a corpus of ten novels or so, this study, as a comparative one, aims at revealing the regularities that enable us to consider them as representative of the “spirit of the time” if I may say. However, we will not give the same importance and space to all of them and will in particular concentrate our analysis on two of them, namely *Üüriin Tuya* and *Tungalag Tamir*, the others being used as a “control sample” or sometime punctually, to illustrate a point in particular. There are several reasons for this. The first and most evident one is that, especially when in presence of long running novels, especially when limited in time, it would be difficult to enter in a thorough analysis of the all of them but further works will enable us to redress this shortcoming, at least I hope so. Another reason is that these novels did not all encounter the same echo in Mongolia. They are not all of equal literary quality, and their authors do not enjoy the same recognition, it would be preposterous to deny it. I decided thus to elaborate on the two ones I know the better for having translated it into French for *Tungalag Tamir* and being doing so for *Üüriin Tuya*.

1.1. A word about the selection of sources and the constitution of a corpus

As I wrote earlier, my acquaintance with Mongolian literature has been gradual and based on “encounters”, or to put it another way, largely guided by chance. The constitution of a corpus to serve as a basis for research, however, cannot be based on arbitrariness. Before presenting the sources, I would like to give a brief account of the reasons that led me to choose them.

The choice of the novel as a literary genre.

Mongolian literature was already rich in literary fictions akin to novels before the twentieth century. In his book *Realism and the Mongolian novel in the twentieth century*,¹³⁶ S. Baigalsaikhan presents several of them, focusin in particular on Inzhinashi’s Khökh Sudar, Geser, Zhangar, inn which he sees the ancestors of the contemporary novel.

But it was only in the twentieth century that the genre really came into its own.

The 1950s and 1960s can be seen as a golden age for Mongolian literature, a Renaissance: a period of creativity and renewal. This was particularly true of the novel, which emerged as a major literary genre. Considerable progress was made in terms of structure, content and creativity, and the experience gained was also able to feed into literary criticism and serve as a basis for theoretical reflection.

The seeds of this Mongolian “Renaissance” had already been sown in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, with the 1948 injunction to authors and critics to develop their production in

¹³⁶ S. Baigalsaikhan, 2019.

terms of both works and analysis, deploring, for example, that of the sixty-eight works published by the literary magazine *Tsog* in 27 years, only four were critical articles.

The result of this injunction was felt in the decades that followed. In the collective work published by the Department of Literary Studies at Ulaanbaatar University in 2018 to which I refer here, the authors cite as examples of articles noticed by literary circles at the time: “What is realism” by P. Khorloo (1948), “Revolutionary realism” by G. Zhamsranzhav (1948), “Let us develop the ideology of art and literature” by S. Dashdende (1949), “Literary party” by “For the principles of the Party” by N. Zhambalsüren (1949).¹³⁷

It is in this sense that the emergence of the novel as a genre in its own right in twentieth-century socialist Mongolia constitutes a new phenomenon which seemed to me to constitute a legitimate object of study and which I felt suited to my questioning.

Selection of works and authors

The fact that novels underwent a period of intense development and found an audience in Mongolia in the second half of the twentieth century does not, however, allow us to speak of an explosion, certainly not in relation to Western production at the time or to Mongolian production today. We shall see in the course of the discussion the role played by the government and the party in power in terms of literary production, but we can already note that it was subject to the five-year plan and, in absolute terms, very limited. In the book mentioned earlier, S. Baigalsaikhan, one of Mongolia’s most eminent specialists in the study of the novel, points out that the total number of novels written in the twentieth century, at least up until the 1990s, was in the hundreds.

Of these several hundred novels, *Üüriin Tuya*, *Tungalag Tamir* and *Tsag Töriin Üimeen* are almost universally considered to be those that have received the most attention, acclaim and commentary, followed fairly closely by *Gazar Shoroo* and *Ikh Khuvi Zaya*, to mention only the works that make up our corpus. The works of Lodoi and Dorzh are rarely mentioned, but they were certainly successful at one time, and can still be found today in almost every bookshop in Ulaanbaatar. In the case of the latter, it was their “accessibility” that was a criterion for me, as well as their characteristics: like the other novels in the corpus, considered masterpieces in Mongolia, they belong to the genre of the historical and realistic novel, depicting the tormented history of Mongolia in the twentieth century.

1. 2. Main sources: Üüriin Tuya and Tungalag Tamir

“Üüriin Tuya”, by Byambyn Rinchen

A word about the author

Rinchen is an interesting case to exemplify what Caroline Humphrey has remarked about the “arbitrariness of power” in socialist Mongolia, who has fallen victim of censorship and harsh condemnation but also been a key figure of the establishment. While his public image has enjoyed a significant change after the collapse of the socialist regime, his talents as author and his intellectual skills have never been totally denied.

¹³⁷ Baigalsaikhan (dir.) 2018.

A Mongolian intellectual, Byambyn Rinchen was born on 21 November 1905 in Khiakta, Mongolia (today Altanbulag) and died on 4 March 1977 in Ulaanbaatar. He learned to read at an early age and received an education that enabled him to study in the Soviet Union, where he joined the Institute of Oriental Languages in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) in 1924. He defended his doctoral thesis in Hungary in 1956 on the subject of *Grammar of Written Mongolian*, which was published in four volumes between 1964 and 1967.

The short bibliography of him, added to the publication of a new edition of *Tsogt Taizh* in 2005 reads as follow:

“However, due to the censorship in force at the time, the fourth volume of the work was withdrawn from sale and burnt for ideological reasons. He wrote many scientific articles of major interest, including “Isn’t it time to react to the impoverishment of the language?” in 1934, “Mongolian poetry” (1969-70) and “The dialect of the Khamnigan of Mongolia” (1965). Apart from his academic work, he left a very rich literary oeuvre, as well as numerous translations, including the film *Tsogt Taizh* in 1946, the historical novel *Üüriin Tuya*, published in 1951, and other books such as *Zaan Zaluudai*, 1964, *The Great Migration* (1972), *Günzh*, 1969. His short story “The Letter that Revealed the Secret”, Anu Khatan, Shükhegch Buniga, his poems “The Mongolian Language”, “The Scabiosa”, “The Moon” are very famous. His translations of the works of Gorky, Sholokhov, Galidas, Gogol, have met their public. He always fought against the opprobrium of the leaders of the Mongolian People’s Republic and the Soviet Union and published numerous pamphlets to denounce the shortcomings of the society of the time. He remains one of Mongolia’s most esteemed intellectuals, authors, translators and scientists.”¹³⁸

I do not use the bibliography prepared for this recent edition of the book *Tsogt Taizh* by accident. The film associated to it, released in 1941 and which he made with Soviet collaboration, was awarded a Choibalsan price in the mid forties but was taken to task a few years later for having been “produced in a spirit of bourgeois nationalism”. For having played *Tsogt Taizh* up as a patriot who took up the anti-Manchu struggle led by the Chakhar emperor Ligdan Khan, Rinchen was accused to have idealized feudal society, drawing a picture of harmony in class interests between the people and the feudal nobility. An article by the critic Chimid, quoted by Bawden in his *History of Modern Mongolia*, illustrates well the “opprobrium in question in the above biography:

“The great Lenin said that bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism are outlooks which express the interests of two opposing classes. In the ideological struggle, either the socialist view must prevail or the capitalist – there is no middle course. The attempt to reconcile the ideologies of two antagonistic classes result in the retreat of the socialist ideology before the bourgeois, in the blunting of class interests. Now the ideological attacks of the imperialists, directed towards the furtherance of the revival of the old, some distrust and enmity among the people of the socialist countries.

¹³⁸ Б. Ринчен Цогт Тайж Улаанбаатар, НЭПКО, 2015.

It is necessary to note that **manifestations of nationalism** are to be observed among us, preparing the ground for bourgeois intrigues. One of the spokesmen for **nationalism** is Professor Rinchen.”¹³⁹

This was not the first time Rinchen was in trouble with the regime. A founding member of the first Literary Circle set up in Ulaanbaatar in 1929, Rinchen fell victim of the system he was involved in, only a decade later, serving a jail sentence. Bawden writes:

“[...] Rinchen and Damdinsüren [...] both suffered imprisonment on false charges in the late thirties but [...] fortunately survived to become two of the foremost contemporary Mongolian scholars.”¹⁴⁰

It is interesting that Bawden mentions both Rinchen and Damdinsüren in the same sentence. Damdinsüren who, in his *Overview of Mongolian Literature* and under the subtitle “*ündesnii үзэл*” (nationalism) wrote:

The nationalists who brandish the Mongolian cultural heritage are doing us harm. These are the people who glorify everything that comes from the past. In the field of literature, they do not care whether the works express a progressive point of view and praise them unconditionally. They are silent about the fact that the old regime was a class society, depicting the past as a time when people lived happily. The film *Tsogt Taizh* by B. Rinchen, which portrays the union of the people and the feudal class without making a distinction, is a good example of the harm done by **nationalist ideology**”.¹⁴¹

If intellectuals who both suffered from the injustice of the regime tended to oppose rather than support each other, this gives us a glimpse of the climate of mistrust and anxiety that may have prevailed at the time. To conclude these few words about Rinchen, we can quote Bawden:

“In circumstances where literature is at the mercy of political control, the reputation of a writer depends less on his talents as an artist than on the degree to which his work is acceptable to political ideology, and the demands of ideology vary at different times, so reputations are made and unmade arbitrarily with sole reference to political expediency, and are susceptible to retrospective arrangements”.¹⁴²

Summary of the novel

¹³⁹ Quoted by Bawden, Bawden Charles, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, New York, Praeger, 1968, p. 416.

¹⁴⁰ Bawden, p. 413.

¹⁴¹ Монголын соёлын өвийг ашиглахад үндэсний үзэлтэн саадыг учруулдаг байдаг билээ.

Эд хуучин юм бүрийг магтан сайшаадаг. Хуучин уран зохиолыг ангийн талаар дэвшилтэтэй эсэхээр нь авч үзэхгүй, цөмийг нь бөөгнөрүүлэн магтдаг байна. Хуучин нийгэмд анги байсныг олж үзэхгүй, урьдын цагт хүмүүс их жаргаалтай байсан мэтээр үзүүлдэг. Жишээ нь Б. Ринчений “Цогт Тайж” кинонд ангийн ялгаврыг гарсангүй, ард феодал хоёр нийлсэн мэтээр гаргадаг нь үндэсний үзлийн алдаа мөн. Дамдинсүрэн, ор. cit. p. 10

¹⁴² Bawden, ор. cit. p. 412-413.

Through his fictional works, Rinchen has composed a rather surprising overview of the history of Mongolia, starting from the stone age with *Zaan Zaluudai* (1964), followed by the Great Migration with *Ikh Nüüdel* (1972), the aforementioned struggle of Ligdan Khan, the last emperor of Mongolia, against the Manchu, in *Tsogt Taizh* (1946 for the release of the film) and ending, chronologically speaking, with *Üüriin Tuya*, “Ray of Dawn” (1951) which started at the turn of the twentieth century and leads the reader until the beginning of the Second World War.

The main plot of the novel *Üüriin Tuya* is centred on the life stories of a few characters, the main ones closely or remotely related to Zhamba, a rather wealthy herder but without noble ancestry. The novel starts when Zhamba, who has no children of his own, adopts the last born one of a wretched woman, a boy called Shirchin. The head of his camp, Zhamba is not the one who enjoys the stronger authority above his relatives, this role being endorsed by the old Batbayar, a poor but clever and experienced herder whose words are always listened and followed by the others. Though illiterate, Batbayar is wise and eager to learn and his encounter with the Russian academician Radlov¹⁴³ leading a scientific expedition in the ruins of Khar Balgas (Ordu Baliq) in the Orkhon valley will become for him an “Unforgettable happy memory”. But this event is overshadowed by the sad news he get when coming back home: his son Nasanbat has been expelled as a “scapegoat” (*zolig gargakh*) allegedly to cure the disease suffered by the local lord, Lkha Beis. Nasanbat escaped death and reached Beijing where, by a combination of circumstances, he became fluent in Chinese, learned to write and read, acquired all sorts of books imported from various countries of the world and began to translate them.

Meanwhile, the boy Shirchin has grown up at Zhamba’s. His older brother who has become well-off, come with the intention to bring him back home. But Shirchin’s real parents are stingy and hateful and treat him like a servant, his life at theirs’ reveal to be a nightmare. He flees from the camp and meets a young woman, Tseren, the servant of a local administrator the *zangi* Sonom. Tseren introduces him to the man. He stays there for a while as a serf, before enrolling the army of the Bogd, takes part in the struggle for independence, then in the revolutionary war before coming back to his home place to live as a herder with Tseren whom he had married in the meantime.

As for Batbayar, urged by his wife, he decided to go in search of his son Nasanbat, whom he finds in Beijing. This stay in the former Manchu capital opens up his eyes to new thoughts and horizons, to the extent that, back in Mongolia at the very time of the elevation to the throne of the Bogd Zhavzandamba,¹⁴⁴ he is lucid enough to understand that what is presented as a victory for the people in Mongolia is likely to be nothing else but the continuation of the feudal system, yet in other hands.

As time goes on, Nasanbat, who has married a Chinese, return to Mongolia on his turn. After the establishment of the Mongolian People’s Government he works as a teacher in the school built in his home place with the help of Batbayar and the others, Batbayar who never fails to recall his encounter with the Russian scientist in the Orkhon Valley.

We discover later that Nasanbat has fallen victim of the counter-revolutionary forces, just like his daughter. The book ends with the staging of a national meeting attended by

¹⁴³ Vasily Vasilievich Radlov, famous for his work on the Orkhon inscriptions.

¹⁴⁴ A word about the transliteration used for “Zhavzandamba”, I chose this form because it is the transliteration of the title as it appears in most of the Mongolian sources I refer to.

Choibalsan, on the occasion of which Shichin, now an old man, is invited to bear testimony of the harsh struggle he took part in the name of the people of Mongolia. “Ray of Dawn” the title of the novel, symbolizes metaphorically the hope that comes from the victory in the struggle against the backwardness and the obscurantism of the old system.

The adventures lived by these few characters, which make for the “red thread” of the novel, are perhaps not as important as the many subplots inserted in the narrative, at least as important in terms of dedicated space. They paint for us a precise, incisive, surprising picture of the society of the time, considered in its evolution, as well as a thoroughly documented account of historical events. With *Üüriin Tuya*, Rinchen navigates the reader in the turmoil of Mongolian history of the first half of the twentieth century with a rather deep insight in this of the nineteenth century, the occasion for him to deliver a message, certainly an “evocative one” to speak like Caroline Humphrey, that we shall have to study with great attention.

“Tungalag Tamir” by Chadraabalyn Lodoidamba

A word about the author

Unlike Rinchen, Lodoidamba is not considered as an opponent to the socialist regime. If he may have uttered some critics, they remained very cautious and discreet, as he took upon himself to make things changes from inside, working for many years as an active civil servant in the Government. Thus, the presentation we will offer of him as a man, as an intellectual will slightly differ from the one we made of Rinchen.

Born in the Sükh Valley of Mongolian Gov’-Altai in 1917, Chadraabalyn Lodoidamba discovered the world in the manner of other Mongolian children of the time, herding sheep, gathering *argal* for the fire and looking after his younger siblings to help his parents. His father, Tsogtyn Chadraabal, a modest herdsman of popular descent with a thirst for learning, could read and write Mongolian and was interested in the ancient history he could discover thanks to the books, at that time imported from India, Tibet and China. Distinguishing himself during naadam tournaments in wrestling and archery, Chadraabal was appreciated and valued by his entourage. But a dispute with the local lord forced him to leave his native region and the family set out for Khüree (present day Ulaanbaatar), the capital.

In Khüree, Lodoidamba was introduced to a lama of the Gandantegchinlen monastery in 1921 and received a rudimentary education before entering the Töv elementary school, where he stayed one year, and then a newly opened “model school” in Khüree. He completed his secondary education in 1935. From 1935 to 1938 he studied at the Rabfak Faculty of Professional Education in Ulan-Ude, Buryatia.

From youth, Lodoidamba has had an active and multi-purposed social life. In the year of his graduation, he went on a study trip with his class to Moscow and Leningrad, an opening to the outside world. As the president of the student council, he was already involved in social life and took advantage of his free time to learn skiing and sledging. In 1939 he graduated as a machinist and started to work as a depot keeper on the newly built Ulaanbaatar-Nalaikh railway line, and then as a full machinist. When he was called up for

military service, the director of the railway managed to obtain an exemption for him. There was indeed a shortage of qualified workers, and the central communications body was looking for a competent worker to teach physics to future telegraph and radio technicians, a function he performed between 1939 and 1941 before becoming deputy director of the radio centre, until 1943. After a six-month training organized by the Soviet Communist Party, he became a reader for the central agency of propaganda and joined the editorial board of the newspaper “Life of the Party” and editor of “Tsog”, the magazine of the artists’ union of Mongolia.

In 1945, he married the actress Chimidiin Dolgorsüren, with whom he had three daughters and a son, Nasanbuyan, Nasanbat, Nasanbayar and Galbadrakh. In his memoirs published in 1986, his wife gave a personal account of the warm and benevolent attention he gave to his family and especially to his children. As a sportsman, he was open-minded and curious about what was going on in the world. For the anecdote, during a trip to Moscow, where they attended a soccer match “Dynamo-Spartak”, he was able to tell his son about international football stars.

At the same time, he attended evening classes at the National University of Mongolia and once he had obtained his degree in history, he went to prepare a PhD in language and literature at the Academy of Social Sciences, which he defended in May 1959 on the subject of “Concepts and Characters in Contemporary Mongolian Drama”.

Among his many contributions to the development and modernization of the cultural sector in Mongolia, Lodoidamba has been particularly active in the theatre and film industry, always striving to bring the country up to the level of other nations in this area. He advises, supervises and coordinates the stage, sets and other artistic infrastructures, film studios, acting, staging, theatres and concert halls. Understanding that the Mongolian cultural heritage can only be defended and preserved from within the system, he deals with the rigidity of censorship in order to enhance this wealth while making it evolve and thus pass it on to future generations. From this point of view, his commitment to supervise the traditional naadam tournaments, to guarantee the respect of the rules, the well-being of the racehorses, the recognition and the esteem of the competitors is accompanied by an important field work aiming at promoting this heritage through the realization of documentary films.

A sensitive and precise observer of the world around him, he knew how to restore it with art and left behind him a prolific and diversified work, combining collections of poems, novels, short stories, plays and cinematographic works, but also numerous scientific publications and finally his personal archives, letters and testimonies on the society of his time. He died suddenly in 1969 while writing a new novel dedicated to his mother. His death remains surrounded by a halo of mystery on which the veil has not been lifted.¹⁴⁵

Ethnographic accuracy

Lodoidamba’s fictional works reveals a great concern for precision in the various ranks and functions of the Lamaist Church, the temples, the rituals, the world of animal husbandry, culinary culture, games and tournaments, and everything that makes the Mongolian way of life original.

¹⁴⁵ Personal sources, his children insist on it.

Lodoidamba was not one of those authors gifted with great erudition but who stay in their offices to write. The memoirs of some of the leaders of the time, who worked with him show that, while they themselves stayed in school to learn Russian, the young Lodoidamba went to rub shoulders with the people of Moscow and thus made faster progress. In the same way, throughout his life, he never stopped going to the field to get a concrete idea of the cultural reality he was responsible for as a civil servant working for the government. It is thanks to this unquenchable curiosity, to a concern for others coupled with a deep respect for what is now called “heritage” that with *Tungalag Tamir*, he has been able and without excessive heaviness to paint for us, in small strokes, the reality of the herders of Arkhangai in the first half of the twentieth century. The reader, indeed, witnesses wrestling tournaments, games of jacks (*haagai*), sheep shearing or the making of felt (*esgii*), which is used among other things to insulate the yurts (*ger*) in which we are invited to taste the warm and wild atmosphere of the festivals that punctuate the calendar, to “listen” to talented singers, while the tables are always overflowing with fatty meat and *arkhi*, the traditional alcohol made from the distillation of milk, is flowing freely.

Lodoidamba wrote somewhere that he was “living” his works: crying when writing tragic episodes, laughing if he imagined funny scenes, this ability provides us a vivid, sensible picture of the Mongolian society of the time.¹⁴⁶ Unlike Rinchen, Lodoidamba made the life experience of his characters central to the novel, while the historical course of event, yet important, is more a framework to abide by the requirements of censorship, but also to make them convincing.

Summary of the novel

Tungalag Tamir is divided into four books which we will summarize one by one before some comments about the overall novel.

Book 1

In feudal Mongolia, at the beginning of the 20th century, Erdene is a poor man of Zasagt Khan Aimag¹⁴⁷ who has become an orphan in his early childhood and has always sold his services to wealthier herders (*zaragdakh*). But when one of his employers has his own son learn to read and write, Erdene seizes his chance and also learns, after what he will become renowned as being literate, a skill which he uses to render people services when needed. The exactions of the local lord, the new Zasagt Khan Gombozhav, having pushed him to revolt, he is thrown into prison but soon after, Mongolia regains its autonomy and alike many other prisoners, he is released by a decree of the Bogd Geegen who has just been crowned. The grudge bear on him by Gombozhav being too fierce for

¹⁴⁶ М. Цэрэндорж “Уран бүтээлийн улаан мөрөөр”, (Ч. Лодойдамбатай хийсэн ярилцлага сурвалжлага) “Утга зохиол урлаг” сонин 1964, №40.

¹⁴⁷ Today, the word aimag is used to refer to the various provinces of Mongolia, twenty-two in all. But under Manchu rule, the “khalkh” territory - the territory of present-day Mongolia, named after the majority ethnic group - was divided from west to east into five regions: Khyazgaar nutguud (“border regions”), Zasagt Khan Aimag, Sain Noyon Aimag, Tüsheet Khaan Aimag and Tsetsen Khan Aimag. The names of these administrative divisions continued under Bogd’s reign and only disappeared after the disappeared only after the VII Khural (Great Congress) of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (mprp) in 1930. Thirteen aimag, in the modern sense of the term, came into being in 1931.

him to stay in his native place, he set off for the capital with his wife and son with the intention to pay respect to the recently “elevated” king (*olnoo örgögsön*).¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, his horse was stolen in the Tamir valley, and by his own brother as he will discover later. One day earlier indeed, not far from there, Khongor, the son of Itgelt, a rich herder of the region, had discovered a man tied up (*shirlesen*) at the bottom of a ravine: a *Shiliin sain er* or somewhat of a Mongolian “Robin Hood” known for stealing rich herders’ horses to give them to the poor in other areas. This man will turn out to be Erdene’s younger brother, Tömör, whom the elder one had not heard off for some time. And the reason for it was that, surprised by a flood of the Tamir River, Tömör had been captured by a local *takhar* (a civil servant responsible of the maintaining of the order at the time), the greedy and violent Badarch, and sent to jail. Thanks to Khongor’s help, Tömör escapes the authorities. The loss of his sole means of transport preventing Erdene from heading further, he meets Itgelt who decides to hire him, glad to have a man who can read and write among his servants (*zarts*). There Erdene meets Pyotr, a Bolshevik on the run, who serves Pavlov, a rich Russian trader and Itgelt’s business partner. When war broke out between the Tsarist Empire and Germany, Khongor and Erdene’s son, Bat are sent to board with a lama and Pyotr returned to Russia. Erdene stayed with Itgelt for a few more years but seduced by the former’s wife, Dolgor, the powerful herder forces her to have sexual intercourse with him. Jealous, Itgelt’s secrete lover who is also his shepherdess, Dulmaa, let the cat out off the bag and Erdene, terribly outraged, leaves, but alone, abandoning Dolgor.

Book two

Having reached the capital, Ikh Khüree, Erdene finds refuge with a nobleman, Dovchin whom he had met when he was at Itgelt’s. Dovchin’s young wife, Gerel, takes Erdene under her wing and becomes his ally.

Meanwhile, Bat, who has set out to follow in his father’s footsteps, is introduced to the capital’s lamaic college of Daischombol by a very wise lama, Erenchin. Erenchin, who has become aware of the corruption of the Church, is losing his faith.

This happens at the time when, to counter the rise in power of the lamas on the one hand, the Bolshevik threat on the other, the Mongolian nobility surrendered the country’s autonomy to the new Chinese government. The revolt rumbles among the people at a time when the tsar has just been deposed in Russia. His fleeing supporters cross the border, promising to return Mongolia to its sovereignty. Led by Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, the White Russians drive out the Chinese invaders and liberate the capital, only to spill blood and tears. Erdene is swept along by the whirlwind of history. He ends up joining the patriotic army that General Sükhbaatar is raising to support the provisional people’s government, in exile in Bolshevik Russia. At the same time, Tömör joined the troops of Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav, who, despite his noble titles, supported the revolutionary cause.

Book Three

¹⁴⁸ *Olnoo Örgögsön* refers to Mongolia's independence from the Manchus in 1911 and the establishment of a theocratic regime ruled by Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt. The calendar era adopted during this short period of autonomy (with the instauration of the theocratic state: *Olnoo Örgögsön* Bogt Xaant Mongol Uls) has as its founding event the beginning of Bogd's reign, designated by the fixed expression *Olnoo Örgögsön*, "exalted by all" (Year I, Year II, etc.)

With the help of the Red Army, the Mongolian People's Army defeated the invaders and entered the capital. The task facing the new government was immense: the whole of society had to be rebuilt on new foundations and social relations completely rethought. However, the population remains very conservative especially because it is completely subjugated to the Lamaic Church, whose influence is not limited to the spiritual sphere but extends to all areas of social life. It was therefore necessary to win the hearts and confidence of the people, and this involved education: offering the children of the people a modern education, open to all, was one of the first objectives. By the time Bat joined the first university to train future teachers, Erdene, whose path crossed again with that of Pyotr engages in vivid discussions with him, through which he come to understand more and more the stakes of the struggle in which he was involved in. Having become a member of the People's Party, he is sent to the Tamir valley by the General Sükhbaatar to make the common people understand the meaning of the reforms undertaken. But he has to face his past and see Itgelt again, with whom he has never reconciled. Riddled with remorse for having abandoned Dolgor, he finds refuge in his work as a party delegate. But the obstacles are many and the enemies powerful. As for Tömör, he asks Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav to be demobilised, willing as he is to live a quiet and peaceful life as a herder with Dulmaa.

Book four

Bat has finished his studies. He becomes a schoolmaster. His journey leads him to meet his childhood friends, Khongor and Solongo, Itgelt's children, and Süren, the daughter of Itgelt's shepherd, who married Khongor with her father's consent. Bat marries Solongo but Itgelt's initial hopes that he would take care of his capital are disappointed and their relationship turns sour. Itgelt decides to take Solongo from him. Khongor, who has never forgotten his first meeting with Tömör, is about to embark on a dangerous path. The government's efforts to involve the population in the social revolution have paid off throughout the country, but its foundations are still fragile, and dissension within the party over the confiscation of the property of the nobility, the Lamaic clergy and the wealthy herdsmen threatens its cohesion. At the same time, the powerful Lama Church, whose hegemony is under threat, begins to organise a counterattack, promising the imminent outbreak of an apocalyptic war between the guardians of the faith and its enemies, at the end of which only one will remain. When the armed uprising of the lamas breaks out in the western regions, everything goes up in flames. The country is on the brink of civil war and the heroes of the novel find themselves facing their destiny, forced to make choices that could prove fatal to some. It is also a time for them to confront each other and to test their friendship.

Psychological realism

Where Lodoidamba excels, what makes his "signature" compared to the other masters of Mongolian realism, is in the composition of his characters. A historical novel, an adventure novel, *Tungalag Tamir* is also, and perhaps first of all, a "psychological" novel.

Far from unconvincingly smooth heroes of the revolution Mongolian literary critics of the 70's pointed out, Erdene is a whole and complex character. He commits himself wholeheartedly, first to the war of independence and then to the construction of a new society, but remains to the end racked by remorse for not having been able to forgive a

loved one, Dolgor, nor to understand in time the feelings of the friend, Gerel, who will sacrifice herself, not for the revolution, but for love for him. But Erdene himself is not an early revolutionary. He is certainly an idealist and a lover of justice, and this is what triggers the story when, for believing that he can make the voice of the people heard in the face of the cruelty of the powerful, he finds himself forced into exile. Erdene is “naive” and the other characters see it clearly: Itgelt, who uses him for his own benefit, but also Pyotr, the Russian friend, a Bolshevik on the run, who never stops warning him.

Some Mongolian literary critics have considered Itgelt to be the most accomplished character in Lodoidamba’s novel, noting that, despite the quantitatively small place he occupies in it, relatively to Erdene’s, he is the one who makes the greatest impression. Where Erdene let himself be carried along by events, found himself by a combination of circumstances engaged in the White army, then the Patriotic Army, before being sent to build socialism in the provinces, Itgelt remained from beginning to end master of his destiny. Everything he does, he does by calculation. Itgelt gambles but wins every time, his dealings with women are just examples of his ability to always get his way. In the novel, Itgelt represents, in a way, the capitalist ideal, which could have been established at the time of independence if history had decided otherwise. Cunning, intractable, egotistical, he does not have the best role in the novel. However, critics have pointed out that with this figure, the author avoids the Manicheism of all-black or all-white characters. I would suggest that this is also the case with Erdene and it could also be said of Tömör.

Others are less complex. Propaganda obliges, the Red Russian is exemplary (if one is willing to forgive him a few drinking excesses), the Whites are brutal and cruel and the Chinese are detestable even in their physical appearance. It will not escape the reader that the bar managers all have small, sharp yellow teeth eaten away by opium, while the Mongolian heroes, Erdene, Tömör, Sükhbaatar, have big, beautiful white teeth. One might be tempted to hold this against the author, but one can never remind us enough of the dangers to which anyone who deviated too much from the party line could be accused of collusion with the enemy (capitalist, Japanese, internal, and so on).

If not all the characters have been as well elaborated as those of Erdene or Tömör, it is in the relationships they have with each other that many of them gain their depth. The story of Tömör and Dulmaa, and that of Erdene and Gerel, for example, in many ways open up a reflection on the female condition of the time. And Lodoidamba was a playwright, so it is not surprising that in *Tungalag Tamir* we find an art of staging that reveals the characters as much through their thoughts as through their actions. In this sense, it can be said that each actor has a purpose, allowing us to paint a vivid picture of the society of the time. As mentioned above, the author is a leading figure of Mongolian literary realism and there is something in this novel with drawers that recalls the project of Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine*.

The renewal of tradition

Just as the regime’s policy on collectivisation went through periods of excess and relaxation, as can be seen in the novel, censorship was not uniformly applied throughout the socialist era and cultural policy evolved, going through phases of questioning. In the decades of revolutionary terror, there were real book burnings in the country, with the aim of wiping out Mongolia’s literary past, or even radically denying that it ever existed. At the time when Lodoidamba wrote *Tungalag Tamir*, however, the watchword was the slogan

“nationalist in form, socialist in content”, which enjoined authors to make the best of the national artistic heritage to pass it on to future generations, while at the same time making it bear modern ideals (socialist, that is). A breach has been opened, and some people will jump in with finesse and talent. I don't think I'm being biased if I say that this is the case with *Lodoidamba*. Whether it is in the narrative structure, the vocabulary, the poetry, the metaphors or even the characters and the adventures they go through, it is all the richness of the long songs, proverbs, puns, tales and legends and other treasures of the oral tradition that the Mongolian original of this polymorphous text carries. It is a realistic novel, but it also often gives way to the marvellous, where the destinies unfold in parallel and the adventures of the various characters open up like drawers.

So it is with Bat and Khongor, the two little boys whose lives cross for the first time at the beginning of the book and will continue to do so until the epilogue. Bat is the son of Erdene, an honest, courageous and penniless worker, Khongor the son of Itgelt, a commoner but a calculating and cunning one, whose determination has enabled him to rise in the social hierarchy to become the richest man in the whole Tamir valley. When the vagaries of life force Erdene to place himself in the service of Itgelt, the latter favours the agreement between the two boys, knowing that he can benefit from it. They are sent together to a lama to follow the religious path, very common at the time. There their paths diverge. Inspired by a folk tale, they take an oath in front of two saplings which they each make their own, swearing to remain forever united by this pact of friendship. If Bat follows a path that conforms to that of the typical hero of socialist realism, Khongor's adventures link him much more to those of a folklore revisited to anchor him in the twentieth century. The encounter that determines Bat's entire journey is that of Erenchin, a lama of great erudition but disillusioned by what he observes, who will end up advising the young boy to abandon the religious voice. The one that will have forever sealed Khongor's is that of Tömör, Erdene's brother, a character straight out of the legends that the storytellers tell at the wake. Endowed with prodigious strength and extraordinary courage, Tömör is a Mongolian-style “Robin Hood” who takes from the rich to give to the poor, does not frequent any temple and knows no other home than the mountains, whose companions he has made his allies. Fascinated by the big-hearted thief, the son of the rich Itgelt has only one idea in mind: to become a “Brave” in his turn, although if he is able to measure its prestige, it is not certain that he has grasped the meaning of their struggle. Khongor is thus a bravura and passionate hero, fearless and exuberant, touching in his failure to match the model he has set for himself. The “Braves of the Heights” (*shiliin sain er*) did exist, and among them a Tsakhiur Tömör of Zasagt Khan, of course, but the fables they inspired are part of the oral tradition, and specialists in Mongolian literature have been able to identify resonances between *Lodoidamba's* novel and these treasures that form their cultural heritage.

In the form, too, the influence of “long songs” (*urtiin duu*) and epic poetry can be seen. Most, if not all, chapters open with a reference to the season, which is usually an ode to nature. The lyricism of these evocations can be pleasing or overdone. I think that to appreciate them, one must see in them the expression of a sensitivity to the world that has impregnated nomadic thought since ancient times and has been passed on over the centuries, always evolving, always renewed. The play of light and shadow, opacity and transparency, are all materials for metaphors that put human feelings in tune with the song of nature. The

Tamir, the river whose valley serves as the cradle of the story, is a character in the novel, cruel when it devours men - and women - but also prodigal when it ensures their subsistence by making the mountains of Arkhangai, one of the richest regions of Mongolia, green every year. And if the Tamir has such clear waters, it is because, unlike men, she never lies.

With this novel, Lodoidamba wanted to pay tribute to his father who had a very special relationship with this river, which he believed had saved him. There are many indications that Tsogtyn Chadraabal, Lodoidamba's father, inspired the author to write the character of Erdene. Like the hero of the story, Chadraabal was respected by his entourage, curious, passionate about history and literature, and shone at the naadam with his singing talents as well as his excellence in wrestling. And like him, it was a dispute with the local lord that forced him to leave his native valley, the Sükh, in what is now Govi-Altai, to take the road to Khüree, the capital. But if, like Erdene, Chadraabal stopped at the crossing of the Arkhangai, it was not to enter the service of an Itgelt or because a thief had stolen his horse. In the Tamir valley, Lodoidamba's father spent many months between life and death, stricken with smallpox, and it was only thanks to the care and benevolence of the local people that he escaped. The seeds were planted for the blossoming of a branching, bushy novel in which historical figures mingle with fictional heroes, socialist realism with folklore and the marvellous, the aspirations of a nation on the march towards modernity and a tribute to a cultural heritage as rich as it is original.

1.2 Other sources

For the reasons given above, the biographies of authors as well as the presentations of novels to follow will be much more succinct and grouped under one section. Essentially factual, the information provided here, taken from the three-volume *Encyclopaedia of Mongolian Literature* (2022), can be seen as the expression of a contemporary and therefore uncensored view of twentieth-century literature.

Dain and Tulaldaan, by Zhamsrangyn Lodoi

A word about the author

Informations about Lodoi are rather scarce. A Buriat, he was born in 1918, in present day Dashbalbar Sum, in Dornod Aimag, and completed his studies in 1965 at the "University of the Party" (*Namyn deed surguuli*).

In terms of his career as an author, he started to write in 1944. He was awarded a prize of the Mongolian Writers' Union in 1973.

As a soldier and military officer he took part in the Battles of Khalkhyn Gol and in the War of Liberation. Then, from 1946 on, he became involved in political and social life as a Party member and Union member, acting also in various organisations dedicated to education and art.

A dozen of his works were published, among which the novels *Dain* and *Tulaldaan*. He also wrote for the stage, we can mention his plays *Khürim* (Wedding) in 1966 and *Bürkheg shönö* (Foggy Night) in 1972. He died in 1990.

Description of the novels

These two novels did not enjoy the same success as *Tungalag Tamir* or *Üüriin Tuya* and have more or less fallen into oblivion, as well as their author. Nevertheless, several reasons prevented me from totally overlooking them. Both novels were written in praise of the Mongolian People's Army and to bear testimony of its history.

As a soldier and direct witness of Battles of Khalkhyn Gol against Japan in 1939, and in the "Liberation War" in 1945, two important events of the history of Mongolia in the twentieth century, he dedicated them two of his works, the novels *Dain* (War) first edited in 1973 for the first part and published in full in 1977, and *Tulaldaan* (battles) in 1983, respectively on the occasion of the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the Mongolian People's Army. The subject is typical of Mongolian literature of the 70's: celebration of the army, of the struggle against Japanese militarism and German fascism and of the brotherly alliance with Soviet Russia, and these two books reveals rather clearly the influence of propaganda. Besides the just mentioned themes, *Dain* tells us about the modernisation of the country, in particular of the agrarian conquest of the soil. *Dain* is not just about war, it also gives us a picture of a society in transition between tradition and modernity, with the tension that this implies.

Dain's main setting is the Zharaakhai Valley, in the region through which the long Ulz River flows, in north-eastern Mongolia. Zhargal, in his fifties, lives with his wife, Lkhyam, in the sum of Dashbalbar, where many Buryats settled in previous centuries. Zhargal is one of them. Depending on the season, he drives caravans or goes hunting. Zhargal and his wife had three children, the eldest of whom, Dambii, disappeared several years earlier. Davaa, the youngest, is a propaganda officer for the party (*ukhuulagch*), the third is a daughter who is not mentioned much.

The story begins in the summer of 1941. In the sum of Dashbaldar, young and old mix in a festive atmosphere. In Zhargal's entourage, the reader also meets a generation of young adults who are joyful and undisciplined, easily tempted by the pleasures of alcohol and sex. The break out of the war between Soviet Russia and Germany will put an end to this carefree attitude.

The reader finds back Dambii long before the other characters of the novel do. Zhargal's eldest son has crossed the border to the city of Khailaar in Inner Mongolia, where the Japanese government maintains an intelligence base to spy socialist Mongolia. Dambii is one of their agents, actually a double agent as we come to understand. He has an ambiguous relationship with a woman named Yumzhir (of the Barga people), who is not immediately clear whether she is his lover or a cover.

The novel also takes us to the Western Front where the war is raging. We are plunged into the (Ukrainian) war field in the company of the Russians Danilov, the officer, Nina, the nurse and a few others. The destiny of these Soviet troops crosses that of the inhabitants of Dashbalbar when, mobilized in the name of the Soviet-Mongolian fraternal agreement, they start participating in the war effort by sending animals, food, small gifts but also letters to the front. This is how the young Tserem, whose abuses were constantly denounced by the inhabitants of the sum, begins to have an epistolary relationship with the pretty Russian nurse, Nina Orlova, and is significantly transformed, and matured, by it.

With Danilov, the reader will experience the hell of the death camps, with Zhargal he will meet Marshal Choibalsan in person during a journey to the capital Ulaanbaatar, where

a huge national gathering is being held to explain the policy of agrarian modernization to delegates sent from all regions of the country. Zhargal returns enthusiastic but also filled with questions about this transition and about the future of traditional knowledge.

By setting his novel in the region of his birth and by choosing Buryat characters like himself, Lodoi has immediately given an autobiographical colouring to his story. This is reinforced by abundant descriptions of war scenes, both at the back and at the front, since as an officer he himself was a direct witness.

As for *Tulaldaan*, we can quote the author's word to his readers, introduced as a short posface to the novel:

"I dedicated this book to the 60th anniversary of the Mongolian people's revolution and the history of our people's army.

In many books about the Battle of the Khalkh River, the event is described from our own point of view. There would be no shortage of titles if I had to give examples. For my part, although this is fiction, I have tried in this novel to recount some of the events that took place on the battlefield from the point of view of the Japanese and the Manchus".¹⁴⁹

Dain does not have the fame in Mongolia of *Tungalag Tamir*, *Üüriin Tuya* or *Gazar Shoroo*. However, the book must have had some success, as almost all the book markets in Ulaanbaatar still sell copies, which may also be a sign that there are not many buyers for it anymore. Written in a fairly neutral style, *Dain* is rich in subplots with a slight focus on alcohol, sex and violent action, which are quite typical of what one might call a "bestseller".¹⁵⁰ A specificity of the text perhaps, it is punctuated by songs and poems supposedly composed and recited by the characters, a way perhaps of paying tribute to a culture of orality which the Mongols care a lot.

"Ikh Khuvi Zaya", by Sonomyn Udval

A word about the author

Sonomyn Udval was born in 1921 in present day Dashinchinlen Sum, Bulgan Aimag, and was a renowned Mongolian author and poet, as well as a socio-political activist. She studied at the University of Oriental Studies in Moscow until 1943, then at the "University of the Party" established under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, completing her studies in 1960. Between 1961 and 1973 she worked as the director of the Mongolian Women's Union, as the director of the Mongolian Writers' Union, and as the vice director of the Mongolian Association of Elderly People (*Mongolyn Akhmadyn Khoroo*). She also endorsed elective duties as a member of the Central Committee of The People's Revolutionary Party, a head member of the People's Grand Khural of Mongolia

¹⁴⁹ Lodoi, *Tulaldaan*, p. 311.

¹⁵⁰ Mönkhbayar has pointed out, the term can hardly be used for Mongolian novels before the publishing world became free. Мөнхбаяр Б. "1990-ээд оны романы төрөл зүйлийн хөгжмийн асуудалд" *Уран зохиолын судлал* УБ 2001 боть XXV 15 тал.

(*Ardyn Ikh Khural*) as well as of the International Democratic Association of Women, for which she was re-elected several times. She died in 1991.

She was awarded a Joliot-Curie gold medal by the Institute for Peace of the United Nations in 1965, a Sükhbaatar prize in 1969, a State prize for her novel *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* in 1978, an award from the Asian African Writer's organisation in 1971 and a prize from the Soviet People's Friendship in 1979. *Odgerel*, one of her first novels that has been warmly praised by the critic and widely spread among the reading public tells the story of a young girl, an orphan, to whom the People's Revolution brought a bright future. Her novel *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* about Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav and D. Sükhbaatar is considered to have opened the pace for a new step in the development of Mongolian literature.

Among many works we can mention the novels *Odgerel* (1957), *Ta bid uulzana* (We Will Meet, 1965), *Ankhny arvan gurav* (The First Thirteen Ones, 1967), *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* (The Great Destiny, 1973), a collection of short stories in 1974, a book of poems in 1981 but also some books published abroad.¹⁵¹

Summary of the novel

Ikh Khuvi Zaya is a fictionalised biography of Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav in which the author tells us how a reserved, obedient but impulsive and even angry young boy gradually opens his eyes to the shortcomings of the society of his time and sets out to change it by committing himself in the fight for the independence and Mongolia and then embrace the revolutionary cause alongside Damdinsüren and Sükhbaatar in particular. Aside from the original portrait she paints of Magsarzhav, which does not completely conceal her darker side, the novel is interesting for the purely fictional plot that develops between Togoo, Magsarzhav's faithful companion, and the young Günchinkhorloo, the second companion of the nobleman "Ga Gün", whom he repudiates when the young girl becomes pregnant. Although fictional, the plot provides a convincing illustration of the status of women at the time, or at least one of its many facets.

"Erdene Zasgiin Unaga", Zunduin Dorzh

A word about the author

Zunduin Dorzh was a Mongol poet, publisher, author and author for the youth. He was born in 1941 present day Avzaga Sum, in Bulgan Aimag. He received his basic education at the 10 grade school of Bulgan, which he completed in 1961, and then studied language and literature at the Mongolian National University (MUIS), from which he graduated in 1968. From 1971 to 1973 he worked as a radio journalist for the radio station "Runfunk" in Berlin in Eastern Germany and from 1973 on as a radio journalist and redactor for the National radio of Mongolia. He died in 2015.

Highly regarded for his political commitment and professional skills, he has received numerous awards and medals, including the Labour Medal and the Sükhbaatar Medal, as well as high state recognition for his historical novel *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*.

¹⁵¹ "Первые тринадцать" /повести и рассказы/ (М., 1970. 158 с.), "Великая судьба" (Пер. Е.А.Демидова, Л.А.Карабаевой. М., 1977. 340 с.)

Among his works let us only mention the poems “Eriin Tsee” (Man estate), “Shankhny üzüüriin chichirgee” (The trembling of the tip of woman hair), 1990, “Sagsar Sambai Gezeg” (Shaggy Braid), “Er” (Man), in 1984, the novels *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga* and *Ükhegsdiin Daraa Gantsaardal* (Loneliness after the dead).

Summary of the novel

Erdene Zasgiin Unaga is a first-person novel. The action takes place during the second revolution, over a relatively short period of time compared with the historical frescoes of *Tungalag Tamir*, *Üüriin Tuya* or *Gazar Shoroo*. Gombo, the narrator, is an impulsive boy who is not the last to get into fights, drink too much and brag at parties and naadams, as he himself admits. His indiscipline has led to a number of setbacks, and bad tongues are wagging about him. He feels sorry for himself because he knows that his mother worried a lot about him and that she died without him having managed to give her any reason to stop tormenting herself. Nevertheless, the author has created a character who is undeniably endearing and who has no shortage of talents, not least his agile handling of the *uurga*. As he conscientiously looks after a wealthy herder’s horses, the latter gives him a foal to choose from. Gombo’s horse, much more than a mere mount, is a character in its own right in the novel, with a mind of its own, and although faithful to its master - or companion - it is not one to be trifled with. He shows his disapproval when Gombo claims to be riding him when he is drunk. Gombo doesn’t just have friends in the *khoshuu* - he even has a few “mortal” enemies, as he calls them - but also a tender friend, Demberel. The novel begins shortly after Baron von Ungern re-establishes the monarchy and puts the Bogd back on the throne. A national army is raised and Gombo is mobilised, along with his “enemies”. When one of them tells him that he plans to desert and join the Baron’s forces, arguing that the army they have just joined is allied to the Red Russians - the miscreants (*buruu nomton*) - Gombo, who was also planning to run away (but not to join any army), changes his mind and decides to fight in the regular army, not out of any political or ideological conviction but simply to have the opportunity to do battle with his sworn enemies. However, his encounter with Sükhbaatar will transform him and has him become much more mature in this respect. *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga* can thus be read as an initiation novel that sees Gombo “reborn” as a loyal and patriotic revolutionary.

The novel has many interests. The historical aspect is present, although it is romanticised and perceived by characters - particularly the narrator, given the form the author has chosen for his novel - who do not necessarily have the knowledge and ability to understand everything. Of all the novels in our corpus, *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga* is perhaps the one who plunges us most deeply into Mongolian rural life, with particular emphasis on the relationship between “the Mongol” and his horse. In Sükhbaatar’s army, Gombo is in charge of the herds of reserve horses, which he initially deplures because he would like to fight, before understanding the value of the task he has been given. The characters are endearing and the story has plenty of humour. This is a book that my interviewees often told me they had read it during their childhood, and it is indeed accessible to young people, even if it is just as suitable for an adult audience.

“Gazar Shoroo”, Magzhavyn Dүgerjavyn Maam

A word about the author

Dügerzhavyn Maam was born in 1935 in Sükhbaatar Aimag, in a place called “Buduun Ovoony Zavsrin Buuts” located Tüvshinshiree Sum. An interesting point of his bibliography, at least to be noticed for reasons we will discover below, at birth he was called Tserendorzh, but after his father, Mazhig, was brutally killed, his first name was changed to “Maam” and he was named after his elder brother, Dügerzhavaa.

After completing his schooling at the school Sükhbaatar Aimag, he studied at the Vocational High School of Education (*Bagshiin tekhnikum*) from 1951 to 1954 and then at the University of Education (*Bagshiin Deed Surguuli*), specialising in the teaching of Russian language. After that he moved to Moscow and graduated in 1968 from the University of International Relations with a degree in international history after six years of study. He then briefly taught Russian and literature at the school of Sükhbaatar Aimag (1957-58), worked for the Ministry of People’s Enlightenment, Children’s Literature Section (*Ardyn Gegeerliin Yamny Khüükhddiin Utga Zokhiolyn gazar*) from 1959 to 1962, then as a secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a translator and then as an attaché to the Mongolian Embassy in Cairo. At the Academy of Sciences, he worked as a researcher in the Oriental Studies Department, as well as an assistant director. Since 1990 he has been Secretary, then President of the Mongolian Writers’ Union. He was elected member of the *Baga Khural* between 1990 and 1992 and participated in the drafting of the new Constitution.

Among the prizes and awards he has received we can mention the Mongolian Writers’ Union Prize in 1983 and in 1996 an honorary prize for his investment in Mongolian cultural activities (*Ulsyn Soëlyn Gaviat zütgelten tsol*). In 1996 the Tüvshinshiree Sum School of Sükhbaatar Aimag was renamed in his honour “School of the Cultural Activist and Author Orloi Mazhigiin Dügerzhaavyn Maam”.

Selected bibliography:

Poetry:

- 1959 “Süülchin zakhidal” (The Last Letter)
- 1962 “Khögshin tenүүлч” (The Old Wanderer)
- 1965 “Mandakh zul” (The lighting Candle)

Collections of poems

- 1970 “Temeenii duuli” (The Camel’s Lament)
- 1972 “Tarkhind khiisen ayan” (A Journey under Duress)
- 1976 “Tүmen gazryn zam” (The Crossroads)

Selected short stories

- 1981 “Өндөр сүкhee”

Novels:

- 1969 *Sarnai törөkh uchir* (Why the Rose was born)
- 1977, 1981, 1982, 1989 *Gazar shoroo* (4 tome) (The Land)
- 1990 *Tsagiin salkhi* (The Wind of Time)
- 1979 *Gishgekh gazargüi khöl* (pamphlet novel)

Filmography:

- 1969 *Khoër khar buuryн tuuri* (The Story of Two Camel Stallion)
1980 *Martakh äsgüi* (We Must Not Forget)
1989 *Tsövuun tsagiin Bogd* (Evil times of the Bogd)
1975 *Maoizm maogiinkhan* (Maoism and Maoists)
1994 *Mönkh tengeriin dor* (Under the Eternal Sky)

Scientific publications

- 1977 Khyatadyn udirdlagchaas arab dorno dakhind yavuulzh bui bodlogo (Chinese Policy in the Arab Middle East)
1975 Maogiin bodlogod khelmegdezh bui Tövd oron (Tibet, a victim of Maoism)
1977 Arab dorno dakhin, Beezhingiin bodlogo (Beijing's Middle East Policy)
1972 *Sinain Dain* (The Sinai War)

Translations

- Alexander Pushkin's *Ruslan and Ludmila* (1965)
Mikhail Lermontov's "The Prophet" and "the Devil"

About "Gazar Shoroo"

The novel, divided into four books and described as a historical epic, was published in three parts in 1976, 1982 and 1989.

The action begins at the turn of the twentieth century and takes the reader into the 1920s, through the end of Manchu domination, the struggle for independence and the autonomous government of Bogd Khaan. The story takes place on the eastern border, in the Dariganga region near Altan Ovoo and Lake Ganga, where the characters have lived for generations, and tells a fictionalised story of their struggle to protect their land, their fight against the Chinese and Manchu invaders in the name of their traditions and their history.

Critics have hailed this novel for its literary, historical and ethnographic quality, particularly as regards the customs, way of life and culture of the Dariganga region.¹⁵²

"Tsag Töriin Üimeen", by Donvoryn Namdag

A word about the author

Donvoryn Namdag was born in 1911 in the Sum of Taragt, in the Aimag of Övörkhangaï. He learned to read and write thanks to a private teacher who came to his home to teach him the basics of education. In 1925, he joined a high school in Ulaanbaatar before leaving to study in Germany for four years. From 1962 he studied at the Great Literary School in Moscow, from which he graduated in 1964.

Starting in the 1930's, he has been actively involved in building a Mongolian national theatre on a modern basis and has contributed to the staging of Nicolai Gogol's "The

¹⁵² Baigalsaikhan, 2019, p. 205.

Revizor”, Lope de Vega’s “khoniny bulag” (foreign plays), and Natsagdorzh’s “Uchirtai Gurvan Tolgoi”. He worked for many years as a theatre actor and director, as well as a writer employed by the Ministry of Culture or the Soviet-Mongolian Union. In 1971 he was awarded as a talented artist of Mongolia and twice received the State Prize, in 1962 for his novel *Tsag Töriin Üimeen* and for his play *Eedree*, then in 1983 for his play *Orolmaa*. In 1969 he was awarded the Soviet-Mongolian Union Prize.

Having started writing in 1934, D. Namdag is considered one of the greatest Mongolian playwrights of our time. His play *Sharai golyn gurban khaan* for example, a stage adaptation of the Geser legend, is very famous. But he also wrote several novels, such as *Tsag töriin üimeen*, famous both in Mongolia and abroad.¹⁵³ From 1962 onwards, he was inspired by more contemporary subjects with the plays *Shine baishind* (In the New House), *Nayanchuluuny oi*, *Erdemni yaria* (Scholarly Discussion), *Khangai Nuruund* (In the Khangai Mountains), *Ür taria* (The Seeds), *Sandart arav khonog* (Ten Days of Anguish), and historical themes with *Eerde* and *Orolmaa*. He also wrote the film *Nügel buyan* (Virtue and Sin). As an actor, he has for many years delighted audiences who are grateful to him. In addition, he was involved in the opening of educational establishments and the creation of many new playwrights.

Selective bibliography¹⁵⁴

Works

1952 *Alim* (The apple), (short story)

Operas

1960 *Tsag töriin üimeen*

1960 *Erkhem zurag*

n. d. *Sharai golyn gurban Khaan* (The Three Kings of the Sharai River)

Novels

1961 *Togos kheer*

1962 *Tsag töriin üimeen*

Plays :

1967 *Sharai golyn gurban Khaan*

1970 *Süreg chono*

Other writings

1980 *Gompilyn бага khüü*

1982 *Nayanchuluuny oi*

1985 *Tüüver Zokhiol* (3 volumes)

1987-1988 *Shine Mongolyn shine teatr* (The New Mongolian Theatre) (3 volumes)

¹⁵³ I rely here on the Encyclopedia of Mongolian Literature, this statement might have to be qualified.

¹⁵⁴ The correct interpretation of certain terms that have homonymous necessitating to read the works I preferred to remain cautious and not to try to translate them.

About the novel

In his book, S Baigalsaikhan *The 20th Century Mongolian Novel and Realism (Realizm ba XX зууны монголын роман)* by S. Baigalsaikhan,¹⁵⁵ emphasizes the timelessness of a novel that continues to leave its mark fifty years after its publication. He sees several reasons for this, in particular the author's realistic portrayal of human life, "reflecting back to us like a mirror". The novel is based on proven historical facts, which he portrays in a fictionalised way. The action takes place over a relatively short period of time, during which dozens of characters are drawn into the turmoil of history, with all its desolation. The backdrop is the brief re-establishment of autonomous rule by Baron von Ungern Sterberg and the Mongols' struggle to free the country from this domination. We meet the Zhalkhanz Khutagt, the Bogd Khaan, Manlai Van Damdinsüren, Magsarzhav Van, Zhigmed gün and Sükhbaatar, all of whom cross paths with particularly endearing fictional heroes.¹⁵⁶

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These few biographies, all built on the same model, call for some remarks. Through the presentation of their twentieth-century authors by Mongolians today, we can see the reaffirmation of a national pride around this intellectual elite that was partly "manufactured" by the socialist regime. This might not have been the case; the Mongolians could have, following the collapse of the regime and the adoption of new values, disowned these representatives of a now suspect ideology. I write "manufactured" because it will not have escaped the reader's attention that, in parallel to their writing, all these authors held important positions within the state administration, and we see the names of associations, organisations and bodies flourishing in these short paragraphs, revealing the commissioning of a cultural machinery steered with a firm hand by the regime. We will come back to this. In addition, the proliferation of medals, awards and distinctions, common to all peoples but particularly accentuated here, deserves to be noted. In addition, the courses of these few authors, although heterogeneous, testify to the relative effectiveness of the system of instruction set up at the time, instruction accessible to the greatest number, which was not immediately foreseeable when one considers the extent of the territory and the isolation of certain regions. The biographies presented here do not mention the social origin of the authors, were they children of herders, intellectuals, descendants of a certain nobility? This aspect of things has been left in the shade. The fact remains that the Mongolian education system in the twentieth century allowed a child born in the provinces to acquire a basic education before entering secondary school or a vocational school, with the possibility of completing his or her studies abroad, in a "sister" country. Finally, the bibliographies reveal another interesting point, which is the multi-skilling of these authors, who are at the same time playwrights, poets, authors of short stories and novels, translators, sometimes film-makers and most often authors of scientific

¹⁵⁵ С. Байгалсайхан *Реализм ба XX зууны Монголын Роман*, Улаанбаатар, "Ган зам пресс", 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Baigalsaikhan, p. 108-109.

publications. We note that the novel does not appear here as a major genre and indeed, only a few hundred novels were published during this entire period, mostly historical novels, which makes our corpus representative and therefore legitimate for an overall reflection. One last remark perhaps, before continuing, the parallel presentation of the works and the authors' careers brings out, in addition to the historical character of the former, their autobiographical colouring.

2. Sources for literary criticism and historical analysis

2.1. *Mongolian sources*

Not surprisingly, to approach these novels, the essential tools of interpretation are provided by the Mongols. Indeed, while ancient Mongolian literature has been studied extensively by researchers from around the world - often but not always from an overall archaeological, historical and ethnological perspective, - twentieth-century writings, especially novels, have received little attention from foreigners.

The Mongols have their own tradition of literary criticism. It is already old since Ts. Damdinsüren dates it back to at least the 16th century: if Mongolia can boast 700 years of literature, he says, its experience in the field of criticism represents at least 300 years of history. That being said, just as socialist Mongolia has sought to build a national literature on new foundations, it has also sought to re-found its tradition of criticism in order to bring it into line with the Marxist-Leninist principles that guided the entire ideology of the time. The authors' backgrounds presented above have already revealed the existence of a significant critical activity, which was encouraged by the regime. If the writings of the period must be approached with circumspection, precisely because of their propagandist vocation, they remain nonetheless essential for our study, to be confronted of course with more recent sources, in principle free of this ideological bias. While doing this, we must nevertheless also remain cautious since as Kaplonski or Morozova among others insist "recent" does not automatically mean unbiased.¹⁵⁷

In addition to their interest as a tool for analysis, these Mongolian sources are an integral part of our object of reflection insofar as the scientific and literary activity of the twentieth century participates in the construction of a new Mongolian national identity, or more precisely in the transformation of the **representations** of this identity.

¹⁵⁷ To quote Morozova:

"Bearing the Soviets a grudge for rapid (especially economic) withdrawal in the early 1990s provoked a negative revisionism about the USSR's role in Mongolian history". Morozova Irina, *Socialist Revolutions in Asia, The social history of Mongolia in the twentieth century*, London & New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 20; and Kaplonski: Although the debate about truth in history is a political one, it would be an oversimplification, however tempting, to draw quick and easy parallels equating the old socialism with "bad" (i.e. "false") history and the new democracy with "good" (i.e. "true") history. As one Soviet historian noted, "[I]t would be a profound misapprehension to reduce our new tasks to a simple arithmetical operation – the elementary substitution of minuses for pluses (or vice versa) in evaluating the past" (Kozlov 1989: 35). The actual relationship, at both the public and the private levels, is far more complex. History was, and continues to be, a battleground. Kaplonski, p. 3.

Socialist period

As there are many works by Mongolian researchers that could serve as a basis for our analysis, it is not possible to exploit them all. However, all of them constitute a reservoir of material to be consulted and known by those who wish to study the history of Mongolian literature of the period, a history rich in debate, reflection and even sometimes self-criticism. In order to understand the state of mind and the atmosphere in which “our” novels were produced, it is essential to briefly retrace the history of Mongolian criticism and literary studies in the twentieth century. We will focus here on this history without going into the ideological and censorship issues, which will be dealt with in a later chapter.

The first part of the twentieth century was a period of great change for Mongolian society and one during which Western influences overtook the previously dominant Eastern influences. This trend has been particularly influential in literature.

Mongolia gained its independence in 1911. From then onwards, combat manifestos flourished, notably under the pen of D. Bodoov, Badrakhbaatar or Zh. Tseveen. These manifestos were inspired by the writings of thinkers of the past centuries – such as Sandar, Shagdar Soliot Ravzhaa, Danzanvaanzhid, Ihsambuu, Khaidav, Luvsandondov, Khishigbat, Inzhinashi – who theorised about the motherland and about liberty. Published both across the border and in Mongolia itself, “Life in the Far East” (*Als dornodyn amidral*), “New Encyclopaedia” (*Shine toli*), “The Capital Newspaper” (*Niislel Khüreenii sonin bichig*) attracted the attention of the masses with poems of a completely new genre. During this period, there was an exponential increase in compositions with progressive claims, aiming to instruct and educate as well as to inform.

As we wrote as a matter of introduction, the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century saw Mongolian literature turn westwards to non-Asian countries in order to draw new influences from their culture. However, if the access to independence marks the beginning of an evolution of Mongolian literature, with the emergence of a social as well as a national consciousness among the people, one cannot really say that the rules of writing in the literary field have known a significant reorientation from that time onwards. Indeed, the influence of Chinese culture on the one hand, and of Buddhist philosophy on the other, remained dominant for some time.

From the 1920s onwards, literary criticism was present mainly in the form of newspapers and periodicals. For example, the newspapers “The Truth” (*Ünen*), “The Fundamental Rights of the People” (*Ardyn ündestnii erk*), “The Road to a National Culture” (*Ündesnii soëlyn zam*), “The Truth of the Young” (*Zaluuchuudyn ünen*) opened their columns to literary issues. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, the fact that the writers and authors, who were the “architects” of the new literature, worked for these newspapers and secondly, because art and literature, in all genres, were the preferred tool for thinking about and questioning the policies implemented by the state. These publications therefore had specialised literary sections with articles inviting to take part into the development of literary criticism or addressing theoretical and methodological issues. Let us mention for example an article by S. Buyannemekh entitled “A plea for progress in aesthetic criticism” (*Uran saikhny shüümzheliig örgönöör khögzhüülie*), or another one by Ch. Dashnyam entitled “Is criticism in art necessary?” (*Uran shüümzhlel*

kheregtei yu?). In the latter, Dashnyam set out to clarify the interest of such criticism explaining that it was by no means a question of identifying the flaws in the works, of neglecting their contributions and qualities in order to denounce their shortcomings in a subjective manner. At the time, it was still mainly a question of demonstrating the importance of literary criticism, which was still in its infancy, but without really putting it into practice.

The 1930s marked a new stage in literary history with the emergence of professional critics, inspired in particular by Dashnyam's texts and his calls for participation. Thus, between 1930 and 1940, the foundations of literary studies and related criticism were laid and consolidated, thanks to the energetic investment of a whole generation of authors and researchers, including D. Natsagdorzh, Ts. Damdinsüren, S. Buyannemekh, M. Yadamsüren, Shi. Ayush, Ch. Dashnyam, No. Danzan, B. Rinchen, B. Sodnom, D. Sengee. During this period, the need to draw on experience to provide tools for the next generation was clearly felt and it was this feeling that guided the work of all these scholars, as demonstrated by the publication in 1947 of the first collective work dedicated to the new literary criticism.

In the mid-1940s, the specialist magazine "Tsog" (Ember) started to be released, a new turning point in the history of literary criticism and a major contribution to it. The publication of the "Introduction to Literary Analysis" by the Russian theorist G. Abramovich, translated by Sh. Gaadamba and published in serial form, was to serve as an example for a "Theoretical Précis on Literature", published in the same way in 1958. This period, which was full of ideas and major advances in the field, has remained known as a "golden age" in literature, at least as far as the twentieth century is concerned. History has remembered the names of Sh. Gaadamba, P. Khorloo, G. Zhamsranzhav, G. Renchinsambuu, Ts. Khasbaatar, S. Dashdondog, D. Tsend, Ts. Mönkh, S. Luvsanvandan, M. Bayanzul, D. Dashdorzh, D. Tsedev, G. Dūinkhorzhav, as critics and analysts who would emulate them and train numerous followers to whom they would pass on their experience: the generation of the 1960s.

Two main orientations marked this period. On the one hand, a patient work of appropriation of the experience of Western cultures in order to define clear guidelines for research as well as for the training of specialists. On the other hand, there was a desire to develop a discipline adapted to the national culture in order to highlight the specificities of contemporary Mongolian literature. A great deal of work has therefore been done to list the works and talented authors to whom complete studies have been dedicated.

In the early 1970s, literary criticism took a step towards the general public. This work of was taken on by a new generation of researchers, including Zh. Tömör, B. Tsedev, Kh. Sampildende, Ch. Dagvadorzh, Ch. Biligsaikhan, Sh. Tsend-Ayush, S. Dulam, D. Oyunbadrakh, D. Otgonsüren, D. Ölziibayar, Ch. Enkhdalai, Du. Myagmarsüren, De. Myagmarsüren, B. Ganbat. Special radio and television programmes were organised in addition to debates, seminars, conferences, national and international meetings on literature and literary criticism, always with the aim of making these issues as accessible as possible to the general public. Training institutions and literary circles were also established under the aegis of the Soviet-Mongolian Friendship Group (MZE), headed by Ts. Mönkh in the 1970s and Ch. Dagvadorzh in the 1980s. The new generation of literary scholars, strengthened by the legacy of the previous one, saw the appearance of the names of D.

Galbaatar, Ch. Zhachin, Ts. Enkhbat, Do. Tsendzhav, D. Tsolmon, G. Batbeltreg, T. Dorzhpürev, S. Baigalsaikhan, D. Battogtokh, D. Khüü, D. Davaasüren, Ch. Tuyasaikhan, S. Khövsgöl, U. Khürelbaatar, Ya. Baatar, S. Enkhbaatar.

The 1980s saw a significant turning point. Society was changing, and so was criticism. In particular, it was from 1984 onwards that a change took place, with the rise of organisations calling for an overhaul of the system, aspirations that raised a wind of self-criticism and questioning. We will come back to this soon, but let us just mention here that it is a question of freeing literature and literary studies from the ideological orientations that remained influential throughout the socialist period, and to do it in order to promote inspiration, style and originality.

All these works will only be of indirect use to us, insofar as they are exploited and cited by more recent sources which will be of direct use to our analysis. A few exceptions: *The Hundred Masterpieces of Mongolian Literature* by T. Damdinsüren (*Mongolyn uran zokhiolyn deezh zuun bilig orshivoi*), the *Overview of Mongolian Literature*, and in particular the introduction by the same author (*Mongol zokhiolyn toim*, 1957), *The History of Contemporary Mongolian Literature* (*Mongolyn orchim üyeiin uran zokhiolyn түүх*, 1985) and finally *The Changing Literature and its Problems* (*Utga zokhiolyn khögzhliin asuudluud*, 1971) for an article by Khasbaatar on Mongolian realism (*Realismyn tukhai asuudal*).

Post-socialist period

Inheriting the history outlined in the previous paragraph, a new generation of scholars has taken over to work without the crushing weight of ideological pressure and propagandistic demands. As Tsetsentsolmon has pointed out, however, the change of perspective from the 1990s onwards has not been radical, as we have just pointed out; literary studies today are at least partly in line with the literary studies of the socialist period, striving to draw on the best of it to advance research. And it is undeniable that, despite propaganda and censorship, the discipline has made major advances throughout the twentieth century. In the 1990s, a few researchers including Zh. Batbaatar and Sh. Odontör have sought to qualify the radicality of change by approaching the question of literary evolution through the prism of the renewal of tradition, a theme essential to the discipline as we shall soon see.

For a general overview of the latest developments in the discipline, mention should be made of the collective work carried out under the aegis of the Department of Letters and Languages of the Academy of Sciences and the University of Ulaanbaatar, in particular the *New Directions in Mongolian Literary Studies* (*Mongolyn uran zokhiol sudlalyn shine khandlaga*),¹⁵⁸ written in 2008 under the direction of S. Baigalsaikhan and E. Pürevzhav, complemented in 2018 by a *History of Contemporary Mongolian Literary Criticism* (*Mongolyn shine uyeiin uran zokhiolyn suudlal shüümzhleliin түүхэн найруулал*),¹⁵⁹ co-

¹⁵⁸ С. Байгалсайхан, Э. Пүрэвжав (рэд.) *Монголын уран зохиол судлалын шинэ хандлага*, Улаанбаатар, Бемби сан, 2008.

¹⁵⁹ С. Байгалсайхан, Д.Цэдэв, А. Мөнх-Оргил, Ш. Баттөр – УБИС. *Монголын шинэ үеийн уран зохиолын судлал шүүмжлэлийн түүхэн найруулал*, Улаанбаатар, Жиком пресс, 2018.

authored by S. Baigalsaikhan, D. Tsedev, A. Mönkh-Orgil, Sh. Battör. Let us also mention an article by S. Baigalsaikhan published in 1999 “The progress of the theory of literature in the 1990s” (*Yereed ony uran zokhiolyn onolyn setgelgeenii khögzhil*).¹⁶⁰

Concerning the novel in particular, *The 20th Century Mongolian Novel and Realism (Realizm ba XX зууны монголын роман)* by S. Baigalsaikhan,¹⁶¹ is a must, but let us also mention an article by B. Mönkhbayar “Evolution of the novel genre in the 1990s” (*Yereed ony romany törö züiliin khögzhliin assudald, 2001*).¹⁶² Other thematic works will support our study, notably a book devoted to Chadraabalyn Lodoidamba, the sixth volume in the collection of “100 Mongolian authors of the 20th century”,¹⁶³ by B. Mönkhbaayar, or the proceedings of the colloquium dedicated to the same author on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth, which includes, among other things, an article by Zh. Uuganbaatar on the renewal of the tradition “About two similar plots” (*Töstei khoër ögüülemzhiin tukai*) which for various reasons drew my attention.¹⁶⁴

Additional Mongolian sources

In addition to these works on literature, literary criticism and their history, several Mongolian references must be mentioned here. These are the ones that helped us to solve vocabulary-related difficulties, to immerse ourselves in the language but also in the culture it carries. I would therefore mention first and foremost the digital unilingual dictionary of the Department of Letters and Languages of the Academy of Sciences, a very valuable tool, constantly completed and corrected, and which includes many examples of uses of terms in context, particularly literary, as well as of idiomatic expressions.¹⁶⁵ I have also sometimes relied on the *Concise Mongolian Dictionary (Mongol khelnii товч тайлбар толи)* in printed form, dating from 1966.¹⁶⁶

For more specific points on the vocabulary related to the Buddhist religion, its hierarchy and organisation, I will mention the *Dictionary of Buddhist Religion and Culture (Buddyn shashin, соёлын тайлбар толи)*¹⁶⁷ of the National University of Mongolia (2000) and the *Dictionary of Foreign Terms Entered into the Mongolian Language (Mongol khelnii hari ügiin толи)* by O. Sükhbaatar (1997).¹⁶⁸ Concerning the administrative system set up by the Manchu administration during the past centuries, I referred to the *Administrative System of Outer Mongolia during the Manchu Era (Manzhiin zakhirgaand baisan uyeiin*

¹⁶⁰ С. Байгалсайхан “Ерээд оны уран зохиолын онолын сэтгэлгээний хөгжил” *Монголын уран зохиолын онол гоо зүйн судалгаа*” Улаанбаатар, 1999.

¹⁶¹ С. Байгалсайхан *Реализм ба XX зууны Монголын Роман*, Улаанбаатар, “Ган зам пресс”, 2019.

¹⁶² Б. Мөнхбаяр “1990-ээд оны романы төрөл зүйлийн хөгжлийн асуудалд” *Уран зохиолын судлал* Улаанбаатар, боть XXV 15 тал, 2001.

¹⁶³ Б. Мөнхбаяр, “Чадраабалын Лодойдамба”, *XX зууны Монгол зохиолчид*, боть 6, Улаанбаатар хот ШУА-ийн Хэл зохиолын хүрээлэн, 2014.

¹⁶⁴ С. Байгалсайхан (рэд), Ж. Ууганбаатар, *XX зууны монголын уран зохиолын үнэт зүйл ба Ч. Лодойдамба* (олон улсын эрдэм шинжилгээний хурлын эмхэтгэл) ШУА-ийн ХЗХ, Улаанбаатар, 2017. About the article by Zh. Uuganbaatar, I singled it out because I translated it into French. Yet, for the time being it has remained unpublished.

¹⁶⁵ <https://mongoltoli.mn>.

¹⁶⁶ Я. Цэвэл, С. Лувсанвандан, *Монгол хэлний товч тайлбар толь*, Улаанбаатар, Улсын хэвлэлийн хэргийг эрхлэх хороо, 1966.

¹⁶⁷ Н. Хавх, *Буддын шашин, соёлын тайлбар толь*, Улаанбаатар, МУИС, 2000.

¹⁶⁸ О. Сүхбаатар, *Монгол хэлний харь үгийн толь*, Улаанбаатар, Адмон компани, 1997.

Ar Mongolyn zasag zakhirgany zokhion baiguulalt) by Ts. Sonomdagvaa.¹⁶⁹ The complexity of this system, indeed, appears very clearly in our novels through the abundance of titles, distinctions, functions and ranks, which were still very much in use at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Finally, I must also mention here a biography of Damingiin Sükhbaatar, exploited in our fourth chapter when addressing the issue of the invention of the national hero and the cult of personality.¹⁷⁰

2.2. Other sources

Non-Mongolian sources dedicated to Mongolian history, culture and language abound, and those that could be used for our study are also very numerous. I will therefore limit myself here to citing only the most essential ones, those to which I have really referred in order to build my reflection.

Given our subject matter, the work of Charles Bawden immediately comes to mind. His bilingual English-Mongol dictionary, one of the most comprehensive available, is a tool for everyday use that has proved invaluable to me. He is also one of the few non-Mongol scholars to have taken an interest in literature and its history. His *Mongolian Literature: an Anthology*,¹⁷¹ an impressive compilation of texts, translated and annotated, in which he has endeavoured to “introduce the readers to some of the various genre of literature [...] in which the genius of the Mongolian people expressed itself from early beginnings in the thirteenth century up to the end of the nineteenth century”, as he writes, is an excellent introduction for anyone wishing to study contemporary literature in historical depth. From the point of view of general history, his *Modern History of Mongolia* remains a fundamental reference for the period from Mongolia’s integration into the Manchu Empire to the second half of the 20th century.¹⁷² This book was helpful in understanding the state of Mongolian society at the very beginning of the twentieth century, the society that serves as the starting point for most of our novels. It was a society in transition, still very much marked by the feudal system and the mode of administration set up by the Manchu power.

We also see under Bawden’s pen how important was the role played by the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia throughout this period and understand that in order to appreciate what happened in the region from the 1910s onwards, it is important to go back several centuries, to the founding of the Buddhist Church by Öndör Gegeen, the first Zhavzandamba Khutagt. In this regard, additional references should be mentioned here, with the work of Zsolt Szilágyi “Nomadic Culture, Society and the Founder of the

¹⁶⁹ Ц. Сономдагваа, Манжийн захиргаанд байсан үеийн Ар Монголын засаг захиргааны зохион байгуулалт (1691-1911), Улаанбаатар, Шинжлэх Ухааны Академийн хэвлэл, 1961

¹⁷⁰ Дамдингийн Сүхбаатар, намтар, Улаанбаатар, Улсын хэвлэлийн газар, 1983.

¹⁷¹ (Online version) First edition: Bawden Ch., *Mongolian literature. Anthology*. Columbia University Press. 2003

¹⁷² Bawden, 1968, *op.cit.*

Humphrey Caroline, “Exemplars and rules: aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia”, in Signe Howell (ed.) *The Ethnography of Moralities*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 25-47.

Mongolian Buddhist Church”.¹⁷³ By the same author, let’s also mention his PhD dissertation, a historical study of the beginning of the modern Mongolian state,¹⁷⁴ and works on the recent evolution of the status of Buddhism in Mongolia.

That said, Bawden is now a rather ancient source that should be completed by more recent one. Moreover, it is not devoid of shortcomings and mistakes. To quote Irina Morozova:

“Ch. Bawden in his fundamental work, *Contemporary History of Mongolia*, gave a comprehensive periodisation of Mongolia’s twentieth century history, singling out the Seventh MPRP Congress of 1928 as a turning point in determining future development under the USSR and Comintern leadership. According to Bawden, before the Seventh Congress Mongolian politicians had enough room to manoeuvre, while the population’s way of life had not undergone any significant change. The author called the confiscation campaigns and the leftist extremism of 1929–1932 a ‘socialist fiasco’. What exactly that fiasco was, who benefited from the left’s experiments, and what was particularly socialist about them the author left unsolved”.¹⁷⁵

And soon after:

“Bawden, following his Soviet colleagues and, in fact, concurring with them, identified the revolutionary social reform as the ‘destruction of the former feudal order’. Concerning the next stage of the MPR’s development, the scholar opposed the official Soviet historiography and defined the country of the 1940s as a totalitarian state and Kh. Choibalsan’s regime as a dictatorship”.¹⁷⁶

This call for vigilance if needed and the latter author’s work will in this respect provide a valuable source in an attempt to improve our understanding of events, in particular from 1921 onwards.

Irina Morozova’s thesis, published in 2009, was quite daring. The author explains this in an introductory chapter in which she sets out to draw up an “sketch” of Mongolian studies in the Twentieth century: she proposes a highly critical re-reading of previous work, aware, however, that such a commitment is not generally appreciated by other researchers, especially those who enjoy an authority and experience that the author herself does not enjoy:

“The goal of this historiography sketch was originally rather ambitious: it identify the status quo of Mongol studies in the field of twentieth century history. With time, as a few years passed since the first version of this text was written, I became even more

¹⁷³ Szilágyi Zsolt, “The Nomadic Culture, Society and the founder of Mongolian Buddhist Church in Nowadays”, In: Birtalan, Á; Majer, Zs; Szilágyi, Zs; Teleki, K (szerk.) *Buddhizmus a mai Mongóliában. Traditional Mongolian Culture III*, Budapest, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2015, pp. 41-47.

¹⁷⁴ Szilágyi Zsolt, *The beginning of the modern Mongolian State*, PhD dissertation, ELTE University, Budapest, 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Morozova, op. cit. p. 18.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

determined in my aim. Concerned about the future of Mongol studies, I decided to point out the main theoretical, methodological and conceptual omissions in the current discussions among Mongolists. Containing a great deal of criticism towards my teachers and colleagues (a manoeuvre not very popular in the world of Mongol studies), this sketch aspires to continue discussions on the problems mentioned below. It was not my intention to mention all the published works dealing with the twentieth century Mongols, but rather to concentrate on those that illustrate most achievements and gaps in our knowledge”.¹⁷⁷

She therefore places Soviet, Mongolian and Western researchers back to back, both during the socialist period and since the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of “Post Cold War Mongol Studies”. As far as the research carried out in the USSR and Mongolia before 1990 is concerned, although it benefited from a solid and long-standing disciplinary tradition (she cites the names of N.Ya. Bichurin, V.P. Vasiliev, K.F. Golstunski, G.E. Grum-Gryzhimailo, Ts.J. Jamtsarano, P.K. Kozlov, V.L. Kotvich, A.M. Pozdnev, G.N. Potanin, N.M. Przhivalski, V.V. Radlove), they were ideologically oriented by a Marxist reading of history, which means that they must be viewed with the necessary hindsight:

“Based primarily on the Marxist theory of socio-economic development and focused on identifying the dominant type of production and labour relationships, it depicted nomadic pastoralism as a degraded productive economy. As the analysis by Soviet scholars was deemed to indicate a way for future development, the keystone of research was the transition to socialism”.¹⁷⁸

During the same period, Western researchers were just as biased in their negative analysis of Soviet influence:

“The general approach to twentieth century Mongol history by G. Fritters J. Murphy, A. Sanders and R. Rupen was predominantly based on a negative characteristic of Soviet influence in Mongolia. Practically all Western scholars shared the concept of the Soviet satellite”¹⁷⁹.

According to Morozova The denunciation of the harmful influence of the Soviets continues to burden research, with the added handicap that Mongolian researchers, in particular, are rewriting history in a radically opposite direction, while retaining the same methods and conceptual framework:

“Mongolian policymakers, most of whom were representatives of the former socialist elite, could not blot out all their previous socio-political experiences, but a populist tendency to blame the Soviet dictatorship for all the misfortunes endured by Mongolian society in the 1920s–1940s prevailed. Bearing the Soviets a grudge for rapid (especially economic) withdrawal in the early 1990s provoked a negative

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 17. With the exception of Bawden.

revisionism about the USSR's role in Mongolian history. In the public domain, Soviet and Mongolian schools suffered owing to insufficient development of the humanities and social sciences. Some Mongolian historians either accepted their socialist ancestors' assumptions and interpreted the newly discovered facts in the old-fashioned way, telling tales about the MPR's independence achieved with active Soviet assistance, or underestimated the USSR's role in Mongolia's development, completely ignoring the influence of such organisations as the Comintern".¹⁸⁰

Morova's work is acknowledged as a valuable and refreshing work that covers in detail the period from the start of the revolution in 1921 to the end of the first five-year plan in 1952 and gives an overview of the post-socialist socio-political transformation (Kh. Choibalsan's political cult, role of the military and the impact of Second World War on Mongolian society).

In the chapter on the invention and promotion of national heroes, an important theme of this research, I used Christopher Kaplonski's *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes* as a main reference.¹⁸¹

With regard to the socialist period, and when questioning the influence of censorship and propaganda on literature and minds, I will refer extensively to the work of the British anthropologist Caroline Humphrey for her articles "Remembering an Enemy: the Bogd Khaan in Twentieth Century Mongolia"¹⁸² and "Exemplars and rules: aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia".¹⁸³ Together with Pedersen's work, in particular his article "Tarrying with Repression: Political Anecdotes and Social Memory in Northern Mongolia"¹⁸⁴ these provide us with useful analytical tools ("elusive transcripts", "mnemonic tropes") for the study of discourses of memory.

Finally, a "special case" that I choose to mention here because it is written in English though the author is Mongol, is the work of the anthropologist Tsetsentsolmon on the relationship between politics, culture and literature during the socialist period and after the transition.¹⁸⁵ In particular, I would like to point out an article where, paying particular attention to the context of writing, she convincingly shows how the regime at the time used

¹⁸⁰Ibid, p. 20. She refers for example to: L. Jamsran Hereed, *Mongolyn türijn tusgaar togtnolyn sergelt* [Mongolian state independence establishment] (Ulaanbaatar, 1997), *Khordugaar zuuny Mongol* [The Mongols of the 20th century] (Ulaanbaatar, 1995).

¹⁸¹ Kaplonski, *op.cit.*

¹⁸² Humphrey Caroline, "Remembering an Enemy: the Bogd Khaan in Twentieth Century Mongolia", in R. Watson (ed.) *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, Santa Fé, School of American Research, 1994, pp. 21-44.

¹⁸³ Humphrey Caroline, "Exemplars and rules: aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia", in Signe Howell (ed.) *The Ethnography of Moralities*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 25-47.

¹⁸⁴ Pedersen Morten Axel, "Tarrying with Repression: Political Anecdotes and Social Memory in Northern Mongolia", *Inner Asia*, vol. 8, 2006, pp. 163-181.

¹⁸⁵ Tsetsentsolmon Baatarnaran, "The "gong beat" against the "uncultured" : contested notions of culture and civilization in Mongolia", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol.15, n°4, 2014, pp. 422-438; "Music in Cultural Construction", *Inner Asia*, Vol. 17, n°1, 2015, pp.118-140; "Between "Hobbled" (Chödörtei) and "Free" (Chöölöötei): The Mongolian Literature in Transition", Ulaanbaatar, National University of Mongolia, *Acta Mongolica* Vol.17, n°492, 2018.

literature to educate the people and promote its model of society. Based on interviews and testimonies, the author has revealed the mechanisms of a very elaborate system which, through the allocation of positions and functions, aimed to push writers to conform to doxa-compliant writing standards. We will return to this in the next chapter.

I shall however admit that my original background is that of a general anthropologist and even if my first contacts with Mongolia date back to 2005, it is only from 2021 on that Mongolian studies became my main focus. For this reason, All the sources mentioned in this section or so had been compiled and studied during this span of time. I am well aware of the work that remains to be done to expand and enrich these sources.

2.3. Fieldwork

A very brief word about so-called “field” research: if the anthropologist resorts to history to give depth to his or her reflection in the study of a society’s present, it is often this same present that prompts the historian to ask questions of the past. This research is the culmination of a project that has grown and matured in contact with contemporary Mongolian society, during numerous visits spread over a period since 2005, when I first discovered the country. These visits have allowed me to immerse myself in a part, however small, of the culture and ways of seeing the world of my interlocutors, to whom I must express my gratitude and sympathy.

Indeed, stays of several months in Züüngovi, in the Uvs Aimag, helped me to appreciate Mongolia’s diversity, beyond the clichés or I hope so.

As I already presented this path of mine in the foreword and the way I came to Mongolian studies, I allow myself not to dwell upon it here and so as to directly adress the subject matter.

I also cannot thank enough the help and support of the Academy of Sciences, and especially these of B. Mönkhbayar, with whom I had the opportunity to work closely from spring 2022 onwards and who has enabled me to enrich my thinking in ways I had not previously imagined.

Chapter two: a people and their “*nutag*”¹⁸⁶

1. A necessary composition with the land

1.1. Geography and climate of Mongolia

Mongolia’s territory is vast and her population sparse. A landlocked country, it covers an area of some 1,564,116 square kilometres, with a population of just 3, 3 million. Anecdotal but telling: as a child, I remember learning in geography class about the notion of a “human desert”, the teacher used Mongolia as an example. Indeed, Mongolia holds the record for being the least populated country in the world, except in the case of fully sovereign states. Combined with this low population density, her severe continental climate is one of the factors which may have the most influenced her development. The whole country lies relatively high. The highest point, the Tavan Bogd (Altai mountain range in the west), is 4374 m above sea level, the lowest being the lake Kukulunor in the north east, only 560 m above sea level.

“Few travellers can have gained an overall impression of the Mongol landscape” Bawden wrote. And indeed, if Mongolia is mainly mountainous, with vast expanses of steppe at its centre, it cannot be reduced to an overall characterisation: it includes mountain ranges as well as low plains and plateaus, volcanic and desert areas, lake regions and forest areas. In the paragraph that follows, I will mostly borrow from Bawden his description.

A journey from West to East

In the west one will see the greatest mountain peaks with the Altai range, a land of eternal snow on the high summits, of glaciers, waterfall and torrents, and of mountain lakes. The Northeast of the Mongol Altai is a vast basin dotted with lakes, some salt water, some fresh and is bounded by the Siberian Tannu Ula range.

Central Mongolia is dominated by the Khangai Mountains, a land of rich pastures and forests, rising to peaks also covered in eternal snow. To the north-east, the foot of the range is marked by large granite boulders and slowly merges into the pastures and fertile farmland of the Tuul Orkhon basin, the so-called “heartland of Mongolia”.

Ulaanbaatar lies at the eastern edge of this basin, set in the wide valley of the Tuul river, amongst hills which form the southern extensions of the Khentei Mountains: a range of medium height, still largely covered with virgin forests. From Ulaanbaatar southwards and eastwards stresses a grassy plateau which sinks gradually into the semi-desert Gobi area and the volcanic plateau of the Dariganga region.

¹⁸⁶ *Nutag* means country focusing on the land, the landscape, often with an affective connotation, it is the country where one is born or at least is attached to.

Through the novels of our corpus, one would travel with *Tungalag Tamir* in the generous western valleys overhung by high peaks and where the richness of the pastures allows the constitution of very large herds where cows and yaks dominate, visit the ruins of the ancient sedentary cities of the Orkhon valley in *Üüriin Tuya*, enter Ulaanbaatar many times - Bogdyn Khüree, Da Khüree or Ikh Khüree depending on the period or the one who speaks -, pass through the north-eastern regions with *Dain*, or the Dariganga region with *Gazar Shoroo*...

The Climate

Far from the influence of the sea, surrounded by mountains and itself at a relatively high altitude, Mongolia has a severe, extreme and unpredictable climate. The passage from season to season is abrupt, and the weather can change equally abruptly in the course of a single day. Between winter and summer there may be a temperature difference of as much as 90°C and within a single day, a variation of 20° to 30°C may occur. Snowfall is generally light, but when snow falls and freezes it may have dramatic consequences for the herds. A sudden snow storm can have a disastrous effect upon a herd of horses, which perhaps several hundred strong, may panic, turn downwind and gallop till exhausted and lost or buried in snowdrifts and hidden hollows.

Our novels capture the severity of these extreme weather events. One thinks, for example, of the *zud*¹⁸⁷ that strikes the people of Oold Beis¹⁸⁸ in the second book of *Tungalag Tamir* – I will quote it in one of the paragraphs that follow–, forcing them to migrate to the *khoshuu*¹⁸⁹ of Luu Gün, or of a chapter of *Üüriin Tuya*, in which B. Rinchen shows us a herding family struggling with the elements, a family who even in the midst of a winter tornado do not give up braving the storm to lead their animals to pasture. Once the storm has passed, the head of the family underlines the the seriousness of the consequences that can result from this kind of climatic event for both animals and people but also their banality.

However, in Bawden' words, despite this extreme and unfriendly climate, “the Mongol people have managed to carve out for themselves a livelihood which, while anything but luxurious, has at least on the material side given them a standard of nutrition and accommodation”.¹⁹⁰

The opposition, the cultural clash between herding and farming, between nomadic and sedentary life, is often put forward to explain the wars and conflicts that have marked the history of the Mongols and their neighbours. The antagonism is certainly real, but one must beware of any geographical or climatic determinism, as well as of being satisfied with this sole explanation. It should also be noted that the sedentarisation currently observed in Mongolia is not a new phenomenon, far from it. To quote Bawden again:

¹⁸⁷ *Zud*: Disaster affecting livestock caused by severe natural conditions, *zud* can result from heat and drought (*khaluun* or *khuurai zud*), from excessive snow (*tsagaan* or *tsasan zud*), they can imply starvation of livestock resulting from lack of water in a snowless winter (*khar zud*) or from lack of feed (*turkhan zud*).

¹⁸⁸ Region of present-day Arkhangai, located in the sum of Khoton.

¹⁸⁹ Often translated in English by the term “banner”. I prefer to use the mongol word which I find more appropriate for a concept that is largely an endemic one.

¹⁹⁰ He adds that though the diet is not always balanced in accordance with modern standards, they are fed well as they need to be and many people”. Notice that he was writing in the late 1960s, the diet is much more balanced now but generally speaking, his comment remains valid.

“In the fertile pasture and agricultural land of the Tuul Orkhon basin, the heartland of Mongolia [...] ruins of ancient cities, long deserted, dot the landscape, the more celebrated of them being the ruins of Karakorum, the imperial capital of the successors of Chinggis Khan. There nomadic peoples have turned to settled life”.¹⁹¹

Therefore, if we want to understand the emergence of a Mongolian identity it would be interesting to draw a general overview of the numerous and varied representation associated by the Mongols with their “*nutag*”.¹⁹² This is what we will do in the next paragraph.

1.2. Relation to the homeland

Polyphonic representations of the “nutag” through the Mongolian novel under the socialist regime.

We saw earlier that Brubacker warned us against the misuse of terms and concepts that, once overused, no longer mean anything, and in any case nothing that can support a line of reasoning. If “identity” suffers from its excessive popularity, one that extends well beyond the world of research, “nationalism” and “patriotism” are not immune to such distortion.

When we use the term “patriotism” in the present work, we do so with great caution, hence the use of inverted commas to translate the Mongolian expression *ekh oron üzel*, word for word the idea - or the doctrine, the ideology - of the **motherland**.

Whatever term is used to designate what we are dealing with in this research - the expression of a Mongolian way of being - it is impossible to dispense with a section on the relationship the Mongols maintain with this “*ekh oron*”, itself closely linked to the notion of “*nutag*”. Moreover, the particular attachment that the Mongols express towards their traditional environment, that of nomadism, i.e. “nature” (another term that should always be used with caution), is, so to speak, an essential point in any research in the field of Mongolian studies. The corollary of this last observation is that the literature on this subject is abundant, as are the prisms through which it is apprehended, and given the breadth of this vast subject, we must limit ourselves here to what our sources allow us to say about it, and sketch out only a few paths of reflection that would deserve to be explored in greater depth, a possible task to set for oneself.

¹⁹¹ Bawden, 1968, p.7.

¹⁹² In his book, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes*, Kaplonski insists that “*nutag*” and *uls*” are terms that are central to Mongolian conceptions of identity, and therefore lay emphasis on them as “key element in understanding how historical figures are represented in Mongolian social memory”. He defines them as follow:

“*Nutag*, means most commonly “birthplace” of “homeland”; it can also mean “pasture-land” in a more physical, material sense. As such, it usually refers to a smaller area of land than does *uls*. It can and is, however, abstracted to reference Mongolia as a whole”. Kaplonski Christopher, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, p. 19.

Without embarking on a statistical study of our sources, a quick search of the use of these two terms or expressions *ekh oron/oronch* and *nutag* in *Tungalag Tamir* and *Üüriin Tuya* already yields some interesting results.

Ekh oron (ch) cannot be neglected here, as it was a key notion in the cultural policy of the time, in other words in the propaganda enterprise put in place by the regime and in which authors of literature were authoritatively involved. I will translate it as “motherland” rather than “fatherland” or “homeland” mainly because *ekh* stands for “mother”. As the academician Ts. Damdinsüren, in the Introduction to his *Overview of Mongolian Literature*, a passage I already quote but would like to highlight again ¹⁹³

“**Үндэсний үзэлтэн** нар өөрийн үндэстнийг бусад үндэстэнтэй найрамдах замаар биш, дайсагнуулах замаар ажилладаг байна. Үндэсний үзэлтэй зохиолч нар бол одоогийн хөдөлмөрийн хүмүүсийг уран зохиолын гол баатар болгохын оронд хуучин хаад ноёдыг гол баатар болгохыг л эрхэмлэдэг байсан. Энэ бол **үндэсний үзлийн** илрэл байжээ. **Үндэсний үзлийг** бид **эх оронч** үзлээс заавал ялгах хэрэгтэй. **Эх орноо хайрлах, ард түмнээ хүндэтгэх, соёлын өвийг хямгаалан ашиглах явбал эх оронч үзэл мөн бөгөөд үндэсний үзэл биш**”

“Nationalists do not favour friendship between their own nationals and others but hostile behaviour. Instead of giving the main role to contemporary working class representatives, nationalist writers used to concede it to noyons (lords) and khans (princes) of ancient times. This was an evidence of their nationalist ideology. We do have to distinguish nationalism from patriotism. **To love one’s motherland, to hold one’s people in high esteem, to preserve one’s cultural inheritance, this is patriotism, this is not nationalism.**”¹⁹⁴

Although in quantitative terms the expression “**ekh oron/ch**” appears very rarely in our two novels - only three times in *Tungalag Tamir*, just over six times in *Üüriin Tuya*¹⁹⁵ - I think we can argue that from a qualitative point of view it remains essential.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ When I wish to emphasize some part in the original mongol source I will quote it ahead of the translation. When I use it only as a matter of reference I add it in smaller characters and after its translation.

¹⁹⁴ Дамдинсүрэн, Ц. *Монголын уран зохиолын тойм*: 3 т. /БНМАУ Шинжлэх Ухааны Академи, Хэл зохиолын хүрээлэн; ред. Ц. Дамдинсүрэн, Д. Цэнд. — Улаанбаатар : Улсын хэвлэлийн хэрэг эрхлэх хороо газар, 1957—1976, p. 10-11.

¹⁹⁵ I do not have the entire computer file, which makes a complete search impossible.

¹⁹⁶ The very limited frequency of these occurrences allows us to record them all in the form of a note so as not to make the development too cumbersome:

Дайсан арван мянга гаруй бид дөрвөн зуу гаруй. Гэвч бидний хөл дор минь доромжлогдсон **эх орон**, ард минь зовсон ард түмэн байга болохоор бид дийлэхгүй байж болохгүй.

Our enemies are more than ten thousand, we are four hundred. But the ground beneath our feet is that of our humiliated **motherland**. And it is against the oppression of our people that we are fighting. We cannot fail to emerge victorious...

Сүхбаатарт жилийн өмнө гаминд эзлэгдсэн хүрээнээс оргон гарч, **эх орон**, ард олно түмэн зовлон мянган гашунас аврах их хүсэл эрмэлзлийг өвөрлөн умрыг зорьж явсан нь бодогдоно.

Sükhbaatar thought back to his escape from Khüree a year earlier, when the city was still in Gemin hands. He had headed north with the firm resolve to put an end to the suffering of the people, of the motherland.

Өдөр ирэх тутам ардын журамт цэргийн тоо олширч эгнээ нь батжин өсөж байлаа. Дарлал зовлонгоор жирэмсэлсэн монгол орны тал бүрээс зэвсэгтэй зэвсэггүй морьтой явган хүмүүс цугларан, **эх орон** ард түмэндээ эрх чөлөө, тусгаар тогтнолыг олгох болд илдийг давтаж эхлэв.

Day after day, new recruits swelled the ranks of the regular army in formation. From the four corners of Mongolia, from this land fertilised by suffering and oppression, men arrived, armed or unarmed, on foot or on horseback, and gathered together, forging the weapons that would give freedom and independence to the people and their **motherland**.

We should note with this passage that if we had extended our search to include occurrences of *Mongol oron*, the frequency would certainly have increased significantly, but this does not aim at being a precise survey. Here, *ekh oron* is associated with suffering and oppression on the one hand, and freedom and independence on the other. The choice of terms is also far from insignificant, with an anthropomorphisation of Mongolian space to which Franck Billé draws our attention in his book *Sinophobia: anxiety, violence and the making of Mongolian identity*:

“It is also noteworthy that “the nation” is often associated with a notion of womanhood (Yuval-Davis 1997). This is also the case in Mongolia, where the country tends to be depicted as a feminized body, which, in Ahmed’s (2004) formulation, is “penetrated” or “invaded” by others (see also picture in Bulag 1998, 152). The capital Ulaanbaatar itself is occasionally referred to as the “white damsel of the East” (Aziin tsagaan dagina)”.¹⁹⁷

This metaphor is indeed recurrent in the discourse, and there are many examples of it in Lodoidamba’s novel. When Erdene, the protagonist of *Tungalag Tamir*, defends a woman threatened with rape by soldiers, at the time of the *Gemin* invasion of Khüree, two nobles, two sympathisers of the White Russians, enlist him in their ranks:

- What a beating those Gemin took! I enjoyed it.
- I was not going to let this woman be humiliated in front of everyone.
- Our Mongolia is suffering their infamous humiliation too, Tseveen sighed, looking him straight in the eye.

- Чи ч гамингуудтай сайн зодолдсон шүү. Би харад их л баярласан.
- Эмэгтэй хүнийг түмний нүдэн дээр доромжилж байхыг харад тэвчиж чадаггүй юм.
- Манай монгол ч бузар доромжлогдож байна даа гээд Цэвээн тэргүүн гүн санаа алдаж Эрдэнэ рүү харлаа.

¹⁹⁷ Billé Franck, *Sinophobia: anxiety, violence and the making of Mongolian identity*, Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2015. S’agissant des auteurs auxquels il fait référence : Yuval-Davis Nira, *Gender and Nation*, London, Sage, 1997 ; Ahmed Sara, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Bulag Uradyn, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, New York, Clarendon Press, 1998.

Or, applied more specifically to Khüree, the same metaphore is employed at the moment when the victorious regular army led by Sükhbaatar entered the town:

Enlivened by the clamour of the crowd, beaming with happiness, the city was like a young mother who hears the newborn child birthed in pain utter its first cry
Олны шуугиан оволзож, баярын мишээл тодорсон хүрээ, шаналан байж гаргасан хүүхдийнхээ энхрий дууг сонсон залу эх шиг байлаа.

This anthropomorphisation of the nation is a form of expression of the attachment that links Mongols to their “territory”, their “country”, – words that I use also with caution because I find it difficult to postulate a strict equivalence between the various Mongolian terms that refer to space (*nutag, oron, uls, gazar, gazar shoroo, khödöö, tal kheer*, etc.) and the categories of European languages (territory, country, countryside, etc.)– This relationship is expressed in a variety of ways, not only in discourse, but also in practice.

This polyphony appears in our corpus, the expression of this relationship being always linked in some way to the fact of feeling Mongolian, thus referring to the idea of a common belonging to one or more “collectives”(collectives that involve non human entities, as we shall see). All these ways of inhabiting Mongolian space, although necessarily interconnected, do not all relate to the same registers. Let’s try to illustrate this by exploring some of the themes that appear in the novels.

Expressions of attachment to the “nutag”

“ükhtel orshikh törölkh nutag”
(Gazar Shoroo)
And die where I was born

In *Tungalag Tamir* and *Gazar Shoroo*, the attachment to the land and to nature is immediately obvious, if only in the title: the Tamir is a river in Arkhangai, *tungalag* meaning limpid, and *Gazar Shoroo* can be translated as “The Earth”, the emphasis being on its concrete character, a space with the land interacting. (*Gazar Shoroo* is also about the soil, nature that can be transformed, land that can be exploited).

I would like to take a moment to look at this novel in particular, which would have merited an in-depth analysis in order to tackle this theme, but which I wasn’t able to get hold of and read until it was too late.

Impossible, however, to illustrate this idea of attachment to the native land – the land of birth, that of the ancestors,– without sayin a word about the first chapter “And die where you were born”, which tells the story of a very old woman born in the Dariganga region, near the Altan Ovoo.¹⁹⁸ She went to Inner Mongolia to pay homage to a great lama from Tibet who was passing nearby, and to “spread virtue” (*buyan*) on behalf of her *khoshuu*. But the old woman feels that she is nearing the end of her life and has no hope of reaching

¹⁹⁸ The Altan Ovoo also known as Dari Ovoo is an extinct volcano in the sum of Dariganga district, Sukhbaatar Aimag in eastern Mongolia. It culminated at 1,354 metres and is a regional sacred mountain in Mongolia.

back her birth place. As they get closer (she has left with her son), however, she is won over by the hope of seeing her “Altan Ovoo” again. The chapter acts as an incipit; the reader knows nothing about the characters yet, so it is only as the story unfolds that he discovers who they are, as they both get closer to their destination. Gradually we come to understand what is at stake for the very old woman in reaching a goal she had previously thought out of reach:

May my son live a hundred years! Altan Ovoo Mini, give my son the strength to carry on to the end!

“Миний хүү зуу наслаг! Алтан Овоо минь, миний хүүгийн хийморийг өргөж яваарай!”
[...]

Altan Ovoo mini! Altan Ovoo Mini! Ah, if only I could see your sacred land again in my lifetime!
She prayed, before dipping her ladle into the pot of tea, dipping her lips in it and making three libations towards the east.

Алтан овоо минь! Алтан оюоо минь! Гэгээн зүсийг чинь амьдаа нэг харах минь! Хэмээн сүсэглэн залбираад тогоотой цайнаасаа шанаганд амсуулан, зүүн хойт зүг гурвантаа өргөж цацжээ”
[...]

Your mother slept very well last night. It won't be long before we see our motherland, sleep comes more easily and the body feels lighter. Now, my son, carry your mother until she sees the outline of her Altan Ovoo, then you can leave her. Her bones will rest in peace. I will die with no regrets.

“Ээж нь урьд шөнө сайхан унтлаа. Нутгийн бараа дөхсөнийх биз, нойр шингэрч, бие хөнгөрч байна. За миний хүү ээжийгээ одоо Алтан овооныхоо барааг харуулаад л хаячихаарай, тэгвэл л яс амрах нь тэр! Үхэхэд гомдолгүй гэжээ.”
[...]

Mum, didn't you say you would die without regret if you reached the edge of the country? he teased.
Impossible my son, not when your body is still so strong! Impossible to die without seeing my Altan Ovoo again! Did she say with great veneration.

“Ээж та нутгийн дээс л хүрвэл үхэхэд гомдолгүй гэсэн чинь яалаа гэж цаашлуулсан ... Тэгдэггүй юм, миний хүү! Бие ийм овоо байхад Алтан овооныхоо барааг харалгүй үхэж болохгүй гэж сүсэглэжээ.
[...]

It is true, I have thought about it too. I am too old and not strong enough to go all the way to Lhasa. The *khoshuu* is not devoid of noblemen to saddle their mounts and set off for the Land of Snow. But these people do not think about virtue. But you and I

both know that our country is not so happy. That is why I have decided, when a great lama from Buddha's country comes so close to me, to go and ask him for indulgences for the nutag where my descendants will live, to ask for absolution and to die serenely. If you won't do it for your mother, the only one you have, then do it for your nutag: take me there !

Тийм ээ, би чиний хэлу байгааг бас бодсон, Баруун зууд хүргээд өгдөг нас хөл хоёр надад ямар байх биш! Хүлгээ хүлэлгээд Цастны оронд оччихоор ноёд энэ хошуунд байвч тэд буян боддоггүй улс. Гэтэл хошуу нутаг маань тийм ч жаргалтай бишийг чи бид хоёр үзэж байна. Ингээд л би бурхны орноос дөхөж ирсэн ламд очиж үр үндэс минь орших ус нутагтаа буян хишиг гуйж толгойгоо тамгалуулаад, хамаагүй тэндээ ч болов үхье гэж шийдсэн юм. Чи ганц эхдээ биш ч газар шороонгдоо ерөөл бодож намайг авч яв “ хэмээжээ
[...]

Just like our cradle, our nutag! It is, of course, the cradle of our Mongolian brothers!

Манай нутаг шиг өлгий юм! Монгол ах дүүгийн өлгий биз!
[...]

Your mother would at least like to set foot on the edge of her nutag before she dies. Please drag me to the edge of Dariganga!
Twenty days had passed since then and the day before, after crossing the *khoshuu* of the Sönöd Van, they had reached the Dariganga.

Ээж нь нутгийнхаа зах дээр л гишгээд үхэх юмсан. Чи намайг чирч яваад Даригангаын дээсийг л хүртгэж үз! Тэрнээс хойш хорь хоног яваад өчигдөр үдэш энэ хоёр Сөнөд вангийн хошууг нэвтрэн Даригангын захад орж ирсэн ажээ.

I wanted to quote these extracts from the chapter in order, without feeling it necessary to comment on them. One can feel the affection that binds the grandmother to the place where she was born, this old woman who cannot die until she sees again the country for which she went to ask a lama from Tibet for Good Fortune. The whole novel is based on the idea of a powerful bond between the people of Dariganga and their birthplace, a region with a special status because it was there, on the edge of Inner Mongolia, that the Manchu Empire kept its horse reserves. And it is this attachment to the land “*gazar shoroo*“ that drives the protagonists into the struggle for independence and revolution.

However, as I wrote above, I have laked time to study this novel in depth.

In *Tungalag Tamir*, the link between the characters and their *nutag* is no less strong. In the following extract, Erdene is invited to sing by Itgelt as many guests gather in the *ger* of the wealthy herder for a Naadam. For our purposes, the reason for Erdene's bad mood is irrelevant (he has caught Dulmaa, who is married to Galsan, in the company of Tsamba the llama, or so he thinks). As he sings a song from his birthplace, *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*, which is by the way the favourite song of his brother, Tömör, the image of the region where he was born comes back into his mind and soothes him. Erdene lives in “exile” in the Tamir valley, having had to leave his native Govi Altai to escape the hatred of the Zasagt Khan.

“- Dulmaa, leave the singer in peace! intervened Itgelt with a big smile and a knowing wink for Erdene. Erdene stood up and sang Erdene Zasgiin Unaga in a vibrant voice. The Taishir mountains, Alan valley and many other images of his nutag came back to him, taking him far, far away from the smut of Tsamba and Dulmaa. For a moment, without being able to explain it, his heart warmed. He let himself be lulled by this mirage, by the ambient cheerfulness and by the strong scent of the *arkhi*. At the end of the last verse, everyone cheered, jolting him out of his reverie. He immediately fell back into harsh reality”.

- Дуулах хүнийг битгий шах гэж Итгэлт хэлээд тал зассан дулаан нүдээр Эрдэнийг харж мишээж нүдээ ирмэлээ.

Эрдэнэ өндийж суугаад «Эрдэнэ засгийн унага»-аа доргилуулан дуулж эхлэв. Нүдэнд нь Тайширын нуруу, Алангийн хөндий зэрэг өссөн төрсөн нутагт харагдах шиг болоод саяхан шиг Дулмаа, Цамба хоёрыг жигшин оволзож байсан сэтгэл нь аяндаа зөөлөрч бүх бодлыг нь эх нутгийн дүр, архины аагаар манарсан үл үзэгдэх, үл ойлгогдох боловч, зүрхийг нь хөдөлгөсөн баярын зэргэлээгээр дүүргэв.

Сүүлийн түрлэг дуусаж цугларагсад Эрдэнийн хоолойг олон сайхан үгээр магтан сайшаахад Эрдэнэ ч хий баярын зэргэлээнээс салж хар амьдралын ертөнцөд бууж ирлээ.

We note here the role played by traditional song - a long song - which appears to be a way for people to appropriate their environment and establish a link with their land.

The idea of nostalgia – I mean here the longing for the land of one’s birth – is very present in the novel. In the following excerpt, Erdene finds himself in Khüree, forced to hide and conceal his identity after having molested Itgelt:

“On one of those hellish days, Erdene was sitting in the courtyard of Dovchin’s house, under the awning that shelters the entrance to the building. Idle, he let his weary mind wander back to his native Sükh, thinking of the soft golden sun that shines there in autumn”.

Ийм нэгэн өдөр Эрдэнэ Довчингийн хашаанд байшингийн саравчинд хийх юмгүй сууж байлаа. Бодолд нь төрсөн нутаг Сүхийн гол түүний алтан шар намар эргэлдэж, сэтгэл нь уйтгараар дүүрнэ.

The theme of exile is also very present in *Üüriin Tuya* through the character of Nasanbat, expelled from his *khoshuu* as an expiatory victim (*zorig*) at the beginning of the novel. As the assistant of the ritual specialist (*güremch*) who organised the exorcism (*zorigt gargakh*: to have the devil go out) takes him to the edge of the *khoshuu* (the man was ordered to kill him), he takes one last look at his *nutag*:

“He bade farewell to the old man and began his ascent towards the pass where, once he reached the ovoo, the Tibetan began to sprinkle the sky with droplets of sacred alcohol, which gave Nasanbat time to look north-west again, to contemplate his country in the dazzling light of sunset, this undulating steppe parched by the sun and where everywhere green mingled with golden reflections, a plain that seemed derisory

compared to the high mountains whose foot it met in the distance, and beyond this range another plain, then yet another barrier of mountains, from the summits of which he could see on either side the swaying curve of the earth on the horizon of a naked immensity that seemed to know no bounds. This is my nutag. His heart sank at the thought, Wind from the steppes carrying the scent of thyme, absinthes and wild onions, charming perfume of the land where I was born, sweet smoke from the argal fires burning in the *ger*, come with me!

But behind him, the sound of muffled footsteps roused him from his melancholy. He turned round: the Tibetan had finished his libations and was approaching him, a sinister smile on his lips. The chilling look reminded the boy of the kind words of old Baldan, and he redoubled his vigilance”.

Өвгөнтэй салах ёс хийж, өнөөх давааны зүг одож, даваан дээрх овооны дэргэд, тэр төвдийн сэржим өргөх завсар Насанбат, шингэх нарны гэрэлд гялалзаж байгаа баруун хойт зүг, нутгийнхаа зүг ширтэн харвал наранд гандсан, шаравтар ногоон өнгөтэй, дов толгод болсон тал газар, хөхрөн харагдагч алсын уулын хормойтой залгалдаж, тэр уулсын тэртээ, бас, нэг их тал, түүний цаана, бас, уул, тэр уулын цаана гарахад, энэ давааны хоёр талд тэнгэрийн хормойд жирэлзэж байгаа зээртэй, зах хязгааргүй өргөн тал шиг элчилгүй уужим тал бий. **Тэр миний нутаг гэж санахдаа, сэтгэл нь уяран гунив.** Хээрийн агь ганга, таана ханхалсан салхи нь, төрсөн нутгийн минь сайхан үнэр, айл хотын минь аргалын утаа ханхалж явна уу даа? гэж санагдаж байтал, ард нь аяархан гэтэсхийн гишгэх чимээ сонсдов. Эргэж харвал өнөөх төвд, сэржмээ өргөж гүйцээд хүйтнээр инээмсрэн, Насанбатын зүг айсуу ажээ. Төвдийн тэр хүйтэн царайгий нь үзвэл, Насанбат, сайн санаат өвгөн Балданы сануулсан үгийг санаж, их л хичээн болгоомжлов.

The Tibetan in charge of killing him so that he could take his skull back to his master, the *güremch* (exorcist), saw him contemplating the region he was about to leave and asked him, noting the phrase he used:

- Are you looking **at the earth you fell on, the water that washed you, your country**, like that? Don't worry, in a very short time all your torments will vanish. Let's go, I will take you to the top of the pass and leave you there.

-**Унасан газар, угаасан ус, нутгийн** зүг харж байна уу? Гайгүй, одоо тун удахгүй сэтгэлийн зовлон гунил цөм арилна. Явъя, би чамайг даваа руу үдээд өгье гэжээб

As is often the case with Rinchen, the sentence echoes another later in the novel, linking the two scenes. Nasanbat has grown up, grown old, been to China, to Peking, learnt Chinese, read a lot of books and has come to offer Gün Khaisan an encyclopaedia of natural history. He told him how disappointed he was with the Autonomous Government's policy on culture and education. He tells him of his intention to return to his region of origin in Inner Mongolia and invites him to join him there. Let us read Nasanbat's reply:

“To save my skin before this suppot of the Tsar of Kochtorovetch comes after me, I'm thinking of returning to the Kharchin region, to my library in Ulaan Khad, where I'll be able to enjoy my home to the full, happy to have escaped the clutches of this demon. Yes, I'm really looking forward to going back. You, too, who to the Tsar and the

ruthless Chinese administrators are like a pusher in the eye, a piece of meat stuck between your teeth, could join me there and help me to provide education for the young and the children.

Nasanbat replied smoothly:

- I have listened carefully to the message that the *gün* was kind enough to pass on to me. And I am very grateful for this invitation to follow you and work with you to educate your children. But as a young boy, your humble servant was expelled from his home, a sacrificial victim charged with carrying the *nutzg'* ills to the outside world. For years I have been wandering in foreign lands, and I would hardly have the heart to leave the soil where I was born, and the water in which I was first bathed”.

Харгис цагаан хааны муухай доторт Хоростобичийн амны жууж болохосоо өмнө амиа хоохойлж, харчин хошуу нутагтаа бучаад, Улаан хадны айлд бичгийнхээ гэрт хүрч, хойморт нь сууваас, Хоростобичийн хумс саварт атгуулах аюулгүй санаа амар болно гэж, бучих саварт айгуулах аюулгүй санаа амар болно гэж, бучих санаатай. Та ч гэсэн, энд чагаан хаан, хар хятадын харгис түшмэлийн нүдэнд нь орсон сормос шүдэнд нь орсон мах болж байснаас, манай Харчин хошуунд очиж, хойч үеийн монгол багачуудыг сурган бадруул! Гэхэд нь Насанбат нам дуунаар. Гүн нь еэ, сайхан сэтгэлээр надад сурган сэнхрүүлэхсэн үгийг сонслоо. Нутгагтаа аваачиж, соёл сургуулийн ажил хийлцэж хойч үеийг хүмүүжүүл гэсэнд маш баярлаж байна. Гагцхүү мөхөс бие, залуу насандаа золигт гарч, олон жил хүний нутгаар бядан явсан тул, төрсөн нутаг, унасан газар, угаасан уснаасаа холдохыг үл түвдэнэ гэхэд (the ч here is not a spelling error but is due to the author's wish to suggest Khaisan's Kharchin accent).

In the following excerpt it is *Tömör (Tungalag Tamir)* who, returning to the land of his birth, is moved to tears, to the point of eating it to soak it up. Note the idea of communion, of a symbiosis with nature that Mongols readily invoke as a marker of their identity, expressed here through the communication that is created between man and wild beasts. Here again, it is worth pointing out that *Tömör* spent a year - according to the text - imprisoned in a dry ox hide and subjected to the abuses of the Badarch *takhar*.

“The sun was rising, filling the world with its glow, a world dressed in its summer finery, resplendent in a thousand colours. Flanked by his pair of horses, *Tömör* galloped in from the north of Guulin Tal. **He sang Erdene Zasagiin Unaga**, a song from his homeland, at the top of his lungs, making his stentorian voice vibrate. He stopped his run with a quick tug on the reins. He gazed across the valley, his eyes sparkling with pleasure.

In the distance, bathed in bluish mist, **Mount Tarlan Khairkhan** sparkled brilliantly. *Tömör* was moved to tears. Like pearls, they rolled down the sides of his nose.

“My country! My **Taishir Khan!**

This choppy voice was the voice of his heart. He dismounted, **plucked a few wild onion shoots and chewed them with relish**. The sap ran down the corner of his lips. As he approached, a herd of gazelles ran off. But the animals soon returned, stared at him and then became **accustomed** to his presence, reassured, as if this man from afar were **familiar** to them. He closed his eyes. Slowly, as if he wanted to soothe once and for all the body that had been folded up in its leather cangue for over a year. He stretched, then lay on his stomach and gazed at the **Taishir mountains** stretching to the horizon, still draped in fog”.

Өглөөний нар дээр мандаж, зуны цагийн гоёлоо өмссөн ертөнцийг соёрхон, түмэн зүйлийн өнгө энд тэндгүй гялалзан байгаа цагт гуулингийн талын зүүн хойноос хор морьтой Төмөр «Эрдэнэ засгийн унага» гэдэг нутгийн дуугаа баргил хоолойгоор хүч мэдэн аялсаар хатируулан орж ирээд морины амыг татаж зогсов. Төмөр, баяр жаргал бадарсан хурц нүдээр эргэн тойрныг ажиглан харахад тэртээ өмнө суунагласан хөх манангийн дунд Тарлан хайрхан жирэлзэн харагдав. Төмөрийн нүднээс нулимсны доголлон дусал гарч хамрын нь хажууд ширхэг сувд шигтгэсэн юм шиг тогтов. Нутаг минь. Тайшир хан минь гэж тасалдсан нам дуугаар сэтгэлдээ хэлээд мориноосоо бууж, нялх ургасан таанаас таслан авч амтархан идэхэд хоёр завьжаар нь ногоон шүлс цахарч байв.

Төмөрөөс үргэсэн сүрэн зээр дээр дээр үсрэн давхиж зугтсанаа гэнэт эргэж алсаас ирсэн энэ хүнийг таних гэсэн юм шиг баахан харж зогссоноо налайн идээшилжээ. Төмөр нүдээ тас анин аажим бөгөөд жил гаруй ширлүүлж эвхэгдсэн биеэ нэгмөсөн тэнийлгэх гэсэн юм шиг суниагаад түрүүлгээ харан хэвтэж суунагласан манангийн дунд нүүгэлтэж байгаа Тайширын нурууг ширтэв.

Apart from this idea of communion with nature, into which the character seems to want to merge, I have highlighted the remarkable points in this landscape, those which serve as landmarks and anchors. The sacred mountains: the Taishir (Govi Altai) mountain range, and Mount Tarlan Khairkhan, which are to Tömör and Erdene what Altan Owoo was to the grandmother in *Gazar Shoroo*. Note also the reference to the song *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*, which recurs like a ritornello throughout the story. The characters, particularly the two brothers, frequently invoke the sacred mountains of their birthplace to pay homage to them or beg for their mercy. I will quote a few passages. In the first chapter, the reader has just met Erdene, for example:

“Returning next to the fire, he stirred the simmering tea with a metal ladle and sprinkled a few drops into the air towards the west, murmuring, “Taishir Khan Mini!” He stirred again, and did it again, this time to the south and in homage to the green mountains: “Khangai Delkhii Mini”!”

Босож шууд явсаар галын дэргэд ирээд оволзон буцалж байгаа цайнаас жижиг төмөр шанагаар хутгаж «Тайшир хан минь» гэж шивэгнэн баруун зүг өргөснөө дахин хутгалж «Хангай дэлхий минь» гээд өмнөх түнхгэр ногоон уул өөд өргөв.

And near the end of the chapter, when he realises that his horse has disappeared:

“At daybreak, Erdene got up and covered his shoulders with his *deel* to go out. But the horse that had been tied up not far from the tent the day before had disappeared. He began to run. The shackle and lead rope were still there. Looking up, it seemed to him that the dark mountains were getting closer, still rising towards the sky, oppressive. He took two steps back.

Staring into space, like a wounded man summoning up the last of his strength, he dragged himself a few metres and picked up the dew-soaked shackle. Turning towards the horizon, barred by the black silhouette of the mountains, he murmured: “Taishir Khan, Ataa Tavan Tenger, Gombo, why aren’t you watching over us?”

Үүр шөнийн завсаар Эрдэнэ босож, дээлээ нөмгөн нөмөрч гараад харвал аргамжаатай морио алга болсон байхад гүйн очвол чөдөр нь аргамжаатайгаа байв. Эрдэнэ цааш харах гэтэл өмнө хар уул томорсон ойртоод ирэх шиг болохоос гэдрэгээ хоёр алхав.

Хэсэг гөлрөн зогсоноо хүндээр шархадсан хүн эцсийн хүчээ шавхан алхаж байгаа юм шиг хэд алхаж хар чийгэнд нэвт норсон гурамсан чөдрийг атгаж , тэртээ баруунаа бараантай харагдах уулсын дээгүүр ширтэж “Тайшир хан минь, Атаа таван тэнгэр минь. Гомбо минь харахгүй яагаав дэ” гэж шивээнэв.

An animated country: the relationship with the “masters of the land”

Earlier I used the term “anthropomorphisation” to describe the representations of nature as expressed in this literature. The relevance of this term could be debated: some anthropologists consider that it postulates a “humanocentrism” for other cultures that perhaps does not correspond to their ontological system. In *Par Dela Nature et Culture*, a landmark work published in 2005, Philippe Descola¹⁹⁹ argued for a move beyond the nature/culture opposition which, while it applies at least in large part to Western thought, is too restrictive to account for the diversity of relationships with the world and the entities that inhabit it.²⁰⁰ I will not venture to go into this question in any depth here, but I will use the term “anthropomorphisation” for commodity but with reservation, insofar as many of the works consulted describe the Mongols’ relationship with natural and supranatural entities.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Descola Philippe, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, « Bibliothèque des sciences humaines », 2005, 640 p.

²⁰⁰ Let us quote him to justify the reservation with which I use the term anthropomorphisation here: There is nevertheless nothing anthropomorphic about analogical systems: despite the preponderant epistemic position filled by humans, the diversity of the parts that compose the systems is so great and their structure so complex that one single creature could not possibly constitute an overall model” p. 109 of the english translation pdf version or later : “Lienhardt furthermore emphasizes that the Dinka do not anthropomorphize their animals but, on the contrary, seek at every level to imitate the characteristics and behavior of their cattle, which is why these constitute the best possible substitutes for humans. In other words, the relational schema here seems to be twofold: the humans’ protective attitude toward the livestock is combined with relations of a different nature between the humans themselves; and these, paradoxically, are copied from those that structure the world of the cattle. The organization of the herd, the competition between bulls, and the relations between the male and female animals serve as models for thinking about political and spatial organization, about the bellicose nature of men, and about the relations between the sexes. This is why, despite the exorbitant role played by cattle raising among the herders of East Africa, protection does not play the role of a general principle of action that structures all the interactions between humans and nonhumans, however fully the latter are integrated within the collective” *ibid*, p. 160.

²⁰¹ Indeed, I am not acquainted enough with this issue to feel entitled to write without this cautiousness. Humphrey, Caroline. “Chiefly and Shamanist Landscapes in Mongolia.” ... *of landscape: perspectives on place and ...* 1995, Hamayon Roberte, *La Chasse à l'Âme: Esquisse d'Une Théorie Du Chamanisme Sibérien*, Nanterre, Société d'Ethnologie, 1990 ; *Jouer, une autre façon d'agir; Étude anthropologique à partir d'exemples sibériens*, Lormont, Le bord de l'eau, coll. “La bibliothèque du MAUSS”, 2021.

If places and mountains have an “agentivity” here (people communicate with them, interact with them), the same applies to all the entities that “inhabit” them, the “masters of the land” (*gazryn ezen*), who have attracted the attention of many ethnologists.²⁰²

An interesting point to note is that while respect is required for the relationship that humans have with these guardians, tutelary spirits, invisible entities whose forms are many and varied (*sakhius, bug, lus, savdag*, etc.), this respect is not unconditional and can even include a dose of deception. Consider this passage from *Tungalag Tamir*, where old Nyam, Itgelt’s shepherd, goes to Zaya Khüree to pay homage to the *sakhius* of the *khoshuu* (tutelary spirit of the place):

“One summer morning, an empty carriage left the Itgelt camp to the north and headed towards Luu Gün Khüree. Two riders were driving it, side by side. It was Itgelt and Erdene, soon joined by Nyam, riding an old white mare that Itgelt had given him years before. Payment for his work.

- Sipping my tea, I fell behind schedule. But from now on I will be riding with you.

- Where are you off to?” asked Erdene.

Itgelt smirked:

- What a question! Dear Nyam is off to pay homage to the *sakhius* of the *khoshuu*.

- Praying brings spiritual well-being; making amends brings material well-being, and everything is good for *khiimori* (inner strength), Nyam recited.

He lit his tobacco.

“If bowing down to the *sakhius* brought luck and power, this guy would succumb under the weight of riches”, Itgelt thought. He winked at Erdene:

- Nyam Guai attracts luck and *khiimori* from all sides.

And Nyam agreed cheerfully:

- I have nothing to complain about. No stumbling horses, no colds all year round!

When the day was not good for sheep, Nyam was used to go to the lamasery to pay homage to the *sakhius* of the region... and to come back quite tipsy, with barley paste to treat the whole camp: “You rascals! Don’t bite your thumb! Take it easy: it’s with it’s with your index finger that you suck”, he used to say as he shared it with them all.

Зуны өглөө Итгэлтийн хойноос хоосон морин тэрэг хөтөлсөн хоёр морьтой хүн Луу Гүний хошуу хүрээ рүү гарлаа. Энэ бол Итгэлт, Эрдэнэ хоёр байлаа. Тэр хоёрыг зэрэгцэн явж байтал Итгэлтээс хэдэн жилийн өмнө хөлсөнд авсан хөгшин цагагч гүүгээ унасан Нямаа гүйцэж ирлээ.

- Цай гүзээлж байгаад та хоёроос хоцорч орхилоо. Одоо хамт шогшоод байдаг хэрэг ээ

- Та хаачих нь вэ? гэж Эрдэнэ асуув

- Асуух юм байх вэ дээ. Нямаа гуай хошуу сахиулсанд мөргөх гэж яваа биз гээд Итгэлт ёжтой инээмсэглэв.

- Чухамдаа залбирч байвал буян, өлзий засаж байвал эд өлзий гэж аз хийморьт сайн байдаг юм гээд Нямаа ажиггүй тамхиа асааж татлаа. «Хошуу сахиусанд олон мөргөснөөр аз хийморь дэлгэрдэг бол энэ хүн өдийд хагартлаа баяжих болсон доо» гэж Итгэлт бодов.

²⁰² I am thinkiing in particular to Delaplace Grégory but there would be a lot of other references, *L’Invention des morts. Sépultures, fantômes, photographies*, Paris, EPHE-CEMS, 2011.

- Нямаа гуай аз хийморь ч арван зүгтээ л дэлгэрч байдаг юм даа гэж Итгэлт хэлээд Эрдэнэ рүү нүдээ ирмэлээ

- Ер нь овоо шүү. Ээ жил морь ч бүдэрсэнгүй. Хамрын ханиад ч хүрсэнгүй гэж Нямаа баяртай хэлэв.

Хонины хишиггүй зарим өдрөө Нямаа хүрээ орж хошуу сахиусанд мөргөдөг заншилтай. Харин баахан халмаг буцаж ирээд чихэр хийж шар тосонд зуурсан балингийн амттай гурил авчирч «Дамшиг минь идэх гээд эрхийгээ, долоох гээд долоовроо идчих вэ дээ» гээд хотынхондоо өгдөг заншилтай билээ.

The way in which Nyam makes his offerings to the *sakhius* is nevertheless a little unusual

“Nyam went to prostrate himself before the *sakhius*.

- *Sakhius* mini, will you offer your nectar to this sinner? If you do dot deign to give me your attention, who will? When Badarch offers the best of his arz to Itgelt, to me he serves only the residue of a still.

And as he rested his forehead on the altar to receive its grace, he glanced around furtively. He rose to his feet, clasped his hands above his head before prostrating himself again... and gulped down all the strong vodka contained in the silver chalice: strong alcohol was poured into it every day, as an offering to the tutelary spirit of Luu Gün. Nyam approached the tall pyramids of barley flour, from the back of which he removed pieces of dough and pocketed them in his *deel*”.

Нямаа залбиран хошуу сахиусны өмнө очоод наминчлав. Агуу хүчит өндөр сахиус минь, нүгэлт надад сархдаа хайрла. Танаас өөр намайг өршөөн соёрхох хэн байх билээ. Бадарчийнх Итгэлтэд арз өгөөд надад тарган цийдэм өгч байна гээд ширээний ирмэгээс адис авах зуур хулгай нүдээр орчин тойрноо ажиглав. Өндийж толгой дээрээ наминчлаад дахин бөхийж мөнгөн цөгцтэй хар архин нанчидыг ууж орхилоо. Луу гүний хошуу сахиусанд өдөр бүхэн хар архиар нанчид тавьдаг билээ. Нямаа цааш явж хэдэн том балингийн араар гарахдаа хэд дахин базан авч өвөртлөөд сүмийн хаалгаар гарахад цагаагч гүүгий нь нэг лам хөтлөөд явж байснаа зогсож «таныг морио энд орхиж болохгүй гэж хэд хэлбэл болох юм бэ» гээд зогсов.

Expressed in a joking tone, this passage suggests a hint, perhaps not of “bad faith” but of interest in the way the relationship with natural and supernatural entities is conceived. At first glance, and given the nature and context of the writing in our sources - a socialist regime that was highly critical of the Church and superstition - one might see irony here. But if we take a step back and look beyond this single explanation, we can also see in it the expression of a conception of morality that is markedly different from the one that prevails in the Western world, and to which we shall return with Caroline Humphrey. We can already cite one of the anthropologist’s observations:

“The same (referring to a “world of temporal and historical give-and-take, an arena of contingent actions, with very little accent on general values of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’”) can be said, perhaps more controversially, about religious customs (*yos*, *zanshil*) in the context of shamanism and the respect paid to objects in nature. Accepted rules such as “You must not wash in rivers” contain some idea of polluting flowing water, but even here the ways that Mongols talk about this show that the action can be considered

as much dangerous as wrong. If you pollute the water, the river spirit will take revenge and punish you, so it is better not do it; or alternatively, people might say that you would be lucky to get away with it. The spirits of nature, existing in trees, mountains, rivers, springs, etc., are known as ezen (lord, proprietor).).²⁰³

I would also like to quote Bawden for an example he gives, even though the point he is stressing using it has little to do with the question that is important to me here. What is interesting for us is the interaction with the mountain:

“All these corvées not only cost money and labour but provided opportunities for bribery and speculation. One of the more imaginative episodes concerns a certain Manchu amban of Urga who went out to celebrate the spring worship of the Bogdo Uul mountain near Urga and was caught in a heavy storm. He reproved the mountain as follows : “I came here to worship you as a duty, not because I wanted to. What do you think you are up to ?” Then he condemned the mountain to a whipping and to wear fetters, which were deposited on its obo. Later in the year he came back and fined the mountain all its horses, confiscated them and drove them away, presumably to his own benefit”.²⁰⁴

It will not be possible for us to decide (do these passages aim at denouncing creeds and superstition, in accordance with the regime line or rather the expression of different attitudes toward the idea of morality that the one that prevails in the West), as the author leaves us the choice of interpretation (a question to which we shall return in a later chapter on the analytical concept of the “elusive transcript” attributed to Humphrey). Another researcher who explored this relationship with supernatural entities is Robert Hamayon, in her book *Jouer, une autre façon d’agir*,²⁰⁵ she gives us a very interesting analysis of these types of interaction (her research focuses on Siberian Buriats), let us quote her:

“When the shaman approaches his animal “wife”, it is not easy to describe his behaviour, for example when he tickles her under the armpit to get her to release more and more reindeer hair, which in this context represents the chance to hunting. No native would talk of *mekhe* (trickery) in this situation, where, moreover the shaman is not on the defensive. The ritual makes it abundantly clear that he is not in a duel with his “wife”, but in a loving relationship with her; there is therefore no internal sanction to be expected - victory or defeat - neither in the world created by the ritual nor in the reality it prefigures. The will take place in any case, and so will the return of the game’s compensation in human life force: it would be no more conceivable to claim to avoid human death than to have no game at all. This is why, far from trying to defeat his

²⁰³ Humphrey, 1997, p. 28.

²⁰⁴ Bawden, 1967, p. 103.

²⁰⁵ Hamayon Roberte, *Jouer, une autre façon d’agir; Étude anthropologique à partir d’exemples sibériens*, Lormont, Le bord de l’eau, coll. “La bibliothèque du MAUSS”, 2021.

“wife”, the shaman endeavours to establish with the species she represents an as advantageous as possible for the humans he represents, which is still “winning”.²⁰⁶

To conclude this paragraph, I will confine myself to citing one last example:

“Erdene had never been to Khüree. But the snow-white khainag knew the road, having travelled it every early winter. He advanced with a quiet, confident step.

As he passed the Shar Khöv pass, he stopped and began to graze. In the distance, Mount Zhankhaisag loomed, shrouded in a bluish mist. Erdene jumped to the ground and murmured a prayer in the direction of Bogdiin Khüree, the splendid palace of the holy sakhuis, which could be seen in the distance framed by its four mountains.

[...]

When he reached Bogdiin Khüree, Itgelt dismounted and prayed to Bogdiin Khüree himself. He bowed three times, picked up a few pebbles and threw them towards the ovoо:

- To you the immense ovoо, to me the colossal gains. To you the great passes, to me the loot”.

Эрдэнэ урьд өмнө богдын хүрээ орж байгаагүй боловч хэдэн жилийн өмнө турш зул сар бүхэн энэ замыг туулж сурсан хөвөн цагаан хайнаг замын голын барин жигд бөгөөд намбатай алхана. Шар хөвийн дөрөлж дээр гарч ирэхэд алс тэртээ униартан байгаа хөх манангийн дунд өндөр жанрайсаг дүнхийн харагдаж, дохио өгөөгүй байхад түүчаа хайнаг шүдээ хавиран зогслоо. Эрдэнэ үсрэн бууж дөрвөн уулын дунд цогцлон боссон ариун сахиусны орон, Богдын хүрээний зүг наминчлав.

Итгэлт дэргэд нь ирж мориноосоо буугаад «богдын хүрээ» гээд гурвантаа мөргөж залбираад хэдэн чулуу авч овоо руу хаян «овооны их танд, олзны их надад, өлийн их танд, өлзийн их надад» гэв.

Strangeness

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 248. This passage is also exactly to the point for the question we are arousing here: “In the past, it was the 'effects' of the shamanic ritual on empirical reality that counted. There was no ideal model to follow, because each time the shaman had to show his action on the spirits in action. He was good' if, afterwards, the hunt had been fruitful and deaths rare. If this was not the case his group did not call on him again. In other words during the ritual, he had to take as much 'hunting luck' as possible (promises of game) and commit to giving back as little 'human life force' (promises of human death) as soon as possible. A good shaman was one who respected the fairness of the exchange while turning it to the advantage of humans, who knew how to show the greatest vitality in the first phase of the ritual, and, in the last phase, find the right measure of self-offering to the spirits.

to the spirits. If he had offered too little, he would have angered the spirits, and the humans the 'chance' they had received; to linger too long, there would be a risk that he would let them take too much and not "come back" 1. In this way, the volume and timing of the exchanges provided a margin for manoeuvre that which favoured humans without making them victors or the spirits of the vanquished: the ritual did not establish a hierarchy between them. But the nature of what humans the spirits of the wild species in return for the game was not negotiable: it had to be and could only be human life force. With the spirits of the wild species, no trickery or deception was possible. The shaman had no intention to deceive the spirits of wild species. But he had to make the most of his position as a player to steer the ritual to their disadvantage”. Ibid, p. 149. She insists that in this excerpt the attitude described cannot be called “trickery”.

Returning to the expression of attachment to the region of origin, its corollary is that of a feeling of foreignness, and therefore of insecurity, in “foreign” territory (*Khünii nutag, khariin nutag*). Let us return to Erdene where we left him, on the banks of the Arkhangai River, having just had his horse stolen. Two local law enforcement officers come looking for a thief on the run. Seeing them coming, Erdene is cautious:

Erdene recognised the takhar’s cloth. It was better to be cautious: there was no need to get into trouble, especially so far from home.

Хантаазаар нь тамганы тахар байна гэж таньсан Эрдэнэ хүний нутагт ямар нэгэн будлианд орохоос болгоомжлон бушуухан босоод гарлаа.

The second meeting he has is with Itgelt, whom he asks to lend him a horse so that he can join Khüree. But as soon as the introductions were made, Erdene’s “stranger-ness” was immediately thrown back in his face:

“After the customary greetings and while swallowing the large bowl of airag, he recounted how the horse he was going to use to prostrate himself at the feet of the Bogd had been stolen. By coming all this way, he had hoped that they would agree to give him one.

- Tsakhiur Tömör slipped through the fingers of the authorities. He must be the one who took your horse away from you. Which *khoshuu* are you from?

Erdene hesitated for a moment but did not dare lie. Itgelt’s eyelids twitched with an imperceptible start. He began to gauge him with furtive glances:

- Taishir, Tarlan Bukh, Tavag khar, Notsdog Degee... The people of Zasagt Khan are tough. I do not know you, you do not know me. We would better stick to that, he concludes, rising up”.

Тамган дээрээс цахиур Төмөрийг алдсан гэнэ билээ. Морийг чинь тэр л авчихсан байх даа. Та аль хошууны хүн бэ? Гэж Итгэлт асуув. Эрдэнэ хэсэгт түгдрээд худал хэлж чадсангүй хошуу нутгаа үнэн зөв хэлэв. Итгэлт нүдээ түргэн түргэн цавчилж хулгай нүдээр Эрдэнийг ажиглана.

«Гайшир, тарлан бух, таваг хар, ноцдог дэгээ гэж Засагт ханы хөх харцууд хэцүү гэдэг дээ. Та намайг танихгүй би таныг танихгүй. Бие биедээ балаггүй салбал дээр байх аа» гэж Итгэлт босов.

The situation changes when Itgelt realises that Erdene can be useful to him. It is not uninteresting to watch the way he moves from exclusion to inclusion:

“People say that the people back home are tough... but there are small trees just as there are big ones, some men are good, others bad. And since when has a Mongolian not helped a brother in need? You can come and sit by my side from now on, he said in a voice full of empathy and understanding”.

Танай хошууныхан хэцүү гэлцдэг. Гэвч олон мод өндөртэй, намтай олон хүн сайнтай, муутай байдаг бас тэгээд монгол ах дүү байна ядарсан хүнд туслахгүй яахав. Ер нь шууд манай хаяанд ирээд бууж орхи гэж өрөвдсөн элэгсэг дуугаар хэлэв.

In the first sentence, as above, Itgelt refers Erdene to his *khoshuu*, but then immediately temporises by integrating him into a wider group to which he himself belongs: the Mongols, a collective within which both are linked by a relatively strong relationship, since it is a question of brotherhood. “When did a Mongolian ever fail to help a brother in need?” However Itgelt only applies this principle of mutual aid and solidarity when he wants to. At the beginning of the second book, an episode recounts how he and Badarch the *takhar* behave towards refugees from the neighbouring *khoshuu* of Ööld Beis who have been hit by a *zud* while the territory of Luu Gün, spared, has remained prosperous. Not only are they not going to help these “Mongol brothers” but they are going to plunder what they have left. The chapter begins with the background:

“The snow had fallen heavily on Ööld Beis. Then came the *zud*.

Not expecting their livestock to survive in such conditions, several families decided to migrate to Luu Gün. Thrown onto the roads with their gaunt, exhausted herds, these nomads eventually ended up on the banks of the Tamir, where they set up makeshift shelters in the shade of a willow grove.

In Luu Gün, on the meantime, nature had been generous that year and the animals had fattened up nicely. The refugees sighed loudly: “Have you seen these plump sheep? Even the lambs have fat, drooping tails...”. Their animals were no thicker than arrows”.

Өөлд бэйсийн нутагт үлэмж цас орж зуд болоод амьд амьтан тогтохын аргагүй болоход хэсэг айл Луу гүний нутгийн зах руу нүүв.

Турж эцсэн малаа замын нэг цувуулан хаясан нүүдэлчид Тамирын захын бургасанд нөмөр дагаж хатгуур барин буудаллаа.

Энэ жил Луу Гүний нутаг өнтэй болохоор бэлчиж байгаа тарган малыг хараад нүүдэлчид «Сайхан аа төлөгний сүүл хүртэл бундайгаад харав уу» гэж ярилцан өөрийн нум болсон малаа хараад санаа алдана.

The feeling of insecurity felt by Erdene and Dolgor, deprived of their horses in Arkhangai is also that of the refugees. It is worth noting that the man here takes up the same idea as that expressed by Itgelt, referring to a Mongolian brotherhood:

“To regale their guests, the nomads reheated their best milk alcohol and boiled the only slightly fatty meat they had, that of sheep slaughtered in the autumn.

Handing Itgelt a silver cup filled to the brim with *arkhi*, one of the men explained:

- We have lost many of our animals and are at the height of exhaustion. We had no choice but to seek refuge in a less disaster-stricken region... in the hope that, amongst our Mongolian brothers, we would find charitable people to lend us a hand”.

Намар алсан тарган хонины мах чанаж, нэрмэл архи халааж хоёр зочныг дайлав.

-- Хэдэн малаасаа салаад ядрахдаа л ингэж харь нутгийн зах руу нүүдэллэн явна. **Монгол ах дүү** болохоор туслах л байх гэж нөгөө хар хүн мөнгөн аяганд халуун архи хийж Итгэлтэд барих зуур хэлэв.

Mongolian hospitality is often praised by travel entrepreneurs, and became a cliché that both Mongolians and those who have experienced it are also fond of extolling. It is not absent here either, as the nomads make a point of sharing what they have with visitors (admittedly in the hope of gaining their understanding):

“Badarch replied:

- For our part, we are not going to chase you away... and we'll try to dissuade the others from doing so. But Luu Gün is populated. By the way, do you know this man? He is Itgelt, the biggest fortune of the *khoshuu*, a man respected and listened to by all”.

Бид ч хөөхгүй. Бас бусдыг ятгахыг оролдъё. Гэвч Луу Гүний албат олон. Олон хүн сайнтай муутай байдаг шүү дээ. Энэ хүнийг та бүхэн таних уу? Луу гүний баян Итгэлт гэдэг хүн дээ. Нутаг олондоо хүндтэй, үг нь жинтэй гээд Бадарч хар хүн рүү нүд ирмэлээ.

The man has got the message and thinks he can buy himself some security by giving Itgelt an ingot of silver worn on a *khadag*.

“By flattering the richest herder of the *khoshuu* and his accomplice - a takhar from the local governor’s administration - in this way, he thought he was putting on a worthy front and had at least earned the right to stay in the region for a while. Reassured, the man spoke of the merciless *zud* that had ravaged their country. He shook his head sadly”.

Хошуу түрүүлсэн Баян гүнгийн шадар тахар хоёрт тал зассанаар Луу гүний нутагт хэд хонох боломжтой болов гэж сэтгэл нь тайвширсан хар хүн нутагтаа болсон нинжин сэтгэлгүй зудын тухай толгой сэгсрэн ярив.

It had indeed been Badarch’s idea, but Itgelt was not prepared to stop there:

“The icy wind hit them hard, but the good fatty meat and alcohol they had ingested spread through their bodies, warming their insides. As the horses raced through the snow, the plan to plunder the poor, exhausted nomads and get rich at their expense took shape in their minds. The more they galloped, the more excited they became, speeding up all the time.

The next evening, around twenty men on horseback had gathered in front of Itgelt’s house. They were armed with long whips, ready to pounce on any intruders. Itgelt and Badarch had taken the lead”.

Өмнөөс нь хүйтэн салхи үлээвч, дотроос нь халуун архи тарган мах жигнэж морьдын хөлөөр нь бөөн бөөн цас шидэгдэн явахад сэтгэлд нь ядарсан нүүдэлчингээс дээрэмдэн авах их олзны зэрэглээ харагдан морьд улам хурдлах бүрд тодорч байлаа.

Маргааш орой нь Итгэлийн гаднаас урт урт ташуур барьсан хорь гаруй морьтой хүн нүүдэлчдийг хөөхөөр мордох болов. Тэднийг Итгэлт, Бадарч хоёр толгойлжээ.

Nyam tried to dissuade them:

“ Come on, my friends, what is the point? A *zud* can strike at anyone...

- Yes, and philanthropists end up with empty pockets!

Itgelt's retort sparked off general hilarity.

- These people are Mongols, brothers! And they are in dire straits. What is the point of being stingy with a country that you could just as easily share? Don't you think so, Itgelt?

Itgelt replied with an air of importance:

- Maybe, but the Ööld Beis are a bunch of pariahs, what's left of Galdan Boshigt's rebels, who thought they could challenge the Khalkh supremacy”.

On a less bellicose note, local preference is also expressed at the Naadam games, and the stakes are not necessarily lower:

“Among the people gathered for the Naadam, the rumour had quickly spread that Badarch de Luu Gün, the braggart, was proclaiming everywhere that he would win the wrestling tournament and, as he thought he would leave with the *ikh nas* (title for a horse), the winner's prize, he had stormed off with the bridle already attached to his saddle. Khan Öndör's people were seething with rage.

From time immemorial, the *khoshuu* of Said Van had included many formidable wrestlers, and the idea of losing to a Zaan of the Danshig of the Seven *Khoshuu* like this Badarch gave the locals a cold sweat. Losing to a foreigner was not only a terrible dishonour, it also meant letting the horse offered as a reward go to another *khoshuu*”.²⁰⁷

Наадамчин олны дунд Луу гүний Бадарч ногт ганзагалж ирсэн гэдэг үг нэгээс нөгөөд дамжин тарж Хан өндрийнхний хорыг буцалгана. Үнэхээр ч бардам Бадарч наадамд түрүүлж байд өгөх их насны морийг нь авна гэж бүдүүн суран ногт ганзагалж ирсэн ажээ. Сайд вангийн хошуу бол хэзээнээс шөрмөстөй бөхчүүд олонтой билээ. Гэвч долоон хошууны заан догшин Бадарчид наадмаа алдах бий гэдэг бодол нутгийн олны сэтгэлийг зовооно. Наадмаа харийн хүнд алдана гэдэг муухай. Бас тэгээд хамгийн тусгүй нь халуун хошуутай малаа байд өгч харийн хошуунд явуулна гэсэн үг билээ.

In *Üüriin Tuya*, Rinchen also describes this state of mind, but to show how the change of era marked a turning point, in particular through the establishment of a national army.

“Living in the promiscuity of their barracks, the men made friends with each other. Over time, the soldiers of Khuzhirbulan appeared to Shirchin in a completely different light. They were nothing like the ones he had met during the Uliastai campaign. These provincial lads would never have thought of thinking of others, of the good of all, because they only thought of themselves. If they ever made common cause, it was always only temporary and linked to the prospect of making a few good catches. But as soon as they had achieved this objective, or not, as the case may be, these comrades for the day immediately went off on their own. When they lured someone into their ventures, it was only to arrive in force at the moment of action, but they also had to think about sharing, and to ensure that what fell to each of them at the end of the day was not reduced to the smallest portion, they could

²⁰⁷ Eventuellement si le temps le permet ajouter quelques mots sur la suite du chapitre

hardly attract one too many members. And they always favoured those who came from the same country as they did, treating all the others as strangers. But if things went wrong and there was no one left to clear their name, or at least minimise their involvement, local or otherwise, they would do everything they could to shift the blame onto someone else, or even throw the whole group to the wolves. In Khuzhirkulan, on the other hand, the men were linked to each other on so many levels that it was impossible for them to ignore that they were all in the same boat. As soon as they arrived, the soldiers from the same *khoshuu* had been distributed among the dozens of different *suman*, although of course they had hoped to be able to stay together, so first in their own dozen, then within the *suman* and finally across the whole garrison they had begun to sympathise, to make friends from other *khoshuu*, and the words “my *khoshuu*” and “their *khoshuu*” had disappeared from conversations”.

*

Other themes are present in the novels, particularly in relation to the nomadic way of life, livestock farming, and the modernization undertaken by the socialist regime through its agricultural policy. To conclude this general overview I will only quote one example of a description of the nomadic lifestyle and its endless requirements:

“Shirchin and Tseren, who both knew what it was like to have to sell themselves in order to survive, relished the fact that they were no longer dependent on a master’s charity. And yet, to be able to live like a Bogd in his white *ger*, a Noble in his black *ger*, you still have to follow your animals out to pasture, just like a herding dog. But that’s not all, because you also have to look after your livestock if you hope to see them grow, and that means knowing how to choose the right land for them. As soon as the vegetation starts to die down somewhere, you have to change location to find the conditions it needs. And that is quite an art, requiring a great deal of experience: you need to know what the soil and water resources are like at all times. You have to be able to estimate, on the basis of an animal’s daily consumption, how long the herd will have enough food to feed itself in one place, and during this time you have to look for the next place to stop, and you have to do this to the rhythm of the four seasons. There are also infectious livestock diseases, epidemics, wolves and dogs - you need to be aware of everything in every region you visit.* And when the time comes for the animals to regain their strength and stature, it’s at this time in particular that you have to make sure that the vegetation and gypsum supplies are sufficient. You need to plan reserve pastures for the spring, anticipate the summer transhumance and the autumn one to follow, try to ensure that all the females, without exception, give birth within the year, and then, when the time comes, work night and day to prevent the newborns from dying because of the cold; leave for the pastures always carrying a large bag to bring back the lambs born on the steppe in the evening.*

In spring, lambing time, Shirchjin’s small *ger* with its four *khana* was, like that of any other farmer, so full of newborn lambs that there wasn’t even room to move around. At this time of year, the master of the household himself has to fight to preserve a corner of his bed for himself, and apart from the heart of the hearth, where the young are kept at a distance by wooden barriers, the rest of the space is saturated.* The lambs

had to be taken out to feed, but immediately afterwards, one by one, they had to be brought in, and dry straw had to be spread. All this work never ends.*

And then there's harvesting argal and wood, tanning skins, sewing clothes, boots and hats, stocking up on white gold for winter and spring: aaruul, *khuruud*, öröm, tos, looking after newborn lambs - all the tasks that fall to the women, and the list goes on and on”.

In *Üüriin Tuya*, B. Rinchen shows us a herding family struggling with the elements, a family who even in the midst of a winter tornado do not give up braving the storm to lead their animals to pasture.

“In the morning the storm intensified, but although there was no rest during the night, the animals had to be driven to pasture in the middle of a winter tornado.

The camels led the way, digging the path through the snow to the pasturelands protected from the gusts of wind by the rocks and cliffs, and by the caragana bushes. Behind the horses walked the cows and behind the cows the sheep were pushed back. Only Granny Süren and little Shirchin were left in the camp, and Yavaan, who had been forced to wait for the storm to subside.

In the midst of the blizzard emerged Pagma’s immense white male camel. Batbayar and Deren, also on camels, were leading the way, pushing back the sheep, pushing back the herd of camels. An almost spectral vision shimmering in this milky fog, of these animals thrown against each other by the power of the gusts.

At last they came to the hollow of the depression in the mountain, to sheltered pastures where the wind diminished in strength. Clearing away the snow, they revealed the green of the thick late-season grasses on which the cows, shivering from the cold, threw themselves greedily, pawing at the ground. The humans who had driven their animals, making sure that the strongest ones walked behind those whose strength and fat had melted away, stayed to graze them and only in the evening did they return, still with their animals, exhausted”.²⁰⁸

Once the storm has passed, the head of the family comments, underlining the banality of this kind of climatic event as well as the seriousness of the consequences that can result from it for both animals and people:

²⁰⁸ “Өглөө шуурга бүр ч ширүүн болж, урд шөнө нойргүй хоносон тэр хотныхон малаа өвлийн шуурганаар билчээрийн зүг мал бичээхээр болжээ.

Шуурганаас уул хад, бургас харганаар халхлагдсан нөмөр билчээрийн зүг тэмээгээр цасан зам гаргаж, тэмээний хойноос үхрээ, үхрийн хойноос хонио туужээ. Хотонд нь гагцхүү эмгэн Сүрэн жаал Ширчин, шуурга намнахыг түр хүлээнэсэн Яваантай гурвуул үлджээ.

Цасан будан дундуур том цагаан ат унасан Пагма, тэмээтэй түрүүлж хойноос нь хонио тууж тэмээ унаж дагасан Батбаяр Дэрэн хоёр будан дундуур, хачин хий үзэгдэл шиг сүүмэлзэн, хаяа салхи хүй хүй салхиж, том том тэмээг бие биетэй нь мөргөлдтөл шуурч байв. Тэгж явсаар уулын суган дахь нөмөр билчээрт хүрвэл салхи тэр хавьд нилээд намдуу, цасыг зайлуулж хамахад дороос нь угтаа ногоон өнгөтэй өтгөн хагд өвч гач хүйтэнд даарч, биеэ хурааж бөгцийсөн үхэр мал, цасан дороос гарсан хагд шунан идэж, маллаж явсан хүн нь чйрэг хүчтэй мал нь хүч тарга муутайгаа хойш түрүүжин гэж хариулан малласар, орой тийш нилээд ядарч, малтайгаа хамт буцаж ирээд [...]

“In a storm like this, many of them must have lost their animals and horses. May everyone be as lucky as we are to have sheltered pastures and a camp!”²⁰⁹

As I wrote as an introduction to this chapter, this theme of the relationship to the *nutag* is a broad one that cannot be explored here. Further research could allow us to do so.

²⁰⁹“Энэ шуурганаар адуу үхрээ алдсан хохирсон улс их л олон байх ёстой. Ямар айл бүр бидэн шиг нөмөр өвөлжөө билчээртэй байгаа гэжээ”.

Chapter three: A centuries-long history of reversals of alliances and disunity

An historical sketch

The ambition of this chapter is relatively modest. Its main purpose was to serve as a tool, particularly for translation work. The sources that have been used – our “corpus” – refer implicitly or explicitly to events that took place well before the time of the story. Looking back over the period that preceded the twentieth century, from the beginning of Manchu domination - from the time of Ligdan Khan, which I set as the limit - seemed to me to be essential for understanding what was happening at the time of the action.

It is with this in mind that I have relied essentially and almost exclusively on Bawden, which is not without its flaws but remains a solid reference in view of this limited ambition. Contemporary with our sources, it offers a view of history that is quite similar to that of our authors, based on the knowledge and sources available at the time, but without being constrained by the same propaganda mission. In the course of the research, it turned out to be rich in information that historians no longer focus on today, but which can be found in romanticised form in the literature of the time – I am thinking, for example, of a chapter in Rinchen about the gifts given by the Bogd to a young woman called Yunnerel -. So the aim of this chapter was to try and capture the mindset of historians and authors of historical novels at the time, rather than that of today.

This modest ambition does not mean that we should neglect the contribution of more recent references, abundantly enriched by hindsight on the one hand, and access to new sources on the other (the work of Irina Morozova presented earlier comes to mind), to which I shall return in a later chapter, but concentrating almost exclusively on the history of the literary world, based on the research of B. Tsetsentsolmon. Irina Morozova’s book will then be mentioned, but I have written it, and I have not had enough time to use it in a truly satisfactory way. For these reasons, this third chapter does not go much beyond the 1930-32 uprising on which *Tungalag Tamir* closes.

“Гол нь хvн, хvнээ мөлждөг ёсыг л арилгах хэрэгтэй. Чингэвэл та нар түргэн хөгжиж чадна”. (Pyotr, *Tungalag Tamir*)²¹⁰

It was during a conversation with his friend Erdene, the main character in the novel *Tungalag Tamir*, that Pyotr, the Bolshevik, expressed this commonly shared idea: the tragedy of the Mongols was that they had not known how to unite. Exhausting themselves in internal quarrels these neighbours had the comparative advantage to be better organised but above all to be driven by a strong “national” political consciousness.²¹¹ Mongolian and non-Mongolian sources agree on this subject. The Chinggiskanid epic is an exception in this history. The conqueror’s ability to discipline and rally to his cause the numerous tribal chiefs of the time, in order to find a stable political entity, an ability set up as a myth, can

²¹⁰ First of all, you need to stop this habit of biting each other’s noses off.

²¹¹ In insist that I am decribing a commonly shared opinion, not asserting my reading of history.

be considered as one of the main foundations of the Mongolian “national identity” that we are trying to question and understand here.

The situation of Mongolia today, in particular its partition between Outer and Inner Mongolia, now incorporated within China, was mostly determined by the succession of events in the seventeenth century, beginning with the rise of the Manchus from obscurity to imperial rule in China. Bawden explains that as the existing Chinese dynasty was about to be replaced by a new and vigorous regime, internal squabbles which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had meant only the transfer of dominant power from one chieftain to another, exposed Mongolia, in the seventeenth century, to a decisive take-over by a non-Mongol power. The historian is severe in his analysis:

“The disunity of the eastern Mongols, their fatal tendency to allow what remained of the imperial power to be challenged and contested by any powerful chieftain with the organizing ability to attract followers and wealth in the form of animals, meant that the Manchus, in the course of their gradual expansion and consolidation southwards towards China, were able to subdue, or acquire as allies, piecemeal, incoherent groups of Mongols”.²¹²

The tribes of Inner Mongolia which lay astride and alongside the road into north China, were the first to lose their independence to the Manchus. Then, more and more squeezed into submission between it and the empire of the west Mongols, Khalkha eventually followed the same path.

1. The loss of independence

Inner Mongolia

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, between two main antagonists, the rising Manchus and the declining Ming dynasty, the only relatively powerful third force that stood in the region was this of Ligdan Khan, the last emperor of the Mongols (strictly speaking it would be better appropriate to refer to him only as the emperor of the Chakhar).

What is known about him remains blur for lack of sources. What they appear to show is that Ligdan once nurtured the twin purposes of civilizing the eastern Mongols and reuniting them, but that at one point of his life he lost this sigh and began to indulge in violence. Hence during the 1620s, when the Manchu assault on China grew in intensity, he showed himself incapable of committing himself to a consistent line of action and therefore of curbing the dangerous process of fragmentation which was already underway amongst the Mongols.²¹³

In order to resist the Manchu advance, Ligdan concluded an alliance with the Chinese Ming dynasty in 1618 and lived at peace with the Chinese for the next few years, but in 1628 he attacked and plundered them again. It appears that Ligdan was used to abuse his

²¹² Bawden, 1968, p. 39.

²¹³ Some of the earliest to make terms with the Manchus had been the Khorchin, as early as 1614.

vassals as well as his allies by robbing them of men and beasts. Hence, in 1628, the disgruntled Kharchin allied themselves with tribes of the Ordos, Tumet and others, and defeated him.²¹⁴

Soon after, the Kharchin suggested to the Manchus that as the Chakhar were in disorder, the time was ripe to unite and smash them. The proposal was acceptable to the Manchus who swore an alliance with the Kharchin.

Even his own Chakhars began to desert Ligdan and go over to the Manchus. The Chakhars indeed were at the time reported to be poor and hungry, their land being covered with corpses like grass as they had eaten everything up. Commenting on this, Bawden wrote:

“Ligdan seems to have lacked all sense of the necessity of persuading allies rather than bullying them when one’s own position is precarious, and to have envisaged Mongol reunification as identical with his own hegemony”.²¹⁵

Then, in 1632, the Manchus organized a final blow against Ligdan. Caught unprepared the latter fled westwards with some 100 000 persons, a complete shift of population on the part of the Chakhars who, according to the chronicles “nomadized” westwards. Nevertheless, even on this flight which turned out to be a rout with seven out of ten persons falling by the wayside, Ligdan managed to squander the support of any local Tumet and Ordos Mongols who might have been prepared to help him.

“What happened in the short span of life which remained to Ligdan is obscure” Bawden wrote, the more plausible hypothesis being that he turned his flight westwards into the beginning of a venture to profit by internal dissensions in Tibet so as to carve out for himself a new kingdom based on Kukuror. But he died of smallpox in 1634, without having achieved this project. Disunited Mongolia then continued on its path to full subjection to the Manchus. Those Chakhars who had refused to accompany Ligdan Khan westwards were summoned to submit to the Manchus. His own son surrendered in 1635 and married a Manchu princess in the following year.²¹⁶

Therefore disappearance of the independence of the princes of Inner Mongolia may be dated at 1636, when Abahai proclaimed himself emperor and adopted the name of Qing for the new Manchu dynasty at a grand celebration attended by forty-nine princes of sixteen Inner Mongolian banners.

Outer Mongolia

With the submission of the majority of the princes of Inner Mongolia to the Manchus, it was only in Khalkha, that part of Mongolia lying north of the Gobi desert, that eastern Mongolian independence survived.

²¹⁴ Ligdan lost forty thousand men in the battle.

²¹⁵ Bawden, 1968, p. 45/

²¹⁶ With the surrender of Ligdan’s son, the imperial seal is also said to have come into the possession of the Manchus but Mongol popular tradition denies it.

Khalkha was roughly divided between three independent khanates,²¹⁷ that were, from west to east, the domains of the Zasagt khan, the Tüsheet khan, and the Setsen khan. These three hereditary khanates were added to in 1725 by the formation of the Sain Noyon Khanate out of some banners of the Tüsheet Khan's domain. A fourth important khanate has to be mentioned for the seventeenth century, but it did not long survive. This was that of the Altan Khan in north-west Mongolia. His pastures touched in the east on the Selenge and Tuul rivers, and reached westwards as far as Krasnoyarsk.

West and south of Khalkha and the Altan Khan lay the realm of the west Mongols. The early years of the seventeenth century saw the rapid expansion and consolidation of the power of the Zhungar tribe of the Oirats under Kharakhula (d. probably 1665). This was based on the Tarbagatai region of western Mongolia and extended into Turkestan. Kharakhula subdued other Oirat tribes, notably the Derbets, while his expansionist policies forced yet another, the Torguts, to migrate farther and farther westwards until they acquired new pastures in south Russia, astride the lower Volga. Yet another Oirat tribe, the Khoshuts, moved into Tibet to take part in the wars that were raging at the time between the last king of Tibet and the Yellow Sect of Lamaism. Kharakhula took part in the war on the winning side and obtained as a reward the title of Erdene Batur Khungtaizh and a patent from the Dalai Lama in 1635. Karakhula and his descendants managed to build up for the Zhungars a secure and stable state, hence a power capable of challenging the Manchu empire for the control of central Asia as we will see below.

As for the international context, at this time, central Asia was on the move and frontiers were fluid. The Manchus were expanding southwards, consolidating their conquest of China. Russia was reaching out farther and farther across Siberia, extending her sovereignty eastwards, and making diplomatic contact with Zungars and Mongols on the way but came into sharp conflict both with the Khalkha Mongols in Transbaikalia, and with the Manchus on the Amur river.

The khans of Khalkha still enjoyed considerable freedom of action and contacts at diplomatic level with various foreign powers remained possible for them. Bawden wrote, for example, that until the late 1680s the Tüsheet khan and his brother the Zhavzandamba Khutagt were in touch with Moscow and other Russian authorities. The Tüsheet khan also felt himself free to come to blows at various times with Zhungars and Russians. Yet he also felt obliged, it is true, to report his intentions to Beijing. The independence of the Khalkha khans was indeed a qualified one. Despite this relative freedom of action, at least in comparison with the princes of Inner Mongolia, the Manchu emperor already enjoyed a position of quasi-suzerainty over them.

There was indeed, from 1636 on, no visible limit to Manchu expansion. For the khans of Khalkha, who had watched the disintegration of Inner Mongolia during the last years of Ligdan Khan, there were, theoretically two courses open. They could ally themselves with

²¹⁷ These were all descendants of Geresenje, that one of the sons of Dayan Khan who had taken the majority of the Khalkha tribes as his inheritance, and had nomadized with them north of the Gobi. (Dayan Khan, born as Batu-Mönkh, was the last descendant of Kubilai Khan. He was adopted at the age of seven by Queen Mandukhai Khatun, widow of Manduul Khan, who died in 1467. She put him on the throne, drove the Oirats out of eastern Mongolia and assumed the regency. At the age of 18, Batu-Mönkh married his adoptive mother and took the title of Dayan Khan).

the Zhungar state, or they could follow their fellow princes of Inner Mongolia into adherence to the Manchus. A great meeting in Tarbagatai, in 1640, may perhaps be considered to have been a tentative step in the direction of the former policy, but it was an ineffective one. Before even this assembly took place, the khans of Khalkha had already expressed their desire to remain on friendly terms with the Manchu Emperor. To illustrate this, Bawden refers to the nineteenth-century chronicle *Erdeniin erkh* or “Jewelled rosary”.²¹⁸ It says that “from this time, by imperial command, the Khalkha khans offered every year one white camel and eight white horses each, and so was established the permanent regulation of the “tax of the Nine Whites”. This, Bawden comments, “seems to anticipate by some years the reduction of Khalkha to true vassaldom”.²¹⁹

However, opportunist and unconcerted action on the part of the Khalkha khans against the Manchus still continued to break out sporadically over the next twenty years. In 1638, for example, the Zasagt Khan was reported to be massing troops and threatening Hohhot. The Manchu emperor retaliated, and an army of Mongol troops supplied by loyal princes joined his troops on this campaign. The Zasagt Khan withdrew in confusion.

In 1644, the year when the Manchus officially succeeded the Ming as the reigning dynasty in China, it appears that the TüsHEET Khan sent a tribute embassy to the new emperor. Yet in 1646, when Tengis of the Sunit, an Inner Mongol prince who had earlier fled from the oppression of Ligdan Khan renounced the allegiance he had declared to Abahai in 1637 and fled back to Khalkha. At the Setsen Khan’s request the TüsHEET Khan furnished 20 000 troops to protect him from the Manchus. These were heavily defeated by the latter at a place called Zhazhibulag. As Tengis submitted once again, the two Khalkha khans saw no further reason why they should continue in dispute with the Manchus after this, and offered their apologies.

But another dispute involving the TüsHEET Khan broke out. One of his relatives had plundered the Baarin tribe of Inner Mongolia. The Manchu emperor sent a message of reproof to the TüsHEET Khan. The latter asked for pardon but refused to meet the Manchus demand that was to send his own son and younger brother to Beijing as hostages. The quarrel was not patched up in his lifetime.

In 1651 another crack occurred in the fragile Khalkha facade. One of the TüsHEET Khan kinsmen, a certain Buntar, took all his followers and possessions and went over to the Manchus, who accorded him the rank of *Zasag chin wang* and granted him pastures near Kalgan. His secession, Bawden wrote “characterized the less vigorously independent Khalkha nobility of the second half of the century, who were to let the last traces of independence slip from their hands”.²²⁰

In 1655 Chakhundorzh succeeded his father Gombodorzh as the new TüsHEET Khan and seems to have been aware of the inevitability of some concessions to Manchu power.²²¹ To what extent Khalkha had fallen under Manchu influence is clear from the fact that in 1649 the Emperor reorganized the country into eight *khoshuu* or banners, adding one to the

²¹⁸ Which is considered as the fullest source for this period, though based to a great extent on Chinese and Manchu sources, and thus expressing the official point of view.

²¹⁹ Bawden, 1968, p. 59.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 61.

²²¹ Yet, at the same time, the Setsen Khan is reported to have try to establish relations with Russia as a possible counterweight to the Manchus.

existing seven, and dividing them into a left and right wing. He nominated eight *zasags*, or governors, for the new divisions. Though the names of the original khanates were retained, the process of dividing Khalkha into an ever-increasing number of small hereditary units, each of equal rank, seems to have begun.

The process of disintegration and enfeeblement of Khalkha took a new turn with the death in 1661 of the Zasagt Khan. A dispute broke out between two of his sons as to which should succeed to the khanate. The younger son who succeeded, contrary to custom, but the Altan Khan took a hand in the dispute for reasons that remain unclear and killed the new Zasagt Khan. The elder son took his dead brother's place, but many of the nobles of the right wing, to which the Zasagt khanate belonged, angry and upset by this usurpation, deserted with their followers to the TüsHEET Khan, the most powerful ruler of the left wing. As for the murdered Khan's uncle, fearing violence on the part of the Altan Khan, he took refuge with the Manchus, becoming the first important Khalkha chieftain to submit entirely to the Manchus (since the flight of Buntar). The TüsHEET Khan took the part of the murdered Zasagt Khan, and made war on the Altan Khan, who withdrew to present-day Tannu Tuva. Little more is reported about the latter after this flight, what is certain is that he never again influenced the course of events in Mongolia, and that with him the realm of the Altan Khans founded by his grandfather disappeared from history. However, Bawden précised "the troubles which he unleashed with the murder of the Zasagt Khan continued to plague Khalkha to the very end".²²² And indeed, the Zasagt Khan kept on demanding the return of the disgruntled nobles who had fled to the TüsHEET Khan who "made no haste to comply", letting the dispute simmer.

Not very much is known about the state of affairs in Khalkha over the next few years. According to Bawden once again, "it is possible that the strained situation might eventually have resolved itself unobtrusively, had matters not been complicated by the rapid expansion of the Zhungars under Galdan, and his determination to exploit a ready cause". Let us therefore summarize the succession of events.

In late 1670 that one of the sons of Kharakhula who ruled over the Zhungars at that time, was murdered in the course of what appears to have been a palace revolution resulting from a conspiracy of two of his elder brothers with some others. At this time Galdan, who was also one of Kharakula's sons, was studying in Lhasa as a disciple of the Panchen Lama. . He returned to Zhungaria and deposed the rebels. It appears from many indications that he did not act entirely on his own initiative, but was obeying the instructions of the Dalai Lama. Indeed, the Zhungar alliance was a valuable counterpoise to the influence of Beijing for the Tibetan authorities, which probably did not want to see the Zhungar khanate fall apart in civil war as a result of a mere family intrigue.

Galdan's first efforts were directed towards the elimination of possible rivals among his own people. His ambitions were already generally recognized among the west Mongols at this early date. In 1678, he made a pretext for intervention in Tannu Tuva, a campaign that also provoked the first armed clash with the TüsHEET Khan. The matter is reported to have been terminated by the diplomatic intervention of the Manchu emperor. A significant moment in the development of Galdan's career was his elevation to the rank of Boshigt

²²² Bawden, 1968, p. 63.

Khan or “Khan by Divine Grace” by the Dalai Lama, a public declaration that the powerful Tibetan Church was backing him. Moreover, by implication, Galdan was from then on considered the equal of the line of Chinggis and the potential rival of the Manchu emperor for Mongol loyalties, when the Manchu emperor was at the time considered as the legitimate successor to the previous Mongol imperial family. Then, Galdan sent an embassy to the Manchu court to report his new title and even though the Manchus were quite reluctant to accept the precedent of recognizing a Zhungar Khan, it was impossible for them to ignore the existence of the new state so they eventually agreed to receive his embassy and its gifts, and the Emperor furnished him with a seal, similar to those issued to the Khalkha princes.

At first conciliatory, as we have just seen, Manchu attitudes towards Galdan began to harden during the 1680s. In the 1650s Manchu policy towards Khalkha almost aimed at weakening the Mongols by encouraging the growth of a number of petty princedoms. It intended to exert as much control over the course of events as possible without actually assuming responsibility for Mongol affairs. But in the 1680s, as the aggressive intentions of the Zhungars became more and more apparent, they get more involved. The continuing dispute between the Zasagt Khan and the Tüsheet Khan was indeed weakening Khalkha, at a time when it was appearing as the next obvious field for Galdan’s expansionist ambitions. Here, the lines of foreign partisanship began to take shape. Galdan chose to take the part of the Zasagt Khan, while the Manchu emperor verged more and more to the side of the Tüsheet Khan. Bawden comments:

“If Khalkha alone had been concerned, it is reasonable to suppose that the weight of Manchu authority allied to the stronger protagonists might have resolved this dispute between princes, which did not involve the interests of the folk at large, but Zhungar intervention made a peaceful settlement unobtainable. Galdan appears to have been determined to exploit the situation in Khalkha to provoke a showdown with the Manchus, and to do so he was prepared to take the part of the enfeebled Zasagt Khan [...]”²²³

Sure of Galdan’s support, the Zasagt Khan continued to demand from the Tüsheet Khan the return of the fugitives who had fled his khanate after the murder of his predecessor by the Altan Khan. In 1684 the Manchu emperor appealed to the Dalai Lama to intervene in the quarrel. The return of the fugitives had been requested over and over again without success until 1686, when the long planned reconciliation between the two Khalkha khans took place at a general assembly held at Khüren Bilchir. The Manchus sent a delegation, the Dalai Lama as well, and the Zhavzandamba Khutagt took part personally on the Khalkha side. “The khans themselves pledged their friendship, and all embraced in an atmosphere of apparent sweetness and light” Bawden wrote, although adding two line below that “this reconciliation within the Mongol world was illusory and short-lived”.²²⁴

In any case, the assembly at Khüren Bilchir furnished Galdan with a pretext for military intervention in Khalkha. He reproached indeed the Zhavzandamba Khutagt to have insulted

²²³ Bawden, 1968, p. 68

²²⁴ Ibid. 71

the Dalai Lama's representative by seating on a throne similar to his, an attitude Galdan considered to be a mark of disrespect towards the Dalai Lama himself. As he challenged both the Zhavzandamba Khutagt and his brother the Tüsheet Khan, the latter reported the matter to the Manchu emperor and asked to be allowed to go to war against the Zhungars. Yet the Manchus advised him not to attack Galdan. They were understandably anxious not to become involved in a war whose dimensions promised to be very uncertain, especially at a time when Galdan, who had for years past been on friendly terms with Russia, was apparently likely to enjoy Russian military support.

In the autumn of 1687 Galdan's brother moved into the pastures of the new Zasagt Khan who, with other princes of the right wing, appeared to be on the move to join forces with him. The Tüsheet Khan moved to the attack. When the Manchu emperor heard about the outbreak of hostilities in Khalkha he hurried an ambassador to the Dalai Lama to warn him not to let Galdan stir up trouble among the Mongols, and sent another to the Tüsheet Khan to order him to halt his attack. But the damage was done. The Zasagt Khan had been killed, as well as Galdan's Brother. The Manchu emperor made a final effort for peace, summoning both Galdan and the Tüsheet Khan to meet him at a place called Tsogdos nor. The latter apparently obeyed, but Galdan, having found a convenient *casus belli* in the death of his brother, invaded Khalkha through the pastures of the Zasagt Khan in early 1688, and advanced along the north side of the Khangai mountains, capturing a number of Khalkha chieftains. Galdan and his allies, some of the Oirat princes of Kukunor, thoroughly routed the Tüsheet Khan son who fled with only one hundred survivors from his force of ten thousand. Then, in April another, the Zhungar army, led by the allied Oirat princes, captured the great lamasery of Erdeni Zuu, the centre of Buddhism in Khalkha and the largest permanent settlement at the time. While the Tüsheet Khan retreated to the Ongin river, his brother, the Zhavzandamba Khutagt fled to the pastures of the Setsen Khan, but just about then the latter had died, and his people were in some confusion, so he had no choice but to flee still farther and made for the pastures of the Sunit in Inner Mongolia. As Galdan was still pursuing him, he received the news that the Tüsheet Khan had organized another army so he abandoned the chase, turned and moved back, and again beat the Tüsheet Khan at a place called Olgoi Nor. By the late summer of 1688 the Khalkha forces had been decisively defeated and were camping on the borders of Inner Mongolia. There were two courses open for them, either to seek help from the Russians or apply to the Manchus. Submission to the Zungars seems not to have been considered. The traditional reason why the Khalkhas decided in 1688 to seek refuge within the Manchu empire, rather than submit to Russia, is said to have been the Khutagt's insistence that the Manchus were of the same faith and "wore similar dress to the Mongols", whereas the Russians had a different faith and manner of clothing. Metaphorically this refers to the fact that the differences of tradition, custom, language and religion between Russians and Mongols were enormous while the Manchus spoke a language not so dissimilar to Mongol, their alphabet was an adaptation from the Mongol one and they looked with favour on the development of the lamaist Church.

In fact, by late 1688 the Mongols had little room left for manoeuvre anyway. The continual friction with the Russians and their position of weakness would have made it difficult for the Khalkhas to have extracted any very favourable terms from the Russians. On the other hand, they had before their eyes the attractive example of the Inner Mongolian

nobility who was becoming integrated into the ruling caste of the time and were coming to occupy a privileged position in what was developing into a Manchu-Mongol ruling aristocracy at the summit of a great empire.

During the summer the Manchus had not shown any eagerness to give military help to the Khalkhas. This reluctance to intervene in the Khalkha-Zhungar dispute led to the complete rout of the Khalkhas. At this point probably partly in order to prevent them from attaching themselves to Galdan, in desperation, the Manchu emperor accepted their submission. This, Bawden wrote “brought the inevitable Zhungar-Manchu conflict nearer, but at least ensured that the Khalkhas would not be hostile”.

The Manchus were then constrained to offer the fleeing Khalkhas asylum within their frontier posts and the numbers involved were considerable. As Galdan had also invaded the pastures of the Setsen Khan, where disorder was increased by the successive deaths of two khans, and the minority of the third, the regent also chose to flee to China. Most of the Zasagt Khan’s people had been dispersed, some fled to Kukunor, his son was captured by Galdan and settled south of the Altai Mountains, and a third group fled to the Tüsheet Khan’s pastures. Following this general submission, other Khalkha chieftains gradually brought their subjects in to join the Manchus.

Hostilities between Galdan and the Manchus began in the spring of 1690 when the former moved out from his winter quarters on the Selenga eastwards towards the Khalkha river, and plundered the Mongols camping there. Then he came into collision with a defensive force which he defeated. The Manchus who were not prepared for war, disowned the leader of the defeated force, stating that the conflict had not occurred at the wish of the Emperor. Meanwhile they mobilized a large force which they sent to Mongolia and defeated Galdan at a battle known as the battle of Ulanbudang. As he had fled, the Manchus proceeded to regulate the position of the Khalkha khans.

In the spring of 1691 he assembled a great convention at Dolonnor, in Inner Mongolia. Some 550 Khalkha nobles attended, headed by the three great khans and the Zhavzandamba Khutagt, as did the princes of the forty-nine banners of Inner Mongolia. A formal reconciliation was effected between the nobility of the two wings, that is, between the Tüsheet Khan and the Zasagt Khan. The incorporation of Khalkha within the Manchu state on the same basis as the banners of Inner Mongolia was solemnly proposed and eventually adopted. Bawden comments:

“Mongol historians nowadays talk of the “treacherous nobles” who handed Khalkha over to the Manchus, but in fact there was no alternative for them but to act as they did”.²²⁵

From the Convention of Dolonnor dates the formal disappearance of Mongolia as a political entity. The khans were formally confirmed in their positions by the Manchu emperor who distributed Manchu titles to their relatives, and the Khutagt who was up to then elevated to the religious throne by the free choice of the Khalkhas, was from then on appointed Grand Lama by specific imperial command. Under Manchu control, Khalkha

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 80.

became during the next half century a military base which played no independent part in international affairs for the next two centuries.

When Bawden and after him Kaplonski write that there was no sense of national identity for the Mongols before the twentieth century they are speaking in terms of political will above all. In this sense, the argument bears as we have just seen. However, it does not imply that there were not, among the folks, a certain feeling of belonging together, be it a loose one, or at least a sense of cultural proximity. It is thus important to say a few words about the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia and its growing political influence from the seventeenth century on.

2. The spread of Buddhism and its influence on Mongol society

The history of Khalkha during the seventeenth century, Bawden remarks “is complicated by the rapid emergence of the Lamaist church as a formal institution: it was not merely a religious entity but also, and perhaps primarily, an economic and political entity of supreme importance in the land”.²²⁶ In Khalkha, the political role of the Church took shape about 1640, the decisive step being taken in 1639 by the Tüsheet Khan Gombodorzh (1594-1655) who had his younger son accepted by an assembly of the Seven Banners of Khalkha as head of the faith in the land. Born in 1635, the child continued his education in Mongolia until 1649 before going to Tibet where he studied under both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, receiving from the former the title of Zhavzandamba.

This event appears as a radical departure in the organization of Khalkha, with the emergence of a novel institution, known in English under as that of the “Living Buddha” or Khutagt of Urga (Ikh Khüree in Mongolian), hereditary by re-incarnation. It seems that what Gombodorzh had in view was the creation of some centrally attractive force around which the Mongols - still independent at that time, as far as the Khalkhas are concerned, - could unite themselves. The course of the events under Ligdan Khan had suggested that a secular hegemon was bound to fail. To Bawden, the Tüsheet Khan “Gombodorzh’s political acumen resided in his realization of the possibilities inherent in an alliance with the Church, at that time the only home of learning, and, in Tibet, a disciplined hierarchical organism”. He thus exploited such an alliance by favouring the creation of a pontificate after the manner of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, and managed to have his own son installed as the pontiff. Still according to Bawden, it may then well be that in doing so, the Tüsheet Khan was also hoping “to forestall a possible attempt on the part of Lhasa to establish a pan-lamaist theocracy in central Asia, directed from Tibet” and therefore “to detach his own Buddhists from too much dependence on Lhasa in view of the possibility of an alliance between the Tibetan Church and the Manchus”.²²⁷

The acceptance of the boy as the head of the Church by the Khalkhas occurred a year before a great meeting of all the independent Mongols in an attempt to establish some sort of Mongol unity. If a common legal code was indeed adopted, regulating internal affairs,

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 52.

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 54.

the status of the Church, and common defence, actually, no lasting agreement resulted from it, the hope of Mongolian solidarity being doomed to fail due to the ambitions of Galdan and the succession squabbles of the Khalkha khans we have talked about earlier. Bawden contrasts to this erratic history of alliances and reversal of alliances the durability of the line of the Zhavzandamba Khutagt which the historian sees as one of the most powerful factor, if not the only one, “in maintaining the identity of the Khalkha Mongols over the next three centuries”. He writes:

“His religious headquarters, known in Mongol as Orgoo, “The Palace”, a name which was corrupted by Russian travellers into Urga, became the focal point of Mongol loyalties”.²²⁸

The fame and prestige of the Zhavzandamba Khutagt rested on popular superstition but also on a firmer basis. As Bawden remarks, “at some time during the eighteenth century he was provided with an artificial pedigree of fifteen pre-existences, as was indeed the practice with all important “Living Buddhas””. He was at the same time considered as the spiritual descendant of one of the companions of the Buddha and as the lineal descendant of Chinggis Khan, through his father the Tüsheet Khan.²²⁹ And when he died, in 1723, the discovery of his successor was manipulated so that he was reborn once again in the imperial line of Chinggis Khan. However, this combination of clerical prestige and aristocratic relationship proved in the long run politically unacceptable to the Manchus so when the second Khutagt died in 1759 the Emperor ordered that future incarnations were no longer to be discovered in Mongolia, but only in Tibet.

As time went on, his headquarters, Bogdyn Khüree, became the real centre of the country. Therefore, when in 1911 the Mongols declared themselves independent, it was a natural choice for the capital against the smaller Uliasutai, the administrative capital of the Manchus while, as we will see through our novels, the Khutagt was himself the only possible choice as king.

3. Mongolia under Manchu rule

From 1691, the year of the Convention of Dolonnor, Mongolia’s world position underwent a radical change. Up till then the various khans had played some sort of international role negotiating on more or less equal terms with Russia and Zhungaria. Nomadizing with their followers they were not restricted to particular areas. But from then on, the country was to become a frontier province of the Manchu empire, cut off from contact with Russia. She was to be organized on feudal-military lines, so as to constitute a reserve of mobile soldiery ruled by hereditary princes who were to be bound to the Manchu royal house by a system of hierarchical ranks and titles, by salaries and rewards, and by marriage alliances. Their allotted role was to be the protection of the Manchu dynasty in China.

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 55.

²²⁹ The first Zhavzandamba Khutagt, Zanabazar, was known popularly as Ondor Gegen, the “Lofty Brilliance”.

As Bawden explains, the Manchus pursued a double policy towards the Khalkha nobility: on the one hand they broke the power of the khans by reducing them to the level of authority and influence of the other banner princes, but on the other hand they tried to preserve the pure nomadic character of the Mongols. They made little change in the structure of society but reorganized the three aimags of Khalkha into thirty-four banners (these would further be subdivided in the next century) and to elaborated the feudal system with a proliferation of previously unknown noble titles. Administratively they imposed far-reaching innovations. In particular, they policed the frontier with Russia by means of a continuous chain of watch-posts manned by Mongol soldiers.

Manchu policy in Mongolia was essentially a conservative and reactionary one, the antithesis of a colonial policy. But in practice it had not been able to curb Chinese powerful commercial interests nor to forestall the penetration of Chinese trade, with its associated usury. As we will see in our novels and here expressed in Bawden's words:

“Operating at high interest rates, and enjoying the connivance and even occasionally the active partnership of local officials and lamaseries, the Chinese merchant houses were able, in spite of the restrictions imposed from Beijing, to overrun defenceless Mongolia to the extent that the entire country was in effect mortgaged to them during the two centuries of Manchu domination”.²³⁰

The Manchus were quite uninterested in the economic or social development of Mongolia. As it was to them primarily a reserve of mobile military strength, changes in her economy were directed towards her evolution in this sense. The introduction of agriculture had no other purpose than to supply the armies. A huge area was also set aside in the south-east (in Dariganga) and specially organized as a herding ground for the imperial horse herds. Let us notice that the quite widespread theory that the Manchus encouraged the spread of Lamaism in order to weaken the military might of the Mongols, proves in total contradiction to the military reorganization they carried out. On the contrary, as they were aware of the danger of overmuch concentration on religious activities such as displaying streamers or building *ovoos* for example, they intended to restrict them. They limited the number of lamas and discouraged the concentration of religious power in a single authority. The printing of lamaist books in Peking during the Manchu period was in not planned or encouraged by the Emperors but patronized by rich men and nobles from among the Mongols themselves who also endowed temples and paid for the erection of *stupas* and *ovoos* (pious donations that did not always come out of the patrons themselves, but more often proved to be a charge on the local people, which would last until the twentieth century as we shall see). A banner prince might indeed extract compulsory contributions from his people as a special tax. Though imperial contributions were rare, the state tried to exploit the influence of the Church as much as it could to further its own policies. (We saw above how it manipulated the rediscovery of subsequent re-incarnations of the Zhavzandamba Khutagt).

Under the Manchus the promise of a certain cultural renaissance in Mongolia as a consequence of the conversion to Buddhism in the late sixteenth century was not

²³⁰ Bawden, 1968, p. 83.

maintained, partly because the policy of isolating Mongolia economically and politically involved her in cultural isolation too. However, and this is an interesting point for this research aimed at exploring the tight relations between history and literature:

“[...] if there was no great flowering of literature, neither was there the complete sterility and mass illiteracy that some modern Mongol apologists, from their one-sided Marxist viewpoint, have tried to present as the lot of Mongolia throughout the century. The bureaucracy needed recruits, and schools were founded to supply these. One of the earliest was the school founded at Khovd in 1761 for twenty pupils, who studied Mongol, Manchu and law at the expense of their own banners. Official correspondence was transacted in Mongol within the country and in Manchu with Beijing, the use of Chinese being specifically prohibited. This meant that direct access to the classical culture of China might have been a little more difficult to come by than would have been the case if Chinese were the official language. But the difference was only marginal and cultured Mongols were soon at home in the Chinese language. Indeed, the nineteenth century Inner Mongol writer and historian Inzhinashi takes his countrymen bitterly to task for being far more familiar with Chinese history and lore than with the great past of their own people”.²³¹

Moreover, the currents of two popular cultures flowed into Mongolia, with the introduction of stories and tales from India and translations or adaptations of great Chinese romances. Besides, Bawden remarks, that the libraries of Europe contain a lot of examples of cheap copies of stories and poems, both native and translated, “written out on brown Chinese paper of poor quality well thumbled, greasy and torn” that “prove that the Mongols were lovers of books, not ignorant savages, and that there was material for them to feed their curiosity on”. Hence, Mongolia did not remain a stagnant society during the whole of the Manchu period and we can admit that some important changes in the economic and social structure began to occur, even in spite of a theoretically conservative policy.

The numbers of the *taizhs*, this minor nobility formed by those who were originally the descendants of the family of Chinggis Khan were increased yet they had no specific function to exercise during the dynasty. Some of them became denuded of their personal retainers, and might even be taken on as wage-earners by those who were nominally subject to them. The growth of a bureaucratic, hierarchical system is another feature of this period to be noticed. During the eighteenth century, the Manchus built up an administrative apparatus of considerable complexity, an all-purpose bureaucracy in which no separate judiciary existed apart from the administrative and executive organization. Meanwhile, the exigencies of the Zhungar wars during the first half of the century led to the emergence of a multiplicity of taxes and *corvees* due to the state, principally in the form of work at the watch-posts and relay-stations, and at the State farms and State herds.

As far as economy is concerned, it was dominated by external interests, mostly Chinese and trade was closely connected with politics. The Mongols were producers of primary goods, meat, wool and furs, and the supply of these was strictly seasonal. Hence, they came to rely on the Chinese for semi-luxury foods, tea and tobacco, but also for manufactured

²³¹ Ibid, p. 86.

goods, saddles, needles, cooking-pots, and so on, including things they had previously made for themselves. The obligation to pay heavy taxes in kind or silver, as well as to find money to commute their personal *corvées* involved them most heavily in debt. Indeed, the Chinese shops which provided an elementary banking system in Mongolia were able to grow rich by usury. It was to their advantage to keep their customers in debt was the fundamental factor producing economic and social decay during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The burden of the debts fell ultimately on the people, whether it was their own personal debts which were involved, the personal debts of the banner princes, or official debts incurred on behalf of the banner as a whole.

4. Autonomy and its loss

This brings us to the dawn of the twentieth century, the period which will focus most of our attention in this study. At the beginning of the twentieth century, great changes were taking place in the world, including in East Asia. The Taiping and Boxer revolts were evidence of the wind of revolt against the Qing dynasty, which had to face up to the great Western powers anxious to see the Chinese market opened up to their products.²³² The collapse of the dynasty accelerated and favoured the birth of national feelings among the Mongols and their desire for emancipation.

In the course of the analysis, it will become clear why a reminder of the events of the previous centuries and of the structure of Mongolian society as it was then was crucial for the appreciation of what follows. References to history are indeed constant in the mouths of the characters in our novels, explaining their angers and aspirations, justifying their movements. In order to situate our comments in the historical framework that supports them in due course, it is now necessary to set the milestones and to place them in a relatively precise manner in their articulation.

To Bawden, how Mongolia's revolution, which in 1920 was still aiming only at replacing the hereditary authority exercised by the aristocracy by a representative government was transformed into a full-scale Soviet style revolution in the course of a few years is the true theme of the study of that time". And he quotes the Mongolian historian Natsagdorzh:

“The movement of 1911 was the beginning of the awakening of the Mongol people, and an important step in the future struggle. But all the 1911 movement did was to remove the reactionary Manchu officials and troops. It left the Mongol people as before under the oppression of imperialism and feudalism. The experience of the eight or nine years of autonomy clearly showed the Mongol people the impossibility of going on in the old ways. It became clearer than ever that without fighting for and achieving real independence, without destroying the rotten feudalistic structure which had in fact reached its end, it would be impossible to achieve any progress in Mongolia.

²³² Revolts mentioned in *Üüriin Tuya*, confirming the influence of these geopolitical turmoil on Mongolia's course, at least in the author's view. Cf. *Üüriin Tuya*, First book “In the capital of a moribund empire”.

What was needed to jerk Mongolia out of her centuries' old backwardness was not just a half-hearted reform, but a social revolution".²³³

In the decade between 1911 and 1921, indeed, Mongolia underwent two distinct revolutions. If the second was **inspired by the Russian example, carried out under Russian guidance and control**, and was the prelude to a period of profound change, the first, which resulted in the declaration of independence was, according to Bawden, **essentially a nationalistic movement** aimed at removing the Manchu authority.

The historian analyses it as a **reaction** of the whole people to the rapid replacement, at the turn of the century, of the traditional, conservative, isolating "Manchu" policy, by a forward, **colonizing, "Chinese" policy** on the part of Beijing. The early years of the twentieth century saw a decisive change in Chinese policy towards Mongolia. Even though the Khalkha nobility never had the opportunity to sell off their banner lands to Chinese buyers (while the Inner Mongolian had) the Chinese threat to enforce their presence, and in particular their military one, such as the establishment of army barracks in Khüree or the planned recruitment of a Mongol army, was real.

The **popular discontent** manifested itself in many ways. The anxiety of the people expressed itself first of all through somewhat illusory hopes. In particular, people were looking for a liberator to appear, expecting an army to be assembled in Siberia to invade Mongolia and expel the Chinese. This hope was nurtured by rumours spread by a man called Dambizhantsan, a Kalmuck lama from the Volga, who successively claimed to be a grandson of the Zhungar leader Amarsana and then the reincarnation of the latter himself. His success in gaining the confidence of the people was symptomatic of the **vague and unorganized unrest** troubling Mongolia. Vagabond story tellers and singers sang the old songs and told the old stories about Amarsana and Chingunzhav, the leaders of the 1756-1758 rebellion, and were looking too for the return of Chinggis Khan.

Meanwhile, the Chinese were facing mutinies in their own army, the better known being probably that of Uliasutai, in 1900. It started when, exasperated by their poor conditions and lack of pay, the troops surrounded their officers and demanded to be sent home. The *amban* or Manchu representative and his officers ran away to the hills whereas their guards and the local people joined the insurgents to plunder the Chinese shops and vegetable gardens. Neither the Manchu nor the Mongol officials were able to do anything to quell the mutiny. Nevertheless, whatever popular in origin, it proved unorganized and not directed towards any specific purpose. Therefore, the mutineers simply deserted and disappeared and the authorities could thus return to Uliasutai. Though ineffective in terms of results, the mutiny was far from insignificant for it did demonstrate the thorough **demoralization of the existing administration in Mongolia**. As Bawden writes, "all that was needed to overturn it was a properly directed movement operating at the right time, which was soon to come".

In Khüree, sharp scuffles opposed the lamas and the ordinary people on one hand, and the Chinese on the other. The more significant of those clashes occurred in 1910 when the

²³³ Ш. Нацагдорж, *Ар Монголд гарсан ардын хөдөлгөөн*, Улаанбаатар, 1956, p. 109, quoted by Bawden, 1968, p. 190.

sedan chair of the newly-appointed *amban* Sando was stoned, an event that is considered as the starting point of the 1911 Revolution.

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to consider that it was from any popular movement that the revolution finally sprang in 1911 for it essentially **expressed itself through the leadership of the nobility**, the only group **cohesive** and influential enough at that time.

Indeed, though the ordinary people were not unwilling to cooperate in throwing out the Chinese, it was the nobility which had for some time past becoming more and more annoyed by the purposeful Chinese incursion into their territory that took the decisive step. This took place in July when a mixed group of lay and clerical aristocrats discussed the current situation and proposed to the Khutagt that a delegation should be sent to Russia to ask for help against the Chinese. The Khutagt accepted and, accordingly, a small mission of three men, namely the Chin Van Khanddorzh, a lay noble and the general of the Tüsheets Khan aimag, the Da Lam Tserenchimed, and an Inner Mongolian prince, the Kharchin Khaisan Gün, reached St Petersburg by the middle of August. These delegates expressed the Mongol's will to see the Russians help them assert their independence - more specifically they asked for a loan and the supply of weapons,- while at the same time they offered to accept a Russian protectorate. Though the Russian side remain very cautious, it promised a limited quantity of weapons for self-defence but warning them not to make a rash break with China.

But in the middle of October, a revolutionary uprising broke out in China. Then and in spite of the Russian' warnings for moderation, the nobility pressed the Khutagt for a decision whereupon the latter issued a pastoral letter which reads as follow:

“The time has now arrived for all the Mongol tribes to unite and establish themselves as a separate state, to let the Faith flourish, and to see an end to suffering under foreign oppression”.²³⁴

To quote Bawden “the Manchu dynasty collapsed just at the right time for them to be able to clothe their declaration of independence in a cloak of legality” and, indeed, a provisional government was set up in Khüree and an army mobilized, allegedly to offer loyal help to the Manchu dynasty. In reality, this proved to be a mere pretext to cast doubt on the loyalty of the Manchu *amban*, who was asked at impossibly short notice to arm these troops. Unable to meet the demand, he had to leave Khüree, under Russian protection.

The choice of the head of the new Mongol state naturally fell on the highly respected Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt. Indeed, though himself a Tibetan, he had lived all his life in Mongolia, and was identified with Mongol interests and not with those of Tibet. The lineal descendant of Chinggis Khan through his spiritual ancestor, the first Zhavzandamba Khutagt who was the son of the Tüsheets Khan, as we have seen above, and, by virtue of his holy office, regarded with the deepest veneration by all Mongols. He was therefore the natural rallying-point for the sympathies of Mongols, almost everywhere at this time.

Independent Mongolia's immediate ambitions were huge. For the time being, there was no limit to the extent to which she could extend her borders within Mongol-inhabited

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 194.

territory hitherto subject to the Manchus. In particular, Barga, Dariganga, Alashan, and most of the banners of Inner Mongolia, were to form part of the new state, an ambition which reveals an emerging hope of pan-mongolism.

Independence was declared on 29 November 1911. Five ministries were established, and the Khutagt was raised to the throne, with control over all matters, both secular and religious. He was accorded the reign-title “Exalted by All”, which was much likely a conscious appeal to the legendary past of the Mongols as seen through Buddhist eyes.²³⁵ However, as his authority was still limited to the two eastern *aimags*, he called upon the generals of the two western ones, where the greatest concentrations of Manchu officials and troops were (at Khovd and Uliasutai), to expel these and to accept the authority of Khüree.

At Uliasutai there was no fighting, though the Manchu general had to be rescued by the Russian consul. This was indeed not from any Mongol violence, but from the exasperated fury of his own colleague, the Manchu *amban*, who was disgusted at the compliancy with which the Manchu forces had been surrendered”.²³⁶

At Khovd, where the alternate Mongol representative at the Manchu *amban*’s office was the general Magsarzhav, events proved more violent.²³⁷ At the end of 1911, Magsarzhav passed on to the *amban* Khüree’s orders to surrender his authority to the new regime, but the *amban* rejected this demand and began to reinforce his garrison and to fortify the official city. According to Bawden, the Manchus were probably likely to mount, from Khovd, an offensive against Khüree. Thus, Magsarzhav left Khovd in a hurry with his seal of office to report on the state of affairs to the government. The latter sent two emissaries but they were seized by the *amban*, imprisoned and put to death.

Thereupon the new government appointed Magsarzhav and the Barga leader Damdinsüren as “dignitaries for pacifying the western region”. Together with two other figures of this first revolution, they were allotted five hundred soldiers to which they added recruits picked up on the way, and approached Khovd with an army of some three thousand men. They encircled the city at the end of July 1912. Chinese reinforcements were sent to relieve the city, but the Mongols heard of this in time and smashed them.

In the east, a revolt broke out in Barga in January 1912. The city of Khailaar was captured and the rebels declared their allegiance to the Khutagt, soon followed by thirty-five of the forty nine banners of Inner Mongolia. Nevertheless some Inner Mongol princes, heavily sinicized, were unwilling to break with China. In the autumn of 1912 fighting broke out in Inner Mongolia between the forces of the Chinese general Yuan Shikai, who was trying to re-establish China’s position there, and those of autonomous Mongolia which was pursuing the dream of a pan-Mongol state. While Russia was not reluctant to help and

²³⁵ Indeed, according to Bawden “Exalted by All” had been the name of the mythical first king of India, from whom seventeenth-century lamaist chroniclers, intent on providing Chinggis Khan with a lineage theologically more acceptable than the primitive zoomorphic legend that his ancestor had been born of the union of a wolf and a hind, had ingeniously traced his descent. The new reign title looks very much like a subtle claim to legitimacy by association, and its doctrinal and national overtones were bound to have some persuasive”. Bawden, 1968, p. 196.

²³⁶ This event is accurately staged in *Üüriin Tuya*.

²³⁷ See *Ikh Khuvi Zaya, Üüriin Tuya*.

advise Mongolia, she was not ready to champion more than a limited autonomy within the old boundaries of Outer Mongolia.²³⁸

At that time, Mongolia's international position appeared as extremely weak. Yet, her leaders were inexperienced, and somewhat "naïve" in their approach to international realities, treading a very hazardous path in committing the new state to a programme of absorbing all Mongols to the south and east they were, while the new state had totally failed to get diplomatic recognition from any of the powers²³⁹.

Fighting continued throughout 1913, year at the end of which Russia and China finally agreed on the autonomous status of Mongolia. Nevertheless, the Mongols did not seem to have yet realized how limited possibilities their situation left them. Lack of recruits, desertions and sickness was severely weakening their forces based in Khüree. Therefore, when the Sain Noyon Khan was sent to St Petersburg to get recognition for the boundaries of a greater Mongolia on the one hand, and on the other hand to negotiate for a new loan and the provision of enormous military help (amounting to one hundred thousand rifles, and artillery and machine guns suitable for an army of one hundred thousand men), it proved totally unrealistic. The Russian ambassador downplayed the request, adjusting his proposal to much more modest ideas.²⁴⁰ From then on, Mongolia had barely any choice but to join in a three power conference with Russia and China, in order to settle the matter of her status on a basis satisfactory to both her neighbours. This conference assembled in 1914 and 1915 in the city of Khiakta on the border between Russia and Mongolia and led to the signature of what is known as the Treaty of Khiakta (the "*gurvans ulsyn geree*" in Mongolian) which reaffirmed the "autonomy" of Mongolia, but not any more its "independence" and under Chinese suzerainty. Mongolia and China ceased hostilities and withdrew their armies. Then, China was permitted to station five *ambans*, four in Mongolia at Khüree, Uliasutai, Khiakta and Khovd, and one in Tannu Tuva, with a small number of troops for their protection.

The Treaty of Khiakta and its consequences

Though what Mongolia achieved at Khiakta in 1915 was less than she had hoped for in 1911, her situation was not unpromising as her existence was from then on recognized by international treaty.

Though China exercised a nominal suzerainty, the real influence in the country was Russian. A whole set of important reforms were initiated with this support (in the military field, first of all, but also in medicine, coal mining, agriculture, education, communication).

All these innovations were doomed by the collapse of Russian power in 1917 and the reassertion of Chinese sovereignty. Moreover, they did not truly address Mongolia's ultimate problem, "her hopelessly backward social order", in Bawden's words. Indeed, the

²³⁸ This was all that was recognized in the protocol signed by Korostovets in Khüree in that October.

²³⁹ Her only success, a treaty signed with Tibet early in 1913, was not taken seriously by anyone

²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, according to Bawden, the greatest awkwardness of the Sain Noyon Khan was to have admitted that the Mongols had been negotiating at official level with an unauthorized Japanese individual and moreover to have asked the Russians to continue these negotiations on their behalf but then with the Japanese government itself. This false step, Bawden writes, "gave the Russians the chance to put the Mongols firmly in their place".

feudal system was not dismantled in any way, and was even reinforced as high lamas were given titles of lay nobility. The internal administrative system of the Manchu dynasty remained, with the superstructure of five ministries (home and foreign affairs, finance, justice and war), as well as the *aimag* and *khoshuu* system. The *zasags* continued to hold hereditary office. The Khutagt's Shavi-estate also continued to exist, the shavi being exempted from state taxation and the church entitled to a share of the state's income for its own use.

But for the people of Mongolia, this period was very difficult. Destitution and starvation were reported from all over the country. People had to cope with the severe climate which took a toll of their animals every year, with heavy debts and the extravagance of many nobles (the servicing of Chinese debts continued,²⁴¹ but also with a new drain on their livelihood which opened with the continuing military operations in the east.

Until the international situation changed, with the consolidation of Soviet power in Siberia, there was no earnest attempt made to deal with Mongolia's problems in a fundamental way. There were a few small scale popular uprisings, a number of mutinies and other disturbances in the army but the real trigger for purposeful action was not the growing distress of the people, it was the sudden abrogation of autonomy in the autumn of 1919.

Chinese intervention in Mongolia had been increasing during 1918 and 1919, partly on the pretext of securing the country against Soviet aggression, partly in face of a Japanese sponsored pan-Mongolia movement. Chen Yi, the Chinese resident in Khüree, managed to persuade the autonomous government to allow him to bring in Chinese reinforcements the first which reached Khüree in September 1918. In the summer of 1919 Chen Yi engaged in discussions with the Mongol government on the question of the relinquishment of autonomy. A document in sixty-four points (*64 züülin geree*) which offered to guarantee the feudal rights of the nobility in exchange for their surrender of autonomy and acceptance of Chinese sovereignty was drawn up and accepted by the Khutagt. However, the said treaty encountered the opposition of the parliament whereupon and before the question could be settled amicably, the Chinese general Xu Shuzheng was appointed commander-in-chief and arrived in Khüree with a large military force.

Xu precipitated a *coup d'État* winning over some princes by bribes, and terrorizing others, and extorting from them a petition requesting the abrogation of autonomy. A show of force compelled the government to accept his demands. The "petition" was signed, not by the Khutagt himself, but by sixteen ministers and high lay and clerical nobles.

In February 1920 the actual ceremony of the handing over of authority to the Chinese took place in Khüree under circumstances perceived as heavily humiliating. The ceremonial included the kowtowing of all officials to Xu and the personal reverence of the Khutagt to the Chinese flag. Immediately afterwards the five Mongol ministries were dismantled, their archives transferred to the Chinese authorities, and the Mongol army was demobilized. Weapons and equipment were confiscated by the Chinese.

Preparation for revolution

²⁴¹ Except in the Khovd district where the debt registers had been destroyed. (Bawden, 1968: 203)

Such was the situation when the first revolutionary clubs were founded in Khüree. Bawden insists that “there was no history of a long-prepared revolutionary movement, and no working class to act as a revolutionary force. Nor was there much contact with foreign “progressive” thought”.

Knowledge of communist theory in Mongolia was at that time very limited. The first classics of communism did not appear in book form till 1925, even though Mongol revolutionaries must have been acquainted with them to some extent earlier through the revolutionary newspaper *Mongolyn Ünen* or “Mongol Truth”, which was published in Irkutsk from November 1920 onwards, and printed the Communist Manifesto in its first number. But it was not till 1930 that a determined effort was made to popularize the theories of communism. A special office for disseminating Marxist literature in the Mongol language was then set up for this purpose, inside the propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Party.

This is an indication that the aims of the revolutionaries were at first quite modest. Two revolutionary clubs are known to have been founded in Khüree at about the same time, the one of these being said to have been led by Sūkhbaatar, the other by Choibalsan.

The membership of both groups was very mixed. The revolutionaries and their sympathizers were not Bolsheviks but represented a **wide spectrum of origin and outlook.** There were men of humble origin like the Sūkhbaatar and Choibalsan, lamas such as Bodo, some such as Danzan, one of the seven heroes who undertook the secret journey to Russia in 1920 to attract Soviet interest and get help who might be classed as bourgeois, there were members of the official class, such as Zhamyan, a civil servant in the Ministry of Finance and a scholar who later became the first president of the Mongolian Committee of Sciences. The revolutionaries also **enjoyed the support of a number of nobles and other influential figures** like Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav, Da Lam Damdinbazar the Zhalkhanz Khutagt, and Da Lam Puntsagdorzh.²⁴²

This association of men from such various origins would be later justified by Marxist apologists on the theoretical grounds that it was “correct tactics to create this “alliance” between the true revolutionaries and members of the aristocracy and so consolidate all those elements who might be of help, even temporarily, to the revolution”.²⁴³ Yet there are many indications that the strategic aspect of this alliance was not at that time a conscious one from part of the most extremist elements.

The objectives of these revolutionary groups were still ill-defined, and their activities limited in scope, restricted to discuss the situation, and to compose and post up placards in the streets of Khüree.

The first contact with Soviet Russia came early in 1920 when a secret Comintern agent came to Khüree to spy out the land on the spot, and was put in touch with Sūkhbaatar and the others to whom he advised to make a demarche to the eastern section of the Comintern immediately after his departure. He promised to instruct the Soviet representative at Khiakta to facilitate their crossing of the frontier. Soon afterwards, in June 1920, the two revolutionary groups amalgamated to form the “Mongol People’s Party”, a still small and

²⁴² The Bolshevik element later ousted all others, the latter being for the most of them base traitors. Bodo was executed as a counter-revolutionary in 1922, so as Da Lam Puntsagdorzh, Danzan was liquidated without trial in 1924.

²⁴³ Bawden, 1968, p. 207.

quite unrepresentative group, with no contacts outside Khüree in the countryside. Bawden comments:

“[This] must be remembered when we consider how in the course of the next few weeks it was to arrogate to itself the right to speak on behalf of the Mongol people as a whole, most of whom knew nothing of its existence”.²⁴⁴

One of their first activities was to draw up a party oath in nine clauses, of which the first was a statement of the party’s aims. And Bawden insists that even as late as the middle of 1920 the defence of the Buddhist faith was one of the principal objectives of this new party, justifying his assertion by quoting their words:

“The aims of the People’s Party of Outer Mongolia are to purge cruel enemies who are hostile to the Faith and the nation, to restore lost authority, loyally to protect and encourage state and church, to protect our nationality, loyally to reform the internal administration, to plan fully for the well-being of the poor people, constantly to guard our own internal authority and to let people live free from suffering, neither oppressing nor being oppressed”.²⁴⁵

Morozova who wrote much more recently and with the hindsight new resources as well as time provides, confirmed that the influence of the Comintern was still limited at the time and the objectives of the revolutionaries hesitant. To quote her:

“At the beginning of the 1920s, the new political and social realities imposed on Mongolia by Soviet and Comintern strategies only insignificantly and superfluously transformed society. From the very beginning the Union of Revolutionary Youth (URY), the Internal Defense Office (IDO), the new government, and even the Mongolian People’s Party did not have a revolutionary image, but were rather viewed as if just an ordinary political shift happened in the centre, and Mongolia was liberated from the Chinese and all those were temporary, ephemeral changes”.²⁴⁶

A group of seven revolutionaries was set out to be sent to Russia, namely Sükhbaatar, Choibalsan, Choibalsang, Danzan, Bodo, Losol, Dogsom and Chagdarzhav.²⁴⁷ Yet, the first delegates, Choibalsan and Danzan, were received with some scepticism.²⁴⁸ This reason led Choibalsan to urge his comrades in Khüree to get a letter of authority from the Khutagt. Meanwhile, Bodo and Chagdarzhav reached Khiakta with a letter for the Soviet representative there, who designated them as representatives of the Mongol people, empowered to present requests to the Comintern, and spoke of their group of delegates as a delegation from the whole Mongol people to the Soviet power, There are indications that

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 1968, 209.

²⁴⁵ Quoted by Bawden, 1968, p. 210.

²⁴⁶ Morozova, 2009, p. 41.

²⁴⁷ All of these, except for the first two, Bawden precises “were to be liquidated on one pretext or another during the next twenty years”.

²⁴⁸ This according to Choibalsan’s own account.

the revolutionaries were from then on moving closer towards a full alliance with Soviet Russia, though they did not constitute yet a sizeable party inside Mongolia, let alone the beginnings of a government. At the same time it was clear to them that authority from the Khutagt if they were to reach any success in their relations with the Russians.

The letter asked by Choibalsan was composed by Zhamyantsetseg and received the Khutagt's official seal while similar letters were addressed to the Japanese and American governments. Yet, these latter remained unfollowed. The request for reviewed the circumstances in which Mongolia had lost her autonomy and went on to say that the Mongols of Khalkha and Derbet wished to restore their independent state as it existed under the *ambans* of Uliasutai, Khüree and Khovd, and to get rid of the clause in the Treaty of Khiakta which stated that Mongolia was part of Chinese territory. In this letter, the Mongols merely asked to the Soviet authorities to take account of the circumstances and to agree to help them. Though they wanted to get rid of the *gemin*, the Chinese forces which had been terrorizing the population since Xu's coup d'État, the Khutagt was not authorizing the conspirators to request immediate material help or military intervention.

Analysing these events, Bawden made a few comments on the story of Sükhbaatar's journey to Khiakta, which is important for us to recall for it has passed into legend in Mongolia (to mention just one indication of it, the whip handle (*tashuur*) in which he hid the Khutagt's letter is preserved as a relic of the revolution in a museum of present day Ulaanbaatar).²⁴⁹

In August the Mongols explained to their Russian contacts the aims of their party and asked for military help, a loan, and the dispatch of military instructors and of advisers to help in revolutionary work, with the eventual purpose of freeing Mongolia from Chinese domination. This was going well beyond what had originally been sanctioned by the Khutagt and suggests an incipient break between the delegation and the government in Khüree. We won't dwell upon the details of this journey but what is important to understand is that the Party and the Khutagt reached a compromise agreement in late 1921 which was institutionalized in a formal oath but also that the activities of the Mongol delegation from this time on aroused the distrust of the Khutagt, distrust that will reveal the more and more obvious over the ensuing months.

The Mongols drew up a document in which was set out in outline the programme of activities of the People's Party over the next few years, and handed over to the Russians in August. It was intended to recover autonomy, to appoint the Khutagt a constitutional monarch and then destroy the hereditary power of the aristocracy. Then, when people had been prepared for it, the Party would renew the revolution and eliminate the oligarchy which held power. Several The necessity of constant liaison with the Soviet government was also stressed.

Soon after all sympathizers with the revolution, including Zhamyantsetseg, and the generals Magsarzhav and Damdinsüren were arrested by the Chinese. Therefore, far from being able to reorganize and develop their activities, the revolutionaries had to disperse and remain passively underground.

²⁴⁹ But the historian also insists and regrets that in all the accounts of this period in Mongolia, "the part played by the other conspirators was suppressed, and the story of the epic journey was told as if only Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan had undertaken it.

Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan waited at Irkutsk where they underwent some military training and the former also maintained contacts with Comintern personnel. But by November, the situation inside Mongolia changed drastically. Chen Yi had come back to replace Xu but a new threat had arisen with the invasion of north Mongolia by a band of white Russian troops under Baron Ungern Sternberg at the beginning of October. Ungern moved towards Khüree and laid siege to it. To a certain extent and according to Bawden “the Chinese had played into his hands by their murders, rapings and robberies, as well as by their attacks on lamaseries and the imprisonment of the Khutagt”.²⁵⁰ The consequence of this was that Mongols of all classes began to look to the white Russians to deliver them from the Chinese. They enlisted in great numbers in the Baron’s army, and Magsarzhav himself, on his release from prison, was even to serve as Minister of War in the new government and to hold active field command. Indeed, on 3 February 1921 Ungern occupied Khüree and restored the Khutagt to the throne. At this time, Bawden comments “he enjoyed general support and respect, and the Khutagt conferred extravagant titles on him, extolling him as the “invincible general, incarnation of the fierce divinity Zhamsaran”. This period however turned out to be one of terror in Khüree, the Baron and his men torturing, killing and plundering indiscriminately among the population. Understandably, this caused him to lose consideration as quickly as he had gained it. Meanwhile, preparations for a revolutionary takeover were going ahead in the Russian part of Khiakta.²⁵¹ The Mongols made their first task the recruitment of an army to take action against the *gemin* who were straggling northwards towards Altan Bulag, the Mongol part of Khiakta, plundering and murdering as they went, after their defeats by Ungern’s force. The situation was too urgent to wait for the arrival of military aid from Russia. Bawden comments:

“What is so striking about the events of the next few weeks is the unwonted speed and energy displayed in the planning and recruitment of an army, the successful staging of the first Party Congress in Russian Khiakta, the establishment of a provisional government, and the decisive defeat of a numerically far superior, though demoralised, Chinese army and the occupation of Mongol Khiakta, the first piece of Mongol soil actually to be liberated by the revolutionary forces”.²⁵²

In February, a revolutionary council decided to speed up the work of enlisting an army, and appointed Sükhbaatar as its commander. Bawden insists further writing that it must be remembered “it was Mongol soldiers who carried out this first campaign on their own, relying on their own resources though aided by Russian staff officers”.²⁵³

Partisan warfare

²⁵⁰ Notice that in *Üüriin Tuya*, the Ekh Dagina says precisely the same thing to the Khutagt in the scene we will comment on below, *Üüriin Tuya*, 1954, p.

²⁵¹ Concerning these events, Morozova remarks that the Comintern considered Soviet military assistance to be a decisive factor in the complete defeat of Baron Ungern and in the Mongolian People’s Party’s accession to power. She writes: “Red Army soldiers, who came to the Mongolian steppes only after Ungern had repelled the Chinese, had the clear objective of conquering the remains of his army; they won prestige among Mongols against the backdrop of the Bloody Baron’s atrocities and launched an open agitation campaign”. Morozova, op. cit. p. 31.

²⁵² Bawden, 1968, p. 217.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 218.

During the second half of February Sükhbaatar and a few lieutenants of his began to recruit a force of partisans from the area near Khiakta.²⁵⁴ Recruits came in from all sides, many volunteers, though all did not enrol so willingly, and by the end of February a force of some four hundred men had been assembled. Reports make clear how ill-armed they were, some having guns bought from white Russian, others weapons from Chinese whom they had killed, and they got sabre practice slicing willow trees. But more significant engagements were fought towards the end of February. Let us quote here a rather long passage in which Bawden describes the “partisan warfare” of the time, the relevance of which to our study will become apparent later on:

“Typical of the partisan warfare of the time was Sükhbaatar’s encirclement and destruction of a force of between one and two hundred Chinese soldiers who were gathering hay. These troops had come to steal the grass which had been cut by the local people, and Sükhbaatar, informed of it, rode to the spot, posted most of his few troops in ambush, and then with one or two comrades rode into the middle of the Chinese and began to parley with their commander, trying to persuade him to surrender. The Chinese would not give up their arms, but agreed to retire without the grass, and as Sükhbaatar was shaking their officer’s hand, firing broke out. The official biography of Sükhbaatar says it was the Chinese who fired first, though an account published by Laasag, one of the Mongol officers on the spot, in the Mongol army paper “Red Star” in 1946, says it was Puntsag’s troops who did so. Yet other versions of the event suggest that the Chinese were lulled into a false sense of security by Sükhbaatar, who opened the attack on them as soon as he had reached cover. This seems entirely in character. In another engagement fought a few days later across the Orkhon River, the Mongols used a similar plan. While Sükhbaatar was parleying with enemy representatives, he had riflemen aiming at them from under cover, and had them shot down the moment the talks were over. At any rate, the Chinese foragers were taken by surprise. A few escaped to Khiakta, where they reported the existence of a large and brave Mongol army, but most of them were massacred”.²⁵⁵

Despite these audacious attacks, right up to the time of the capture of Khüree in July, they remained a weak force lacking proper equipment and practically all military training. And there are many indications that in the final and fiercer stages of the war they served more or less only as a cover to the Soviet troops.

Meanwhile, in Russian Khiakta, the first Party Congress was held at the beginning of March and a provisional government set up. This was a direct challenge to the Khutagt at a time when he still headed the legitimate regime in Khüree. At Khiakta, a revolutionary party and government were prepared on Soviet soil with the participation of Soviet citizens. They then moved into the territory of Mongolia which they took over and overthrew the existing government under the cover of the Red Army. Commenting this event, Bawden

²⁵⁴ One nucleus of this, Bawden precises, was from the *khoshuu* of Sumiya Beis, a Chakhar leader from Sinkiang who had brought his people around into Mongolia through Russia at the time of the 1911 revolution and another the so-called fifty soldiers of Khiakta, under the command of Puntsag, a veteran of the Khuzhribulan military school and the Chinese wars of 1912-1914, and an old comrade of Sükhbaatar.

²⁵⁵ Bawden, 1968, p. 221.

insists once again that “at this time the Mongol People’s Party was still unrepresentative of anyone but its own members”.²⁵⁶

The first Party Congress

The sources being scarce and difficult to control when available, Bawden remains very cautious when commenting what happened during this first Congress of the Party. Again and again, the historian warns us against an history written by the winning side, stressing that the original revolutionaries were by no means all committed to communism. And that many of them would have been content to see autonomy restored, the Buddhist faith rehabilitated, and a national democratic constitution elaborated.

“One may well realize that most contemporary Mongol historical writing proceeds from an act of faith, but it is more difficult, in the absence of contrasting opinion and presentation of fact on the part of native scholars, to correct the bias they openly display”.²⁵⁷

The Party Congress was held on the first three days of March 1921. The participants included Comintern representatives and their number increased from day to day. These included party members originating from each of the four *aimags*, and from three *otogs* of the Shavi-estate.²⁵⁸ Several of the members of the Congress were soldiers of the partisan army who were elected to the Party on that occasion.

The points on the agenda were: to discuss the situation of the time and the way to deal with it, to organize a supreme command for the army and to set up a general staff, and to popularize the party’s ideals and aims. It was stated that it was impossible to work with the White Russians who were suspected to conspire with Mongolia’s enemy, in other words with Japan. Danzan who was the chairman accepted the general opinion that Mongolia should seek Soviet help. According to Bawden, this resolution should probably be construed as a declaration of intent not to go along any longer with the Khutagt’s regime considered as a “puppet of Ungern’s”. It was agreed to set up a general staff for the army with five members including Sühbataar and Danzan, and two of them Russians invited from the Red Army. It was then agreed to send telegrams of greetings to “all foreign parties” and to set up a Central Committee of the Party.

The Party’s ideals and aims were set forth in two separate documents, namely the “Mongol People’s Party Proclamation to the Masses” and the “Platform of the Party”, both composed by the Buriat Zhamtsarano. About the Preamble of the former, Bawden notes that it is essentially a historico-political analysis of the rise and decline of feudalism and of the influence of capitalism, and an application of the lessons to be learned from this to Mongolia’s situation couched in a style a little easier and more direct than the Party’s earlier publications but that it bristles with technical neologisms (“koloni”, “capital”, “proletari”, “imperialism”, “feodal”)²⁵⁹ which “cannot have contributed much to the comprehension of

²⁵⁶ Ibidem.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 222.

²⁵⁸ The party members themselves came from ten *khoshuu* or banners of which five were located in Tüssheet Khan aimag, the aimag around Khiakta.

²⁵⁹ In *Üüriin Tuya* Rinchen makes discreetly fun of this use of neologisms by a man trying to enforce the new ideology to the main characters.

this remarkable document by the Mongol masses, still immersed in their lamaist superstitions and for the most part illiterate, for whom it was ostensibly intended”.²⁶⁰ As for its content, the Preamble exalts the Third International as the one force able to effect world revolution, states that the transfer of power to the people is the only way of salvation, and declares that it is in training men to accomplish this transfer that the International can best help. The Platform was composed in a plainer style and presented itself as a sober application of the ideas of the Preamble to the Mongol situation. It stressed the need to re-establish national sovereignty, if possible uniting all the tribes of Mongolia. The Party welcomed within its ranks all those of Mongol race, “whether high or low, lama or lay, men or women” who, being persons of good will and in agreement with the Party’s principles, were prepared to support it.

The provisional government

Then, on 13th March 1921, a meeting was held under the leadership of the newly established Central Committee in order to set up a People’s Provisional Government and this in direct defiance of the legal government at Khüree.

When Bawden wrote, corrections made to mutilated archives already put into perspective the parts played by the leading revolutionaries of the time and he already felt allowed to point it. We saw tht this qualification of the role played by Sükhbaatar is one of the main point of Kaplonski’s book. Bawden thus suggest that in 1921 “the cracks in a facade of unity” which would later be presented as stark and obvious, were probably not so apparent at the time. He remarked in particular that those belonging to “the right wing”, – that is, Danzan, Chagdarzhav and Bodo – where at this time the most important positions.²⁶¹ In 1921, the leading circles of the revolution still included a considerable number of men whose vision of the future was not this of the Soviet communist party.

The proclamation of the setting up of the provisional government still remains a moderate document. It reasserts the principle of Mongol independence, yet no longer mentioning the restauration of the Khutagt, and promises the calling of a National Khural (assembly) to determine the future Constitution of the country. The collision with the Khutagt’s regime at Khüree was by then latent and the latter had at the time only the illusory military power of Ungern to rely on, while the provisional government was backed by the Red Army. To Bawden, the Soviet campaign against the Whites in Mongolia appears to a large extent as an extension of the Russian civil war. The Whites had entrenched themselves in Mongolian territory but did not hesitate to re-cross the border as and when they needed to, which the Reds logically could not tolerate. Their intervention, in 1921,

²⁶⁰ He specifies that the Party became aware of this later and, at its second Congress in 1923, decided to omit such words and substitute Mongol terms for them. Bawden, 1968, p. 225.

²⁶¹ This is suggested in *Tungalag Tamir* about Danzan. However, no matter how “leading” the role, it does not serve the character in a positive way.

was legally covered by a request made by the provisional government but it was probably bound to happen sooner or later, with or without such an “invitation”.²⁶²

The expulsion of the Chinese and the occupation of Khüree

On March the decision was made to capture Altan Bulag, the Mongol Khiakta, from the Chinese. This move had the double purpose to deprive the *gemin* of their main base, and to furnish the Provisional Government with a first foothold of Mongol territory to establish itself on, hence to strengthen its claim to legitimacy. On March 15 the Chinese in Khiakta were demanded to surrender, accordingly by Sühbaatar, but received no reply. The assault began on the morning of the 18th of March. The conditions were in not favourable²⁶³ but the Mongols eventually managed to capture the city. To quote Bawden, “the Mongol victory is all the more surprising when we consider the relative numbers involved” (ten thousand Chinese but some four hundred Mongols, if we are to rely on the data he provides). Most of the Chinese fled into Russia crossing the frontier at Khiakta, but others retreated southwards where they had to face partisan groups or troops of the Khutagt’s army (including a force under Magsarzhav). The Provisional Government was transferred to Altan Bulag and from March onwards devoted itself to organizing revolutionary activities in areas so far untouched and to recruiting more soldiers. The revolutionary organization was feeble at the time, the party itself being only thirty or forty strong with just one cell in the countryside and the army amounting to just a few hundred partisans (this according to a later account by the Buryat Zhamtsarano) Moreover, relations with the Khutagt’s government at Khüree were reaching a climax of crisis, both sides intending to undermine each other’s position. The Provisional Government published a letter addressed to the nobles and lamas of Mongolia in which it expounded its rationale and gave them a warning not to go on supporting Ungern while at approximately the same time, through the intermediary of his Ministry of the Interior, the Khutagt summoned Sühbaatar to come and surrender to Khüree. In their declarations, the revolutionaries had understated their dependence on Marxist doctrines. Yet, the Khutagt’s summon clearly pointed it out, reading as follows:

²⁶² In Tungalag Tamir however, the Russian Bolchevik Pyotr insists that the Red Russians did not feel entitled to encroach Mongolia without such an invitation. To a certain extent, one can think that this character was imagined by the author almost for the sole purpose of abiding by his propagandistic task. In a conversation with his Mongol friend Erdene:

“Pyotr smiles:

- Erdene, you must never look at things from just one angle.

It is true that, without us, you would not have been able to defeat these supernumerary, well-armed enemies. But what country would like to see an enemy lurking just beyond its borders? By making an alliance with the whites, letting them into your country, you have scarcely done us a favour. But we had no right to enter your territory. your territory. But you asked for our help and offered us the possibility the possibility of sending our troops to Mongolia to crush the common enemy. The Whites are our enemies. You opened your territory to us and joined us to defeat them. to defeat them. When two brothers hold hands, they must never let go”.

²⁶³ Wet snow had been falling and the Mongol troops had been forbidden to light matches or smoke or talk to each other, or to go to sleep, Bawden writes.

“The proclamation to the Mongols by the People’s Party is nonsense, written at the direction of the Red Party which is trying to deceive the Mongols as it has deceived its own Russians, and it is a dangerous thing. The Red Party, deceiving the people into believing that it will afford them happiness, has taken power into its own hands, and has in the end plundered the property of farmers, merchants and nobles, destroyed temples, monasteries and other shrines, and killed many tens of thousands of people. They have plundered what the Tsars and their subjects built up in the course of many years, and have brought the whole Russian people to experience poverty and starvation. The majority of the Red Party are Hebrews, also known as Jews, who, without distinction of Russian, Mongol, American, Japanese or Chinese, are intent merely on robbery, and therefore they are not to be trusted or aided. This Red Party is not trying to reinforce or help the Mongol state, but is weakening it, and trying to appropriate from the Mongols much of their cattle and horses. The Mongols are well aware of the doings of the Chinese revolutionaries who are the disciples of the Red Party. Now, at a time when the state should be established in accordance with the mercy of the Khutagt, the Red Party is deceiving the simple-minded people, and trying to set up a party without the permission of the King”,²⁶⁴

While the Khutagt was only looking for a return to the situation as it was before the abrogation of autonomy the revolutionaries who may have intended a simple restoration at the time they left Khüree in mid-1920 were then committed to the Soviet regime for help and advice.²⁶⁵ From early May onwards Russian forces had begun to move in. The white Russian forces in north Mongolia were soon routed and the combined Soviet and Mongol armies made for Khüree which they seized at the beginning of July. The Provisional Government was doing its best to win people over to accept the intervention of the Red Army promising that it had entered Mongolia for the sole purpose of expelling Ungern Sternberg and his men, and would withdraw to Russia as soon as this task was completed.²⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the Khutagt was trying to obstruct the entry of the communist forces into

²⁶⁴ Bawden, 1968, p. 232.

²⁶⁵ Which had in mind a world revolution.

²⁶⁶ See note 251, the same character, Pyotr, when entering in Khüree, manages to win the heart of the suspicious populations by offering them candies:

“Drawn by the Russian soldier’s gesture, a group of children approached. Pyotr took a large sugar cube from his pocket and drew his sword.

- He is going to cut them to pieces!" exclaimed one man as he fled.

The next moment, they had all retreated again. Pyotr gave them an amused look and broke the sugar off the butt of his sabre before returning it to its scabbard. He handed the largest piece to Bat and turned to Zhargal, who had fled with the others:

- Here!

People were beginning to understand. They approached. Pyotr handed out the leftovers to the kids and, to let them know it was over, rubbed the crumbs off his hands.

A laughing grimace curled up his nose.

- Is it true what they say... that the Reds are friends?

These words delighted Pietr, who turned to the crowd:

- Of course the Red Russians are friends, brothers of the Mongols.

- That remains to be seen. The *gemins* and that damned baron too pretended to be our friends... We have seen how that turned out," whispered someone to their neighbours”.

Khüree, summoning the revolutionaries to return to their allegiance.,²⁶⁷ The red forces continued their advance without significant resistances and the few soldiers and police left in the city by Ungern fled on 5 July. Some leading lamas were said to have proposed armed resistance to the opposing army, but the Khutagt recognized that it was hopeless and forbade it. The occupation was completed on the morning of the 8th and on the 9 July the Central Committee of the Party and the Provisional Government agreed to establish a constitutional monarchy, in which the Khutagt would wield very severely limited authority. New Ministers were selected: Bodo became Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sühbaatar Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief, the Da Lam Puntsagdorzh Minister of Internal Affairs, Danzan Minister of Finance, and Magsar (an elderly official who had served the Manchus and the autonomous regime) Minister of Justice. The government as a whole was still formed on a broad basis, and would go on acting with moderation for some years before veering to the left. It is important to recall that loyalty was generally directed towards the Khutagt, as the symbol of Mongolianness, in spite of the shortcomings of his policies and the disaster of his temporary alliance with Ungern Sternberg. There were also a number of men who, though servants of the Khutagt, retained the respect of the revolutionaries. And a soldier like Magsarzhav was able to go through these difficult years with success. To say a few words about him for e appear as an important character in several novels, a fortiori in *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* by Udval, he had commanded the troops of the Khutagt's government at Khovd in 1912. In 1920, after the loss of autonomy, he was imprisoned along with his former colleague Damdinsüren, by the Chinese. Damdinsuren did not survive his imprisonment, but Magsarzhav did. He was released by the Whites and appointed Minister of War in Ungern's government. Yet, in the early days in 1919 and 1920 he sympathized with the revolutionary regime to which he adhered by mid-1921 and afterwards remained loyal to it enjoying his reputation till his death in 1927. Among the high clergy too there were those who were more or less sympathetic to the revolution, and the Provisional Government, notably the Zhalkhantsa Khutagt, then Premier, and Puntsagdorzh.

However, it was to the guidance and help of the Comintern and the Soviet communist party that the revolutionaries owed their success. To Bawden: "in a country which moved directly from a medieval theocracy to a dictatorship of the proletariat, those men who failed to conform to the pro-Soviet line were to fall from power and most often be denigrated and liquidated".²⁶⁸

The situation in 1921

In 1921, Bawden wrote, "Mongolia's society looked as the antithesis of one where the dictatorship of the proletariat was likely to make its way". This did not prevent the Mongols from adopting the Soviet model to further develop the country. According to Morozova:

²⁶⁷ A summons reinforced by magic ceremonies of exorcism performed at Khüree to keep the people's army from coming any nearer but to no practical purpose (Bawden)

²⁶⁸ Here let us recall that Morozova considers Bawden's analysis of the events with some reserve : "Bawden, following his Soviet colleagues and, in fact, concurring with them, identified the revolutionary social reform as the 'destruction of the former feudal order'. Concerning the next stage of the MPR's development, the scholar opposed the official Soviet historiography and defined the country of the 1940s as a totalitarian state and Kh. Choibalsan's regime as a dictatorship". Morozova, op.cit. p. 18.

“From the very beginning, MPP representatives endeavoured to copy Soviet structures and methods of acquiring and maintaining power; their successors did the same, while dealing with problems caused by the socialist development strategy. The international situation and the traditional tendency to side with the strong were not the only factors that pushed the Mongols to so vigorously borrow from the Soviet social experience. Among representatives of the various layers of Mongolian society, internal discord – which had existed for centuries and increased during the long period of Manchu rule, the ruling strata’s disintegration, the separatism in many parts of the country, and the lack of centralised management – provoked social transformation in the framework of the traditional struggle for power. For Mongolian activists, Soviet Russia and the Comintern were a new, effective way to conquer political rivals and acquire power”.²⁶⁹

Morozova’s hindsight is rather useful if we want to consider the whole process in its complexity.

If we are to grossly sketch out its situation at the time Mongolia was, in Bawden’s word “poor, feudalistic in structure and dominated spiritually as well as materially by a powerful, well-organized and self-assured church. Her economy was a primitive, undifferentiated one, based almost exclusively on extensive, nomadic, unscientific animal herding. For manufactures she relied on imports, and even internal trade was largely in foreign hands and financed by foreign capital. The tiny population was scattered over a huge area and was overwhelmingly rural and mostly illiterate”.²⁷⁰ To understand the implication of this demographic specificity one has to imagine that, as Bawden remarks “even when it became possible to organize party cells in the countryside, the members of a cell sometimes lived dozens of miles from each other, on temporary sites, and had no easy means of communication, especially as most of them could neither read nor write”.²⁷¹ Though there were recognizable groups within the population these did not coincide with social classes in the Marxist sense. Even a middle class intelligentsia was lacking. Though there were harsh differences in Mongolia between rich and poor, social cleavages ran in other directions.

The sense of local loyalty, of belonging to a group with different historical traditions from those of other Mongols, was far more important than the ill-understood concept of class solidarity. Western Mongols in particular felt themselves distinct, in language and in background, from the predominant Khalkha population, and local separatism was a matter of concern for at least a decade after the People’s government was first established.

The most important sub-group within the population was the lamaist church. About a quarter of the male population, amounting at some one hundred thousand men and boys were lamas, living either in lamaseries or at home, or roaming the countryside performing religious ceremonies (*badarchin* in Mongolian). Despite great disparities of situations within the church, they were united in their membership of it and in their devotion to the Yellow Faith. Besides, all alike enjoyed the respect of the laity. To achieve its aim, the Party had thus to manage to wean people away from belief in religion and awe of the clergy,

²⁶⁹ Morozova, *op.cit.* p. 27.

²⁷⁰ Bawden, 1968, p. 243.

²⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

and to create and exploit artificial class differences within the religious community itself. There was in no way such a thing like an “urban proletariat”, in Marxist words. According to Bawden once again “it was only with the dissolution of the lamaseries in the late 1930s that an industrial force of any significance at all could begin to be built up from the now redundant secularized lamas”. The urban Mongols were few in number, economically far inferior to the Chinese who formed the bulk of the trading and craft community, and devoid of solidarity or political initiative.

Another parameter that made the task of the revolutionaries difficult was the fact that education was unsystematic, free of any central control, and orientated to the traditional Buddhist way of life and thought. Then, when children had learned to read, what had they to exercise their newly-acquired skill and their curiosity upon were for the most part translations of popular Buddhist scriptures, lives of famous lamas, collections of tales with a religious background, and didactic works teaching a mixture of traditional Mongol and Buddhist morality, to which one can add the classics of Confucianism in Mongol translation. Thus, Bawden concludes, “the acquisition of literacy opened children’s minds, not to the “new” world of Marxism, or even of modern knowledge, but to the traditional, conservative culture of the past”. Moreover, piety and superstition were palpable obstacles to the new political theories.

Outside the few schools teaching was largely in the hands of lamas, who in 1927 were teaching five children for every one in a state school. In 1934 the proportion was still nearly four to one.

Three years of constitutional monarchy

Therefore, the years from 1921 to 1924 were a period of preparation for the first National Assembly which was to promulgate a constitution for Mongolia, and which in fact met some six months after the death of the Khutagt. Internationally, Mongolia still enjoyed an ambiguous status but her existence was guaranteed by the first Soviet-Mongol Treaty, negotiated in Moscow at the end of 1921. Internally, the new regime faced a series of problems. The country was not yet pacified as the last remaining white Russian bands were not expelled till late 1921, and then in 1922 the lama Dambizhantsan gave some indications that he was fomenting a separatist movement from his stronghold in the Maazhinshan mountains just inside Chinese Sinkiang.

The new regime did not enjoy the universal confidence of the people. Plots were dismantled, others suspected and rumoured. Hence, in 1922 an Office of Internal Security and a secret police force were organized with Soviet attendance. Latent cracks in the Party itself were soon revealed by the affair of Bodo²⁷² or those brought later against Danzan, at the time when he was Commander-in-chief. These internal disputes appear now as a relentless duel between the ultimately victorious faction which then personified

²⁷² Bodo, was a lama and one of the seven delegates to Russia in 1920. He also became the first premier of the revolutionary government but he had to resign early in 1922 and from then onwards, began to be suspected of having engaged in a plot to overthrow the revolution he had helped to bring about. Multiple charges were brought against him and his associates, some of whom were revolutionaries like Chagdarzhav, some high lamas who had been sympathetic to the revolution such as Da Lam Puntsagdorz, soldiers like Altangerel, the *amban* for the eastern region, and others.

revolutionary rectitude, and those belonging to the defeated one, accordingly denounced as “traitors”.

It was a long and slow task to assure the authority of the new regime, and to map out the lines the renewal of Mongol society was to take. There was muddle, scarcity of talent, lack of material and of personnel. Some reforms such as that of the administration of justice were not effective till long after the end of the monarchy. The first steps to modernise it were taken in late 1925 when courts with elected judges were instituted. But the lack of men with knowledge of modern concepts and techniques of administration has had for consequence that four years after the revolution the old Manchu code of laws was still in use. Most of the staff of the first local government offices to be set up were illiterate, unable to decipher the directives they received from the central government, and quite incapable of replying to queries submitted to them or of organizing and passing on information. Moreover, people in the countryside distrusted the policies of the new regime, and were reluctant to enter local party cells the regime was intending to establish or to participate and support any sort of local government. In August 1921 feudal ranks and salaries were abolished by decree, and in March 1922 the tax exemptions which the nobility enjoyed followed, but one easily understand the hindrance these decisions met in the countryside where the only effective authority to enforce them was the nobility itself. A beginning of change in the administrative apparatus was made in 1922 when a few unpopular *zasags* were dismissed and their successors appointed by election and a decree issued permitting men of non-noble rank to be appointed as *tusalagch*, that is the *zasag*'s right hand man in a *khoshuu*. Although the provisional government had, in its first revolutionary thrill of confidence, planned a rapid transition to a pyramidal system of elected local assemblies and officials, this was impossible to achieve at once. In fact local administration had to be organized in exactly the opposite way, special commissioners being dispatched to the provinces to regulate affairs on an ad hoc basis. Many of these were incompetent, others were not real supporters of the revolution. In the two following years elected assemblies were set up in many parts of Mongolia, but it was the old nobility and their sympathizers who mostly got elected so the central government had to declare many elections void and hold them again to ensure that candidates of the “right” social origin were elected. Besides, disaffected nomads could simply pack up and move away over the frontier, which not a few did in the years 1929 to 1932, to a lesser extent as early as from 1924 and 1925. The reforms promulgated tended to affect the privileges of the nobility and the church, but not yet in such a way as to cause general alarm. The church was indeed too strong to be deliberately affronted. Comparatively, the lay nobility seem to have presented a less difficult problem.

In any case, none of these two classes was really threatened before 1929. Only a few fringe benefits of the nobility and church were cancelled or limited up till then. In 1922 the *khamzhilga* system²⁷³ was abolished and the nobility lost their right to exact *corvées* from the commoners. Lamaseries were forbidden the free use of the state relay stations, herdsmen were nominally exempted from the obligation to herd church cattle against their will and to make up accidental losses, steps were taken to regulate money lending and to reduce the rates of interest charged by the church. But as long as the Khutagt remained

²⁷³ Servage.

alive as a focus for pious sentiment, it would have been a disastrous affront to the people to meddle with the position of the church and the government was aware of it. And it also knew the extent of the problem if it was to undermine the church's economic position. Indeed, thousands of ordinary people depended on the church herds which were farmed out to them for their subsistence. Understandably, it would have been unreasonable to disrupt this system all at once for it would alienate people from the revolution, and this effectively occurred in 1929. To put it in a nutshell, the fundamental problem as the revolutionaries saw it, and indeed as it really was, which was the existence of a powerful, essentially conservative body inside what was intended to be a progressive state". And Bawden comments:

“What renders the history of revolutionary Mongolia unique in a century whose watchword is revolution is the fact that its main opponent, the main conservative force, was not a foreign colonial power or a class of native capitalists, but the church, and the most interesting aspect of her history is the study of how the church was first wooed, then weakened, and finally, to all intents and purposes, destroyed. The anti-religious campaign of the twenties and thirties in Mongolia has been compared to the Reformation of the English Church by Henry VIII. There are certain similarities, especially in that both churches were enormously wealthy, but had in their contemporary form outlived their usefulness, and presented a challenge to the temporal authority. But there was a fundamental difference. It had never been the intention of the English crown to destroy the Church and to replace Christianity by some other theology or philosophy. It was merely to be transferred from allegiance to Rome to a position of harmless dependence on the crown. The Mongol revolutionaries went further than this. They always paid lip service to the principle of freedom of belief, as a private matter, a freedom which is still guaranteed by the constitution, but to most of them Marxism and Buddhism were, and still are, irreconcilable enemies at all levels, even, at times, that of personal piety. The two could not co-exist and attempts which will be described below to reconcile them were especially anathema to the more extreme party leaders [...].”²⁷⁴

In Mongolia over the next twenty years the Church was not reformed but nearly eliminated. Yet, as we have just seen, the process was a gradual one and for the first three years after its installation, the revolutionary government still recognized the Khutagt as

²⁷⁴ Bawden, 1968, p. 259.

monarch though a monarch with an authority strictly limited to religious matters by the Oathtaking Treaty of 1921.²⁷⁵

State and Church

An interesting point in this history is how the Party disposed of the problem of the succession of a ninth Khutagt when the eight did, a point which illustrates quite well the gradualist nature of its approach to the church in the middle of the twenties²⁷⁶ the conclusion of the affair being that by February 1929, as they felt more secure in its position, the authorities issued a decree forbidding the installation of the Zhavzandamba Khutagt or of any lesser incarnation. There were further attempts made to discover the ninth Khutagt but these were from then onwards illegal. Hence, in 1930, many lamas and nobles were condemned in a big treason trial for having undertaken the search in collusion with the Japanese and the Panchen Lama. From then on the matter ceased to have much practical importance.

For several years after 1921 Mongolia was under Soviet military occupation and the Office of Internal Security, as well as the secret police, were supervised by Russians though nominally under Mongol control. The administrative, financial and social reforms which the government was bringing about (founding of a national bank, replacement of the haphazard media of exchange by a national currency, erection of a series of courts, slow introduction of western medicine, opening of secular schools etc.) all tended to circumscribe the power and privileges of the Church and the nobility. These offended

²⁷⁵ To complete Bawden's reading which a more recent one. Let us again quote Morova:

"[...] Some lamas and nobles recognised the MPP and became loyal to it.

Before the death of the Bogdo Gegen, the party and the lamas practically formed a political coalition, a historical fact that was subsequently buried.

The alliance between the Comintern and the lamas lasted from 1921 to 1924, during which no campaigns by the revolutionary government against the lamas took place. The Bogdo Gegen remained a customary symbol of the Mongol state. On 7 July 1921, the revolutionary detachments marched into [Khüree], and members of the People's party and the lamas worshipped the Living Buddha. On 1st November the People's government and the Bogdo Gegen signed the 'Treaty on Oath': a constitutional monarchy was declared and unlimited rights in religious matters were left to the Zhavzandamba Khutagt, while all political authority passed into the hands of the new People's government. Its members were required to report to the Bogdo Gegen about new laws and important events, but he had no power to repudiate or annul them. For the USSR, the Comintern and the majority of key MPP members, the Bogdo Gegen became a puppet, while for the Mongols he remained the main religious and political leader and the symbol of the independent Mongol polity". Morova, op. cit, p. 31.

²⁷⁶ If we want to precise but not in the corpse of our reflection: From the decease of the old Khutagt in 1924 the high lamas requested official sanction for the search for his successor, the installation of a new incarnation not being a matter for the Church alone to decide. The Party found it better to temporize but in cover was determined not to throw away the tactical advantage it had just gained. A reincarnation was found in north Mongolia which meant the possibility that a new Khutagt, born in Mongolia and no longer even a foreigner from Tibet, might be a rallying point for those who wished to restore the theocratic monarchy. The Party still temporized for a while but it appears rather as a way to win time before it finally put an end to the all matter.

Mongol susceptibilities at their most tender since the latter were still the focus of individual loyalties, whereas concept such as the state, revolution or international communism were not in any way.

In people's minds reforms were identified with Russian atheistic communism, the Reds being seen as continuing the aggressions of Tsarist Russia with the added vice that they were godless. The people were thus an easy target for the effective anti-Soviet propaganda which was circulated in written form or by word of mouth, throughout the twenties. The Party was at a disadvantage here since the state printing works, still in its infancy, was rather inefficient whereas the Church disposed of trained scribes and blockcutters who could duplicate tracts in Mongol and in Tibetan script. Besides, the Church could reach all corners of the country through the itinerant mendicants or *badarchin*. Last but not least, its propaganda was cast in terms the people could understand and appreciate, appealing to legends and tales engrained in everyone's mind. "People knew what the Church meant and what it stood for, whereas they were often at sea with the strange new concepts of the revolutionaries".

For several years the Panchen Lama was the haunt of the Mongol government. It is certain that messages were going to and from between him and various Mongol conspirators, and that he was interested in anti-communist disaffection. The Party could not fail to take all rumours of discontent seriously during the 1920s, for besides the crises inside the Party and government, there were endless plots, actual and rumoured, in all parts of the country throughout the decade, fanned by a real resentment of what was seen as the impact of foreign atheism, and nourished by constant clerical propaganda. Some of these conspiracies were organized and led by men in the highest places in lamaseries, and the suspicion was never absent during his lifetime that the Khutagt was involved personally. Yet these were almost only a reaction to the measures of reform which the People's government was trying to carry out, which were still moderate at that time comparatively to what would happen later. People were not driven to despair, and it would be exaggerated to talk about any nation-wide counter revolutionary organization working against the regime, and neither China nor Japan was ready to engage into a conflict with the USSR over the fate of Mongolia. In the middle of the 1920s, the struggle between Party and Church was largely a propaganda one.

The basic aims of the Party's propaganda were two-fold. They hoped to educate people away from their adherence to the Church and to draw them out of their "medieval backwardness", - to use the terminology of the time - by patient teaching. They were also planning to sow dissension within the ranks of the lamas by accentuating class differences. As far as the first of these aims is concerned, some secular schools had been set up, but only a small minority of children attended these, and it was the press, aiming at adults, rather than the schools, which was the main vehicle of propaganda against religion. The lamas were satirized, and scandalous tales about their immoral lives spread. These lampoons followed a traditional pattern of ironical comment which had been familiar from long before the revolution. At a more sophisticated level the Party exploited the writings of some lamas and theologian who, while reverting to the early, comparatively puritanical principles of pure Buddhism, tried consciously to reconcile these with communism, and to this extent gave his support to the Party. At this time the Central Committee was not unsympathetic to the principles of Buddhism themselves. Co-operation with a reformed

Buddhism must have appeared an attractive alternative to a head-on collision with the Church, especially as the latter was so tightly integrated with the national economy that meddling with one would have meant a thorough overhaul of the other, as we already saw. Yet, the secular authority realized the necessity for change. The rich ecclesiastical estates could no longer escape taxation, nor could one third of the male population stand aside from productive work or from participation in normal social and family life. But the government was none too keen to push matters to extremes or to follow up everything the Party proposed, deferring action on controversial or unpopular questions, such as the subjection of the church's cattle to taxation. So while on the one hand the Party's propaganda machine was doing its best to foment mutual antagonism between the different classes of lama, on the other the government was doing what it could to prevent dissension getting out of control and actually disrupting the lamaseries. The policy would however change in the following decade. Thus, in Bawden's words:

“We are thus faced with the task of finding an explanation for the simultaneous appearance of a “rightist deviation”, followed by a sharp swing to the left, a party purge, a campaign of religious persecution, and a brutal collectivization drive, in three countries which were nominally independent of each other and in which social and economic conditions were quite different”.²⁷⁷

The Third Party Congress

The Third Party Congress met in 1924, at a time of moment in the history of Mongolia. The Khutagt had just died and then the People's Republic had been proclaimed. The Congress was organized in August to determine the future lines of policy and development. According to the Soviet historian Zlatkin, this was the first time that the Party was clearly formulated its general line, that is, its determination to fight for the non capitalist development of the country.

Yet there were some other points on the agenda. The Second Party Congress of 1923 had declared that the unification of all people of Mongol race and the revivification of Mongol culture was one of the Party's main aims, and the Third Congress itself also issued a resolution calling for Mongol unity. Declarations like this gradually lost significance but they remain as evidence of the persistence of ideals of Mongol pan-nationalism which were bound to conflict with Soviet interests.

Besides these signs of a preoccupation with issues which cut across the ideals of international revolution, and perhaps much more critical, was the revelation that the congress was clearly split into irreconcilable factions, one associated with the name of Danzan, the other being “an opportunist alliance between the left wing Rinchino, and the right wing Dambadorzh”.²⁷⁸ Towards its final sessions the congress lost all cohesion. It had the congress chairman Danzan and some others arrested, interrogated and condemned to death by a special commission. Danzan appears as a right wing revolutionary, that is, a partisan of private enterprise who favoured trade with China in preference to the USSR. With his

²⁷⁷ Bawden, 1968, p. 273.

²⁷⁸ Ibid; p. 276.

elimination, a swing to the left could have been expected but in fact no change occurred in Mongolia's course. In political terms, the basic disunity within the party leadership expressed itself as a disagreement between those who wanted Mongolia to follow the Soviet path straight away, and those who considered she was not ripe for an experiment in communism but personal dissensions were also involved. These may have outweighed ideological differences, but there is no doubt that the USSR was not so popular in Mongolia in 1924 and some, who had nothing against friendly relations with her, were yet in no way ready to become its puppet.

Matters went sour on 26 August, when Danzan boycotted the day's session, so that he was not in the chair. Reportedly, he was taking shelter with the army from what he claimed was an attempt to intimidate him by force. Dambadorzh was the first to get up and denounce him. In the official report, armed treason was the main theme. In fact, Danzan appears rather as a man of the entrepreneur type than as someone who could have whipped up military support for a putsch from soldiers. But this was also what convicted him in the eyes of a man like Rinchino. The latter's charge against Danzan was directed against his commercial activities. Posthumously accusations were enlarged to a ludicrous extent. Danzan was later said to have been a Tsarist agent since 1914, then a Japanese agent, and to have wormed his way into the confidence of the Party so as to destroy it. Anyway, it was his alleged abandonment of the principles of the People's Party which convicted him. In Bawden's words "detail after detail was piled up, [...] accusation followed accusation. In the printed version of Rinchin's speech Danzan is referred as a "cunning element" who penetrated the Party by force, tried to revive old debts due to Chinese firms, had put a Chinese spy of his own secret agents at the head of the military training department. In a word, he was dangerous for the whole future, the "incorporation of opposition". The delegates had thus a clear choice: they could move to the right, follow him and fall into a hell of misery for the people, national disgrace and disaster, or choose the left and march towards the "bright sun of freedom and true democracy". Finally, the Office of Internal Security was instructed by the congress to arrest him and some others. Choibalsan replaced him as general. A commission was set up to investigate his activities, to determine the penalty and carry it out within twenty-four hours. The commission's report, presented on 30 August, outlined his misdeeds of Danzan –and those of Bavaasan of the League – and recommended their execution. This was carried out. The other prisoners were sent to jail.

The revolution turns to the right...

Nevertheless, private enterprise continued to flourish, as well as co-operation between church and state. A new form of national consciousness also started to strengthen. In commerce and politics the Mongols were doing their best to draw away from unilateral dependence on the USSR. In 1921 they had notified the USA of their new-found independence and had asked for recognition, but failed to get any response. In 1925 ad hoc relations, below the diplomatic level, were established with Germany and to a lesser extent with France. A trade delegation was sent to Berlin with the mission of developing Mongolia's foreign trade and recruiting technical experts to help build up her industry. Then an educational mission was also sent. These were to acquire a western education followed by a technical or commercial training.

According to Bawden, “up to 1928 there were certain positive signs that Mongolia might be able to evolve into a liberal democracy”.²⁷⁹

The Central Committee became more and more keen to work actively with the Church and not to estrange it. But even the mild restrictions of Church privilege which had so far been imposed were probably sufficient to arouse suspicious mistrust and lead to plots on the part of the high lamas and riots on the part of the rank and file. Up to 1928 there were men who felt that religion was one of the essential characteristics of an independent state and who wanted to cherish and preserve the Buddhist Faith, and so did their best to minimize the contradictions between it and Marxism.

In all respects then, 1928 marks a watershed in the history of revolutionary Mongolia. By then certain irreversible changes had taken place which were essential for her development as a modern community. Theocratic monarchy had given way to a republican form of government based on the elective principle. The monopoly of the nobility in local affairs had been broken, though its economic power had not been noticeably reduced. Some schools had been set up, open in theory to all, though denial of education was soon to be used as a weapon of class warfare. First steps had been taken to introduce western medicine. A Committee of Sciences supervised research in all fields. A national bank and a national currency had been instituted. Mongolia had a postal service in connection with foreign countries that functioned. A few small factories had appeared. A German geologist was prospecting for mineral resources. But, if we are to follow Bawden analysis, at the Seventh Party Congress, the Comintern and the Soviet Communist Party were able to direct Mongol politics by the downfall and disgrace of Dambadorzh and the complete reversal of the gradualist policies followed up till then. He writes:

“This victory directed Mongolia along the Stalinist path to communism. All foreign contacts except with the USSR were ruptured and Mongolia’s economy was linked exclusively with that of the USSR. She now entered a period of total isolation from the world which lasted till well after the Second World War. Though she maintained her identity as a separate state, the course which her history took during those years, especially during the 1930s, shows such crass similarities, both overall and in detail, with that of the USSR, that it is hard to credit that she was capable at that time of maintaining her independence of action”.²⁸⁰

...And turns left

In late 1928 Mongolia did not look like a country firmly engaged in fundamental revolution. The confis

The confiscation of feudal property had been proclaimed between 1921 and 1924, but nothing had been done to implement this declaration. She was making steady economic and social progress but along the road of free enterprise rather than in the direction of communism, but. Available figures for the year 1926 show that USSR was not in any way Mongolia’s main external trading partner. This was in contradiction with the policy

²⁷⁹ And he specifies: “...along lines which were a natural extension of her own unique past rather than, as actually happened, be squeezed into the same mould as Stalin was preparing for Russia”.

²⁸⁰ Bawden; 1968, p. 289.

appealed to at the Third Party Congress and in the 1924 constitution. A left wing reaction started to grow up amongst those who supported more extreme views.

After the Seventh Party Congress had been held, the Party first turned its attention to the task of the extermination of the feudal nobility, an easier target than the Church as the nobles were less coherent, and less numerous whereas the lamas still presented a formidable front. In the autumn of 1929 a special commission was set up under Choibalsan to attend to the confiscation of property belonging to the nobles. The property of some noble lamas was taken over in these operations. What we can judge from the nature of these confiscations and from the figure available is that, through these measures, the Mongol Government provide itself with an initial stock of beasts set up collective farms - yet after having for a while distributed it to poor herdsmen - but that it had also finally annihilated the old Mongol nobility. And it did this not only as a class but in the person of many of the individual members of it.

The *zhasag* campaign, that is, the transfer of lamasery herds to the common people, was not conducted by the same way of confiscation but by forcing the lamaseries to farm out their animals to a much greater extent than before. Contracts were properly drawn-up to ensure the payment to those herdsmen who took the animals over. According to Bawden, over two million head out of a possible three million were transferred during this "campaign". Yet, thousands of beasts perished through lack of care to such an extent that those transfers turned out to be irreversible.²⁸¹ Finally, the Church was forbidden to engage in usury, and its private ownership of land was abolished, together with the practice of compelling the common people to till church farms as a feudal duty. Heavier taxes were imposed on their-funds. This led to tax-evasion, nevertheless, the Church did at last begin to contribute to the state budget. A special tax was also imposed on lamas of military age who did not become secularized, while those who left the clerical life were allotted animals for their upkeep, were given the chance of some education and freed from liability for military service for three years. In actual fact, if a small number of lamas left the religious life voluntarily, the most part of those who abandoned their lamaseries in these years were forced to. Regulations forbidding children under eighteen to become lamas were enforced more strictly.

Collectivization and the "leftist deviation"

The extremism of 1929 to 1932 manifested itself in every aspect of life, but particularly in the collectivization of cattle-herding, the unplanned and unprepared nationalization of other forms of private enterprise, and in the brutal and indiscriminate assault upon all lamas as a homogeneous class of enemies of the revolution. The so-called "leftism" began in 1929, soon after the Seventh Party Congress, and was confirmed as a correct course of action by the Eighth Congress which met in the spring of 1930 at which an overwhelmingly ambitious five-year plan was elaborated. The planners decided to push ahead with a comprehensive programme of education, medicine, industry and railway building, as well as the complete modernization and collectivization of animal herding, but this was far beyond Mongolia's especially while they were at the same time upsetting traditional ways

²⁸¹ He adds that "only rather less than 300,000 head of cattle were given back to the lamaseries in 1932 under the New Turn Policy".

of life and production without substituting anything better and hence almost ruining the mainstay of the country's economy. Besides, this plan relied for its implementation on massive Soviet help and this never materialized. All over the country, party officials were taking power and indulging in a wild desecration of lamaseries, putting out the eyes of Buddha statues, distributing sacred vessels and vestments to the ordinary herdsmen as private property, taxing lamas indiscriminately. Later on, the rationale for the disaster which had resulted from this extremism, would state in a neutral phraseology that "the fact that [the] new young Party was lacking in proletarian ideology and political hardening and experience contributed not a little to the occurrence of such errors". Yet, the autobiography of Sambuu who has served as President of Mongolia from 1954 to 1972 is more direct:

"The party organizations were packed with the poorest herdsmen, who, newly promoted to organizational responsibility, were completely bewildered by the practical tasks which confronted them. They were uneducated and illiterate, so that try as they might they could make nothing of the special courses of instruction they were hastily put through, and they were scared to death that anything they did might get them into trouble later as "rightist opportunism" or "leftist deviation". They lost their heads and made a thorough mess of their jobs".²⁸²

In any case, there has been a tendency to try and shift the responsibility from the shoulders of the Central Committee on to those of local officials, the most of them charged with unwanted responsibility. But only after Russian intervention was it admitted that it the Central Committee and the Party as a whole should be blamed, and the complete presidium and secretariat of the Central Committee were replaced as having been incapable of carrying out a policy "suited to the life, culture and economy of Mongolia". To believe that Mongolia had reached the take-off point for the complete realization of socialism would have been, and actually was, in total disregard of her situation. To Bawden, the real danger to Mongolia lay not in the recrudescence of "rightism", that is, of the private enterprise economy which was dominant before 1928, but in the uninhibited imitation of what was happening in Russia under Stalin. Indeed, he explains, Mongolia lacked every prerequisite for the steps she was about to take: "There was no material basis, no trained managers, technicians or teachers and the people as a whole did not want collectivization, they did not want to see their familiar and cherished lamaseries dismantled, the precious objects in them smashed or desecrated, the lamas they respected reviled and beggared".²⁸³

Party policy, in and after 1929, came up against the apathy of the people. Even the confiscation of the property of the nobility was not carried out on a wave of popular enthusiasm, but was planned and executed over the heads of the people. Still in Bawden's words "The people were kept in ignorance of what was afoot until after the lightning campaign was over, and only then were they, the designated beneficiaries of the action, presented with the *fait accompli* and for the first time informed of the Party's intentions".

Then, the slightly better off amongst the common herdsmen were themselves called class enemies and their possessions confiscated, as if they had belonged to the class of

²⁸² Quoted by Bawden, 1968, p. 305.

²⁸³ Ibid, p. 308.

feudal nobles. They were treated as outcasts just like those who had resisted collectivization, taxed at exorbitant rates, denied the use of pasture and watering, and allotments of consumer goods were refused them. Their alleged class-status was taken out on their children who were excluded from school and denied an education.

Civil war

The direct loss to the Mongol economy of all this was enormous. But, and this was even more ominous, armed uprisings broke out, mostly in the west and centre of the country. The Mongol authorities proving unable to deal with themselves, units of the Soviet army had to be called upon to help put down the rebels. As Bawden explains, Mongol historians of the socialist era generally adopted the formalistic explanation that put the blame on the surviving nobles and high lamas accused to have cunningly exploited the discontent and distrust aroused amongst the people by the errors and excesses of the leftists. The Church was effectively a natural rallying point for discontent, but from 1930 to 1932, what threatened the country was no longer small scale riots, limited to one or other lamasery, nor conspiracies of groups of high lamas appealing to the Panchen Lama for and to the Japanese, but a general upheaval of the people at large.

The Party itself was faced by a thoroughgoing crisis of confidence which affected all classes in the country, not least its own adherents. It was the belated recognition of this by the Comintern and the Soviet communist party which dictated Russian intervention to make the Mongol party see reason and beat a retreat. Hundreds of members of the Party and the Youth League came out against the revolution and were found fighting on the side of rebellion. There were massive desertions from the country. Some of the emigres formed armed bands which infiltrated back across the frontier to raid and destroy where they could, but the majority were simply refugees who preferred to leave home rather than see their property confiscated and ruined. Letters supposed to have been sent to the Panchen Lama in 1929 show that at that time what the leading lamas were aiming at was nothing less than the complete reversal of all that the revolution had achieved since 1921. They welcomed the news that hostilities had broken out between China and Russia in north Manchuria, and declared that they wanted to see the Russians expelled from Mongolia, and Mongolia reintegrated as a province of China. They asked the Panchen Lama for troops to secure the northern frontier against the return of the Russians, and promised that the Zhavzandamba Khutagt would be re-installed and the whole church apparatus built up again to what it had been. The actual value of the Panchen Lama as an ally at this time was probably not very great. His name occurs over and over again in connection with plot and conspiracies, but there is an element of unreality about his person and potentiality that leads to the suspicion that he was less a practical ally than a mystical patron, rumours flew about, for example, that he and the Japanese would come to liberate Mongolia after having overwhelmed Russia and captured Moscow.

West Mongolia, a more populous area than the open plateau and Gobi region along the eastern and southern frontiers, was dotted with several large lamaseries that were chronically, the scene of rather serious outbreaks of rioting. Disposition towards trouble making, added to the general feeling of aloofness from Ulaanbaatar (the name was indeed changed in 1924) made them become a logical ground for rebellion. The description of the

events given by Bawden is plain and to the fact, I thus allow myself to borrow it without any change:

“The most turbulent lamaseries were those of Togsbuyant in Uvs aimag, Bandid Gegeen at Rashaant in Khövsgöl, Tariatyn in North Khangai, and Ulaangom. In 1930 a mixed group of lay and clerical nobles had mobilized and armed seven hundred lamas from Togsbuyant. They smashed the local Party and government apparatus, and set up an administration of their own, and a party known as the “Party of equal rights for furthering religion and the race”. They were in touch not only with other Mongol lamaseries, but with the leaders of similar revolts which were occurring in Tuva, and with Chinese generals in Sinkiang from whom they hoped to acquire weapons. Their aims were straightforward and comprehensive. They included the scrapping of the programme of confiscation of cattle, the discontinuance of the campaign for forcing young lamas into the world, the restoration of the lamas’ right to receive alms, the restoration of the old government headed by the nobility, the cancellation of the law separating Church and State, and, resuming all this, the destruction of the Mongolian People’s Republic, the Party and the Youth League, and the “protection of religion and the race”. The rebels recruited an army which they armed with hunting guns, and whose numbers soon reached two thousand. This sedition, which required armed force to quell it, was followed in 1932 by the most dangerous uprising of all, which was called forth, immediately, by the Party’s arbitrary meddling in the affairs of the Bandid Gegeen lamasery. Here lamas by the hundred had been forcibly secularized, four hundred of them being expelled from the lamasery in a single day. The payment of impossibly high taxes had been demanded, followed by the confiscation of church effects. The local authorities had affronted the common people as well as the lamas by their desecration of sacred objects, tearing off the wrappers of volumes of the scriptures and burning the books themselves, digging out holy relics embedded in stupas, stripping the oracle lama of his special vestments and helmet in full view of the people, and so on. The nobility and the lamas of a number of lamaseries wove a comprehensive plot, under the patronage of the Panchen Lama, which was to culminate in an armed uprising in July 1932”.²⁸⁴(Bawden, 1968: 319)

A central rebel government known as Ochirbat’s Yamen was set up in the Rashaant lamasery in Khövsgöl. Armed detachments were formed in various lamaseries. The course of the civil war which followed was marked by savagery and a reversion to barbaric practices of earlier times. In North Khangai party members were hanged on trees, while others were flayed alive. Anyone suspected of sympathy with the People’s Government was tortured or put to death. Pregnant women were raped, others had their feet cut off. Terror forced many people to join the rebel ranks. The old shamanist practice of ritually tearing out the living heart from a prisoner’s chest was revived once more. The pacification of the rebellious area after the troubles had been put down by the Mongol and Soviet armies was also marked by ruthlessness.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 319.

The leftist deviation was identified as a deviation only in the sense that things got out of hand. Much of what was done during the years 1929-32 was irreversible, the destruction of the nobility, in particular. The Church, too, was deprived of much of its wealth in the form of livestock, and never recovered this. Most of the projects scouted prematurely after the Eighth Party Congress have since been realized, even if only in part and a generation late. Cattle herding has once again been collectivized, successfully this time, though not without disturbance. A small national manufacturing industry has been set up, and extractive industries promoted. Secular education and western medicine have replaced the Tibetan lamaistic varieties. Russian has displaced Tibetan as the learned language. Railways have been built. All private enterprise has been eliminated.

As a matter of transition

As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, its purpose was to provide an essential reading grid for understanding and commenting on the sources. The 1932 uprising was therefore, after reflection, set as the limit insofar as it is on this event that *Tungalag Tamir*, the main source of our research, ends (*Üüriin Tuya* ends a little later, but the historical context after 1932 is not essential for commenting on the passages I shall be quoting).

As a matter of transition, I will give a very rough outline - and I insist that it is really rough- of the main events that took place in Mongolia up to the transition to democracy in 1991.

From 1932 to 1940

The “great leap forward” of the years 1929 to 1932 was followed by a temporary retreat, which was to allow a breathing space before the Party could once again begin its assault on the old order. The Party itself, more and more under the personal control of Choibalsan and hence of the Soviet communist party, never lost sight of its ultimate aim of destroying completely all that was left of the old “feudal” order of society. Yet, the tempo of change slackened drastically. The collectivization of herding was not to be attempted again for another quarter of a century. Railway building and the establishment of industry on a significant scale were delayed till after the Second World War. Private retail trade still existed, alongside state enterprise, till the end of the fifties.

By early 1936 Choibalsan was in a position to initiate his personal dictatorship. At the same time the persecution of the Church sharpened, but this time it was more skilfully planned and prepared than during the leftist years. The second attempt was successful. The presence of a large Soviet army in the country, and of a reinforced NKVD apparatus, alongside the parallel Mongol organs, was decisive. The enforced closure of the lamaseries could be accomplished now without the danger of uprisings threatening the stability of the State. This time, the Party tried to educate the lower lamas in the advantages of abandoning their clerical life, and offered them an economic inducement to do so. After 1936 many lamas began to drift away from the lamaseries, and either took up animal herding, or went into industry, trade, or craft co-operatives, and when the time was ripe the remaining lamaseries were closed by administrative and military action. There was resistance, but

nowhere on a scale too great to cope with, and by 1939 the operation was at an end. But before 1940, the destruction of the old social order had been accomplished.

The war, the post-war and Mongolia's position in the world

The year 1940 in Mongolia was marked by the adoption of a new constitution and a new programme of socialist development. The Second World War did not touch her directly till August 1945 though it slowed down her development. Indeed, the demands of Soviet wartime consumption fell heavily on her. She supplied Russia with huge numbers of horses, with wool and furs. Some of these deliveries were in the form of ordinary exports, but a lot was given free, and she financed the equipment of certain Red Army units. Deliveries of animals, together with an exceptionally dry summer and hard winter in 1945, caused a sharp fall in the total number of her livestock. Due to the German invasion, Russia could not keep up her exports of capital and consumer goods so its industry, which was still in its infancy, had to do its best to tide the country over the shortage.

Mongolia's position at the end of the war was different from what it had been. Under terms agreed at Yalta, a plebiscite had been held in the country about national independence and China had formally acknowledged it. Then the communists took power in China and for the first time in history exchanged ambassadors with Mongolia. The sovietization of eastern Europe at the end of the forties gave her a chance to extend her contacts while the emergence of new and independent countries in Asia and Africa provided her with yet a third field in which to assert her independent existence. Yet, whereas other emerging nations gained their independence through a general process of decolonization all over the world, nothing in 1945 marked any real change in Mongolia's satellite relationship to the USSR. She was still sealed off from the outside world and it was not till 1961 that she was finally invited to become a member of the United Nations after some hard campaigning. Since then she has still further consolidated her world status by exchanging diplomatic recognition with a number of western countries. This involved her with an ever larger circle of trade partners, and with diversified cultural contacts. In 1964, for the first time in history, Mongol students studied at an English university under the auspices of UNESCO. For Mongolia, Bawden writes "one of the most important developments of the [fifties and sixties] has been the definitive confirmation of her independent statehood".

In other respects the war meant a standstill for Mongolia's development. Only in August 1945, the day after the USSR moved against Japan, did she also enter the war. But this war brought Mongolia little gain to compensate for her huge expenditure. Her armies which had advanced across Inner Mongolia were soon withdrawn and no incorporation of Inner Mongols into the People's Republic took place. The only asset for Mongolia, to make for her participation in the war, was her share of the large number of Japanese troops captured. Indeed, these formed the largest part of the labourers who worked in the building of the nucleus of post-war Ulaanbaatar.

Except for the physical destruction of the Church, there was little to distinguish Mongolia in 1945 from what she had been twenty years before. In spite of the existence of a few small co-operatives, almost all animals were still in the hands of private owners, and were pastured in the age-old nomad way.

The years since the war have seen changes of a significant extent. A modern civilization, with industry, schools and universities, radio and television and all the other signs of the complex culture of what would be called a "developed country", was at the

time considered as totally incompatible with a shifting nomadic population existing almost entirely on the surplus production of extensively herded animals (such a thesis might be qualified or discussed nowadays, in a climax of anxiety over environmental and climatic issues and calls for a more responsible, moderate development) The Mongols thus realized at the time that if they wanted to enjoy these amenities, substitute has to be found for nomadism.

By 1960 Mongolia's leaders termed her an "agricultural-industrial" state. This prospect had arisen some fears expressed by both some Mongols and foreigners that this could mean the gradual disappearance of the Mongols as an identifiable entity. Nomadism was and to a very large extent still is what first springs to mind when one thinks of the Mongols. Yet, as Bawden "there is more to him than that" and he adds:

"Perhaps the two most vital qualities which distinguish him from his neighbours, especially the Russians and the Chinese, are the sense of a long national history, and the possession and cherishing of a national language which has shown itself flexible and adaptable enough to encompass the terminology of both Buddhist philosophy and Marxism, as well as the demands of modern science. The Mongol language, even today, is remarkably free from borrowings, and prefers to coin neologisms from Mongol roots rather than import ready made terms. It is a paradox of modern Mongolian life that the present regime, professing as it does a Marx-Leninism imbued with the principle of "proletarian internationalism" is at constant loggerheads with the virile and irrepressible patriotism of the Mongols which regularly effervesces in what is officially disapproved of as "excessive manifestations of nationalism". Prophecies of the disappearance of the Mongols may have had some justification before there was an independent Mongolia, but her generally accepted statehood both guarantees her continued existence and serves as the focus for her people's sentiments and enthusiasms". (Bawden, 1968: 388)

As we can see through these lines written in 1968, the questions arisen by Franck Billé in "Faced with extinction" and other articles of his are not new in any way and even under the communist regime, a latent nationalism or patriotism did subsist.

Transition to democracy

The transition to democracy and the political and economic transformation which accompanied it were closely tied in with the process which began in the Soviet Union around the middle of the 1980s. In the processes of change in Mongolia, the Hungarian researcher Zsolt Szilágyi notes, "the leading role was often played by young Mongolian intellectuals who had [...] studied in Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia, meaning that they probably followed patterns and models that they had become acquainted with in these countries".²⁸⁵ In the second half of the 1980s, the Mongolian transformation process modelled itself on the Russian perestroika. The aim was mostly the transformation of the economy. However, as the processes went on previously latent social tensions grew and came to play a significant role in the life of the country. With the changing Asian policy

²⁸⁵ Szilágyi Zsolt, "The Status and Political Role of Mongolian Buddhism after the Political Transformation", in *Mongolian Studies in Europe, Proceedings of the Conference held on 24- 25, November, Budapest*, Ed. Ágnes Birtalan, Department of Inner Asian Studies of ELTE, Budapest, 2010, pp. 117-127.

of the Soviet Union Mongolia experienced more freedom of movement. However, new measures in economic policy failed to deliver the results and thus the growing of social tensions rendered significant political change inevitable. Mass movements against the system began in the autumn of 1989 reaching their climax in early 1990. The ruling MPRP was internally divided, to such an extent that they did not clearly go into action against the opposition. A group of hardliners in the party did urged firm reaction but they were not followed by the moderates who advocated for peaceful solutions and supported reforms. The transition was a non-violent one. In Szilágyi's words, "the democratic transformation took place without a single gun being fired, which can be seen as the most important characteristic of the Mongolian transition process". Spontaneous social action, after the end of 1989 organized opposition groups also appeared in growing numbers. The Democratic Association was in the forefront of organizing political parties. In February 1990 it transformed into the Mongolian Democratic Party. In March a hunger strike organized by ten members of these opposition groups forced representatives of the Central Committee of the MRPP to start negotiations. The party backed down, members of the Central Committee resigned as a group, and the party accepted a resolution which created the political conditions for transforming the system. The leadership of the MPRP mainly tried to curb opposition movements through administrative measures. Armed force was only used in April 1990, after a major opposition demonstration was prevented, the police being ordered to protect the government building which aroused passionate emotions. Hence, the state party was forced to surrender and elections were called for June 22nd, with six political parties competing. Yet, the MPRP gained 86% of the votes and so won the elections without difficulty. Since the urban population was practically the basis of the opposition, it was also easy for representatives of the state party to get elected into the Mongolian Great Khural of 430 members through the rural districts. In January 1992, the Khural accepted the new constitution which changed the name of the Mongolian People's Republic to Mongolia, established a single chamber parliament of 76 members, and introduced a two-step election process and direct presidential elections.

This political transition brought about the re-evaluation of the events of the 20th century. After the disclosing of previously confidential documents and the publication of relevant source material a "truly scholarly discourse about the past period", in Szilágyi's words, could finally expressed itself without restriction.

Part two

A literature under duress

Writing historical fiction in socialist Mongolia

Chapter three

Literature at the service of the people's education

1. History, fiction, historical fiction

“History and fiction: as old as History itself, the problem of their relationship is nowadays a fundamental question for the future of philosophy and knowledge”
(K. Pomian)²⁸⁶

The choice to conduct research on the basis of “historical novels” immerses us at the heart of an inescapable debate in Human Sciences, that of the relationship between history and fiction. This debate, the historian Krysstof Pomian remarks in an article devoted to the issue, is “old as history itself”. In this article, Pomian aims at reasserting the specificity of history as a discipline and a source of knowledge, and defends it fiercely against a “fictionnalist perspective”, to quote his words, perspective that would reduce history to a mere branch of rhetoric. Appeared in the sixties, he writes “a philosophical-sociological-psychoanalytical-literary school applies itself - though without always proclaiming it - to erasing the frontier between history and fiction, treating the former as if it differed in nothing from the latter”. For the tenants of this school, he explains, history has only one dimension: that of writing, and the procedures used by historians to make their assertions controllable are suspected to be only tricks intended to make the reader believe in the veracity of the accounts they propose.

In line with such a perspective, the essay published during the seventies under the title *How do we Write History? An Epistemological Essay*,²⁸⁷ by the French Historian Paul Veyne aroused strong emotions within the scientific community. Misunderstood or carried to extremes, his reflections can indeed give birth to that deconstruction of historical knowledge against which Pomian warns us. However, Veyne's critical analysis is interesting and relevant in many respects, particularly when he questions historians' claim to objectivity, that is, to reach a truth that would not be relative. Hence, what he aims at is not to question the status of history as a science that produces knowledge, but rather places appropriate limits on it.

This debate is not specific to history. Anthropologists are also well aware of this issue for their discipline has faced the same assaults from many deconstructivists, perhaps even more radical in their denial of its status as a science. Yet, inside anthropology itself, we will find a branch that devotes her attention to the analysis of speeches and that reached many assets in doing so. Besides, from this anthropological point of view, as any other kind of speech, the historian's one can be seen a narrative and hence be addressed as such. Indeed, in the same way as a text of fiction, the historian speech tells us something about

²⁸⁶ Pomian K, “Histoire et fiction”, *Le Débat* n° 54, Paris, Gallimard, 1989/2. p. 115.

²⁸⁷ Veyne Paul, *Comment on écrit l'histoire: essai d'épistémologie*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, “L'Univers historique”, 1971.

the society which produced it, about the way it sees the world and seeks to find its place in it.²⁸⁸

As the texts that will serve as a basis for our reflection are not historical studies produced by historians but historical novels written by authors of literature, such an approach seems appropriate. But let us go back to Pomian, because in the above-mentioned article he deals with this particular literary genre: historical fiction. His comments will be useful to support our analysis in due course.

“There is no history if there is not an awareness of a boundary between the realm of reality on the one hand and on the other hand this where it is fiction that exercises the whole power”, writes the historian. The border is however mobile and its delineation often difficult to establish. It is *a fortiori* porous in the case of historical novels which, while giving themselves as fictions from the outset, nonetheless claims a certain claim to historicity. It is for this reason, Pomian continues - he cites *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, *Notre-Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo, *War and Peace* by Lev Tolstoi, *Quo vadis?* Henryk Sienkiewicz, and also mentions Walter Scott’s name - that “such works allow us to reflect more than any other on the complicated and variable relationship that history has with fiction when they share the same object”.

One of the main characteristics of the historical novel, needless it to say, is that the plot is set in the past. This implies that the author introduces elements into the story that make the reader aware that there is a temporal distance between him and the world in which the events he is following are unfolding. But this is still not enough because all fiction, even fantasy fiction, can also be clearly set in the past. In order to be called a historical novel, the past described in the text must claim to have been lived by men. The author makes this clear by using elements borrowed from an extra-romanesque reality, by citing places that can be found on the ground or on a map and by describing them as they are supposed to have been at the time of the plot. Let us anticipate a little what follows in order to illustrate this point. In the novels of our corpus, there are many descriptions of Khüree, its markets, its suburbs and its temples, which do not correspond at all to the city that is now Ulaanbaatar, and which had already been so renamed at the time of their publication. These descriptions, the very name of the city, impose on the reader’s mind the temporal distance at the same time as they seek to establish a pact of trust between him and the author.

The same applies, as Pomian points out, to institutions, customs and collective beliefs. He also mentions the case of accessories: clothing, weapons, jewellery, ornaments, works of art, coins, weights and measures, tools, utensils, buildings, means of transport, domestic and wild animals, etc. We can again take a few examples - which, incidentally, require a translator to think deeply about the choices to be made in order to convey this wealth - in our Mongolian novels, we find many references to administrative districts that disappeared a long time ago, such as the *khoshuu* (or banners), titles of nobility characteristic of the Manchu period but which continued under the autonomous government (*beil*, *beis*, *van*, *chin van*, *gün*, etc.), numerous kinds of currency that are no longer used today but whose existence is attested and verifiable (*lan*, *embüü*, *yanchaan*, *guldmai*, etc.). Pomian adds, “This also applies to the behaviour of the characters, heroes and companions, whose

²⁸⁸ On discourse generally speaking, see for example Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Seuil, 1957 - rééd. augmentée, 2010.

conformity to that adopted at the time of the plot, in similar circumstances, by the characters portrayed by their contemporaries, is underlined. And finally, this applies to their psychology: the way in which each of them experiences their relationship with themselves and with others". To elaborate on this would take us too far, so let us continue with Pomian. By the way, we will have the opportunity to return to it in due course, when we come to the time of the reforms undertaken by the socialist regime as it is presented in the fiction.

This recourse to extra-romanesque elements is nevertheless necessarily the subject of a skilful dosage. The author of historical novels is in fact obliged to make compromises between the conventions of the novel on the one hand, and the procedures that allow the plot to be inscribed in history on the other. The extent of these compromises depends on the author's objectives (target audience, editorial policy, etc.). In order to keep the novel as a novel, to keep it "entertaining" to read and to avoid it becoming a kind of encyclopaedia of the period in which the plot takes place, the author usually limits himself to examples, allusions and evocations, which allow him to "indicate but without insisting the difference between the present and past ways of dressing, eating, travelling, fighting or loving". When commenting on and comparing the novels of our corpus, it will be of use to refer to Pomian's analysis of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*. He explains that *The Name of the Rose* is clearly aimed at readers who Eco assumes will find pleasure in following the double game of history and fiction. For such readers, the past is supposed to be "primarily an object of knowledge", and they themselves are "credited with knowledge", which in this case concerns the fourteenth century and the conflict between the Papacy and the Empire, the role played by Ockam and his allies, and the turbulent history of the Franciscan order and the fraticelli. Being supposed to have such knowledge and to be attached to it, Pomian continues, "the readers targeted by Eco are thus presumed to demand that the fiction be plausible, that it does not contradict the results of knowledge but is integrated into it without any visible suture, as if it were not fiction, while multiplying winks and clues that reveal it as such. Who is the Mongolian novel of the socialist twentieth century aimed at? Pomian attributes the success of Eco's novel to its ability to meet the expectation just mentioned. Did such an expectation exist within this readership? We will see in the rest of this chapter that the ruling party had thought about the question and developed answers, both theoretically and practically.

But Pomian adds to this the importance of the context in which the work was received, the "dominant climate" in Italian and Western opinion at the end of the 1970s, a climate "marked by the crisis of the future, disenchantment with utopias, the rejection of ideologies, the collapse of the revolutionary myth, the desacralisation of violence". All this has led, he writes, to "a reaffirmation of continuity and identity, an explosion of interest in history and memory, and a resurgence of religion, with the transmission of works inherited from the past appearing, perhaps more than the creation of original works, as constituting the very essence of culture". Here again, what was the situation in Mongolia at the time our novels were published? We will see that while the context differs quite radically, the questions that arise are largely similar.

2. The Writer's Union

Earlier, I mentioned Morozova's work for its valuable insight into relations between the Mongolian authorities and Soviet power. She wrote:

"From the very beginning, MPP representatives endeavoured to copy Soviet structures and methods of acquiring and maintaining power".

This was particularly the case when it came to propaganda and opinion-forming bodies and, consequently, cultural policy as a whole, starting with education. Very early on, as the biographies of our authors show, going to Soviet or Eastern European universities and training establishments became both an opportunity and a sine qua non for access to any position of responsibility, regardless of how minute this responsibility was.

"As early as 1923–1924, in order to prepare national cadres for Mongol-Russian collaboration, it had become common to send young people to study in the USSR, as well as to create courses, schools, and people's universities in the capital and aimag centres. D. Dashpurev [...] highlights three main institutions that prepared Mongolian cadres for building a socialist society: the Communist University of the Working People of the East (KUTV), the Military School in Tver and the Party School in Ulaanbaatar. In these institutions, Soviet instructors taught Mongols communist theory and practice, and trained students about the party's work. By the beginning of the 1930s, it was quite impossible to find a party agent without some background at these institutions. In 1927, 130 people, including 30 women, studied in the Ulaanbaatar Party School, whose only admission requirement was literacy. The general course lasted one year and a special course lasted a year and a half. Such periods were considered sufficient to train and educate a party agent or political activist. On 19 January 1928, the Mongolian Commission of the ECCI resolved to grant Mongols an opportunity to enter not only political but also 'practical–technical–economic' institutions of higher education in the USSR. In later periods, all Mongolian cadres were educated, re-educated and trained in the Soviet Union".²⁸⁹

As we can see from our sources - the corpus, but also all the Mongolian publications of the time that expressed the conception of the role of literature in society - this began with the level of literacy. To quote Morozova again:

"In 1924, the Ministry of Education faced the complicated task of improving low education and literacy standards. As in the Soviet Union, the propaganda campaign for abolishing illiteracy was often a substitute for real education. According to Tsybikov, six organisations that possessed printing presses – "the Government, the Ministry of Education, the Commission on Education (Uchkom), the CC of the MPRP, the Revolutionary Union of Youth and the Military Department" – were busy printing and reprinting congressional resolutions, governmental and party bulletins, and military newspapers but did not publish the necessary textbooks and other literature. The new educational system, as well as other innovations, was spreading among the

²⁸⁹ Morozova, op. cit. p. 55.

people along party lines. In 1925, the Young Pioneer Organisation was established. The young pioneers were attracted by fun and entertainment: they participated in demonstrations, attended concerts and performances, enjoyed sing-along bus rides in Urga. Female organisations also formed, but were in reality nominal and symbolic”.²⁹⁰

Tsetsentsolmon’s research confirms Morozova’s remark: “For Mongolian activists, Soviet Russia and the Comintern were a new and effective means of conquering political rivals and acquiring power” - as far as the Mongolian Writers’ Union is concerned.

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The Revolutionary Writers’ Union (*khuvigalt uran zokhiolch naryn bülgem*) was established under the Ideological Division of the Central Commission of the People’s Revolutionary Party on January 9, 1929 and formed as an imitation of the Union of Soviet Writers and was a politically significant institution controlled by the Central Committee of the MPRP. This functioned as a systematic institution spread all over the country and not merely as an organization of writers. Indeed, as stated in Resolution defining its main role, the Writer’s Union was set out in order to “to organize campaigns of literature all over the country through specialists who should be ideologically and artistically educated”.²⁹¹ Besides, over the decades following its creation and through a series of official resolutions, the union became the more and more highly structured. It was the Party that appointed the director and other leading officials of the Writers’ Union, appointments perceived as “party’s assignments” (*namyn daalgavar*) that were obligatory for anyone, seldom revised or changed (it yet would happen, based on individual request and complaint).

Literary circles were also established both in the city and in the countryside (*utga zokhiolyn bülgem*) so as to intensify literature campaigns for the public. Their organization was demanded in a Resolution issued by the Central Committee of the MPRP in June 1946. These circles were official organizations under the direct control of the Writers’ Committee based on either local newspapers or provincial clubs and that received the assignment “to unite efforts for literature, to draw out new writers and to assist the improvement of their creativity”. To this purpose, writers and art workers were regularly send out into the countryside to assist provincial writers, the responsible organism for this being the “Office for Artistic Affairs”. Moreover, during its 15th Meeting held on May 22 1947, the Political Bureau of the MPRP issued a Resolution titled the Current Situation of the Mongolian Literature and Its Goals (*Mongolyn utga zokhiolyn odoogin baidal ba tүүinii zoriltyn tukhai*) in which it asserted the need to “produce highly artistic and ideological literature depicting new culture, education, morality, and custom in higher forms such as novels, novelettes, plays, and poems”. According to this, the Writers’ Union was demanded “to review and strengthen its organizational, ideological and artistic activities so that it could become a center for literary works in the country”. Hence and in order to raise the ideological level and general education of writers, both the Office for Art Affairs and the Writers’

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 46.

²⁹¹ Zagdsüren, *MAHN-aas urlag utga zokhiolyn talaar gargasan togtool shiidverүүд* (Resolutions and Decrees on Art and Literature Issued by the People’s Revolutionary Party), 121, quoted in Tsetsentsolmon, 2018.

Committee were assigned to run regular classes on theories of Marxism, Leninism, social evolution, world classic literature, and literary techniques. This reveals that the party was at that time thoroughly committing itself in reinforcing literature as justification for the new socialist cultural construction and, accordingly, took consequential steps to strengthen the Writers' Committee as an institution as well as to increase the number of writers and literary works.

The Second Meeting of the Political Bureau then issued a Resolution to organize the First Congress of Mongolian Writers on January 13, 1948. Yet, according to various sources and interviews with people who took part in it, Tsetsentsolmon comes to the conclusion that it was neither properly planned nor well-prepared and rife with personal disputes, unexpected incidents, and unserious attitudes.

The Political Bureau decided to organize a Second Congress in Ulaanbaatar, in 1957, in order to review the progress in Mongolian literature since the First Congress and to discuss tasks set by the MPRP to writers. Compared to the earlier discussions and resolutions, the MPRP was satisfied with the increased number of newly recruited young writers and literary works depicting the real life, struggles, and efforts of the people. It praised indeed "the success in depicting the life and struggle of the people realistically under the leadership of the Party and with the guidelines and wonderful example of high ideology, artistic skills, and generosity of Soviet literature". On this occasion too, it reminded the fields of agriculture and industry to be by then onwards the priority themes for literature and warned against writing with "blank ideas" (*khooson sanaa*) while criticizing variety of styles.

Documents and resolutions issued for the development of modern literature suggest that there were not only political implications, but also artistic ones. Newspapers and magazines were the main platforms to promote literature and to recruit new members.

The Writers' Committee of Mongolia had a tight relationship with Soviet writers' establishment, it was ordered to translate and study materials from the Congresses of the Soviet Writers and its Congresses were attended by Soviet representatives. Yet, if the translation of Russian literature into Mongolian started early the reverse, that is, the translation of native literature to Russian started only with the appearance of a national literature and professional writers in the second half of the 20th century. This trend was also favoured by the emergence of a new wave of nationalist movements raised by writers of "national minorities" of the USSR. Indeed, a slight relaxation of the communist ideological pressure after 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party (1956) allowed scholars and writers to propose new approaches. This new wave of nationalism in the USSR and among the peoples of Central Asia had a significant impact on intellectual life in Mongolia, opening a breathing space for the celebration of "national culture".

The Writer's Union continued to strengthen its institutional structure by regulating provincial branches and sub-organizations, such as the "Literature Fund" (*Utga zokhiolyn san*), the newspaper Literature and Art (*Utga zokhiol, urlag*), the journal Ember (*Tsog*), in addition to a summer camp, a museum named after Natsagdorzh, artistic groups, and even a farm. The Literature Fund purpose was to support creative activities of litterateurs, literary critics, researchers and translators, and was established as a public organization under the Writers' Union by a Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the MPRP in 1955, which stated that "the main goal of the fund was to provide assistance with the "cultural-

household” (*soyol-akhuin*) conditions of members of the Writers’ Union as well as of promising writers.” The membership to the Literature Fund was compulsory for the members and deputies of the Writers’ Union and the Fund itself was controlled and guided by its General Committee. The fund was collected from various taxes and commissions imposed on member writers and institutions, publications, publishing houses, and performances at central theatres and provincial cultural centres and clubs. The literary fund worked in connection with the state tax system so that the literary fund and its affiliated offices and institutions were exempted from all sorts of state taxes and commissions.

By the 1980s the Writers’ Union was completely institutionalized and stabilized as the state socialist body for professionals in the literary arts. With its provincial branches, circles, groups, newspapers, fund, museum, artist residency, as well as various events and activities, it functioned as a system all over the country.

It would lose this hegemony with the transition to liberal democracy and to a free market economy and with the coming to be of the “National Mongolian Free Writers” which organized its first Congress on September 27, 1990 and declared itself “a legal competent public organization for professional writers”. Indeed, disgruntled with the leadership of the pre-existing Writers’ Union, its founders asserted their will to “fight for the sake of freedom of creation, pluralism, and free competition by depicting the national characteristics, habit and lifestyle of a Mongolian man solely in artistic ways and provide every writer with opportunities to develop his or her original style.” A new era for Literature was announced. Yet, whether the changes have been so radical or not is beyond of our study.

3. Socialist realism

From a Western perspective, and today more generally, addressing the literature of the former Eastern Bloc countries in the twentieth century almost inevitably suggests doing so through the prism of “socialist realism”, identified as the “Soviet genre” par excellence. In an article dating back in the late seventies, the American literary critic Gary Morson warned against the tendency, which was very prevalent at the time outside the socialist sphere, to substitute value judgement for critical analysis, with all the ideological considerations that this entailed. In this text, he proposes a functionalist approach to “socialist realism”, the analysis of which, he writes, promises to be “fruitful for our understanding of the nature and function of literature as a whole”.

Without attempting to offer a literary analysis of “socialist realism” here, which is not our purpose, it is important at this point to offer a definition and to do so, following Morson, not in terms of “features” but in terms of “function”. His argument is as follows:

“A principal objective [...] was to explain the possibility of radically different kinds of literature. The central concept for such explanations was that of literature as a system, a system that interacts with other social systems. Because these other social systems differ from culture to culture and from age to age, and because the process of interaction is constant, the literary system will also vary from culture to culture and from age to age. It follows from this analysis that literary norms are social and

historical norms, and that the tasks of defining the boundaries of literature and of classifying literary genres are social and historical task”.²⁹²

What is important to emphasise in this excerpt, given that our approach is historical, is the author’s proposal to approach “socialist realism” as a social and historical, and, I would add, cultural phenomenon. Attempts were however made to define the genre in terms of “features”. The problem with these, for Morson, is that they do not account for the variety of the works encompassed. Indeed, as he maintains, “like everything else in the cultural universe, socialist realism has a history, and to have a history means to have a tradition, necessarily different from the traditions of other literary systems against which changes can be measured and innovations felt as great or small”. Thus, many innovations that would appear as radical to the readership of the socialist countries may be invisible to Westerners. This applies to “innovations”, but also to differences in the literatures of separate countries. Thus, one advantage of the functionalist approach, is to be more likely apt to help identifying the unity of socialist realist art in different socialist countries and this unity lies, according to Morson, in a common understanding of the proper interaction of the literary (or artistic) system with other social systems. To quote him:

“To the extent that the literatures of two socialist countries were similar in features, that similarity could be seen to derive from their common definition of literature. The difference in their literatures could be seen to derive from the fact that the other social systems with which literature interacts in those countries differ for a variety of reasons, including, of course, the differing histories of the countries”.²⁹³

It is thus important to wonder how “socialist realism” was understood by the Mongols, if ever they understood it or were willing to do so. In her above mentioned article, Tsetsentsolmon does refer to “socialist realism” and the term indeed appears frequently in works published in the second part of the twentieth century as well as in the resolutions of the MPRP but, to her, it was more likely a vacuous slogan than a genuine artistic genre.

The concept itself was not introduced till 1957, during the Second Congress of the Mongolian Writers even if “revolutionary realism” had already been used at the first one, in 1948. But Baast, whom she interviewed for her research and who witnessed the preparation of the event, told her that the director of the Division of Persuasion and Education - who replaced the Director of the Department of Ideology of the Central Committee, the latter being supposed to deliver the key-note speech but had been released from his position the day before the Congress, - “did not know what “revolutionary realism” was or what was not”.

To concur with Tsetsentsolmon when she question the fact that the Mongols ever have really appropriated the notion of “socialist realism”, it is worth noting that in the recently published three-volume *Encyclopaedia of Mongolian Literature*, the definition given remains very generic and says absolutely nothing about the application of its principles to the Mongolian context. It discusses its historical and philosophical foundations, its first

²⁹² Morson Gary Saul “Socialist Realism and Literary Theory”, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 38, N°2, Winter 1979, pp. 121-133. (p. 124.)

²⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 125

appearances under the pens of European authors such as the Englishman Charles Johns, the Germans Georg Herwegh, Freidrich Freiligrath or the Frenchman Edgar Motte, its conceptualisation by Gorki, its doctrinal and dogmatic dimension and its subjection to the requirements of the dictatorship of the proletariat, slowly at first, then in an increasingly systematic and exclusive way, and finally its fall into disuse with the disintegration of the system which had carried it. The only indication that the Mongols have not remained totally alien to the question is a reference to the work of the critic Galbaatar, in 2001, in which he denounces its authoritarian, hegemonic character, in contradiction (*kharsh*) with what makes art.²⁹⁴

But it should also be noted that, if for the Mongols “socialist realism” had remained an empty concept, it is not clear that Westerners have been able to grasp it any better. Morson identifies a certain number of criteria often put forward to characterise it, before showing the problems raised by this kind of formalist definitions. We can list them with him:

1. The two-dimensional psychology of the characters.

About the typical “positive hero” of the socialist novel, Morson notes a tendency to contrast it to the “psychological complexity attributed to their Western counterparts. It might be said, he writes “that whereas Western novels tend to depict a quest for personality, Soviet novels usually depict the hero’s quest for impersonality, his struggle to “become one with” his Marxist-Leninist role”.

2. Highly formulaic plotting and style.

“Socialist realist novels often seem to be assembled from interchangeable parts, “to be as pre-fabricated as the factories their heroes construct”.

3. Themes that to Western readers are not likely to appear as suitable for a novelistic treatment.

Morson gives an example, hinting at the novel *Not by Bread Alone*: Rather than rivals in love, a socialist realist novel might deal with rival plans for constructing a machine to be used in the centrifugal casting of sewerage pipes.

4. The inclusion of political sermons, often in high-flown rhetorical language, even in fiction about apparently apolitical themes.

5. Lack of irony.

And he explains: “In possession of the Marxist-Leninist method for solving all problems, the socialist realist novel eschews the kind of ambiguity and limited or individualized point of view that readers of Western novels value and in terms of which they often define literary art”.

6. Strong closure and a mandatory happy or “constructive” ending.

²⁹⁴ Галбаатар Д. Монголын уран зохиолын онол түүхийн зангилаа асуудлууд, Улаанбаатар, 2001, 315 х.

But such a catalogue of features supposed as it is to give a definition of the phenomenon in case is highly problematic. Needless to precise perhaps that it was elaborated by Westerners, in other words by the representative of the “bourgeois” or capitalist culture and art which “socialist realism” was affronting so, not surprisingly, it is overtly depreciatory and reductive. This set of features, Morson writes, fails to characterize equally well all socialist realist novels which were much more diverse than what is suggested in that way. A fortiori, as it is mostly derived from Soviet fiction, it is hardly likely to fit the literatures of other socialist countries. Indeed, it was perhaps too easy for its detractors to pretend to believe that Socialist realism was a Russian phenomenon and not an international. Yet, the main and more important objection Morson addresses to this kind of definitions is that it overlooks that the new Soviet novel was not the product of just another literary school, but a different kind of art from its Western counterparts, at least for those who conceptualised it:

“It was widely hoped that this new proletarian literature would be “qualitatively” different from its bourgeois predecessors, which, in turn, would come to be seen as representing but one period in the history of culture, one literary tradition among many past and possible literary traditions. The aesthetic and literary norms canonized by the bourgeoisie would then be revealed as historical, not universal, norms”.²⁹⁵

Gorki was probably the first one who expressed and theorised the need of historical relativism in the definition of literature and who advocated a radical rethinking of the nature of the arts generally and, indeed, of all of culture. A slight glance at Mongolian writings about literature and its critic reveals clearly that the latter was somewhat a “maître à penser” to them. According to this philosophy, which was also a cultural and social project, “whatever new movements”, “schools and “forms” appeared would simply be the consequence of this rethink”.

Definitions of what their literature was or should be by the Mongols who tackled the issue at the time considered are definitely functional. Art was clearly summoned to serve a purpose, it was a “weapon” - the term is frequently used - in the fight against the old system or any other concurrent way of thinking. We can read the definition of what “revolutionary realism” was about, stated as it was on the occasion of the First Congress of the Writer’s Union in 1948:

1. Today’s life requires our writers to focus resolutely on the crucial objectives of the moment, and demands tirelessly that in portraying the new man, invested in the building of the new society, they endeavour to do so from every angle, and realistically reflecting morality and ideology.
2. Revolutionary realism requires writers to study reality in all its depths and aspects, paying attention to their relationships and subtle articulations in order to extract the substance, the essence, so as to represent life by emphasising progress and evolution, the fierce struggle between the past and the present.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 122

3. Revolutionary realism is literature in the service of partisan principles. Our literature is an essential weapon for the ideological education of the working people. For this reason it must be partisan and represent the interests of the party, the people and the nation. Our literature must educate the working people in the right direction. Writers have the task of helping the party to educate the people in loyalty and unconditional love of their party, people and country, to teach them that the great contemporary ideology is the right one for their quest and that they must be ready to face all difficulties with confidence, enthusiasm and without fear of obstacles. Writers must promote the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the party.

4. Revolutionary realism cannot ignore the darker aspects of reality. Writers must forcefully and unscrupulously denounce past backwardness. By revealing its shadows and defects, they must show that the progress being made will inevitably overcome this backwardness and make way for a new future. The principles of revolutionary realism must become the working method of our authors. To appropriate the method of revolutionary realism is above all to know the laws of social evolution and to make the Marxist-Leninist doctrine one's own.²⁹⁶

It is obvious that this kind of phraseology, full of high-sounding superlatives and clearly lacking in any kind of distancing - any kind of "irony" - was open to criticism in Western literary circles. Lenin is still the "great Lenin" (*ikh Lenin*), Sükhbaatar the unshakeable Sükhbaatar (*chin zorigt*), to take just two examples.

We also understand, when reading these lines, that socialist realism was characterised as fundamentally Manichean, since the authors were, as we can see, summoned by the regime to make clear the opposition between a past judged to be retrograde and brutal on the one hand, and on the other a promising present heralding a future open to all possibilities, to allow the reader to clearly identify the demarcation line between the positive characters and the bad ones. It cannot be overemphasised that what was Rinchen criticised for was his blurring of this line in his film *Tsogt Taizh* by depicting representatives of the nobility fighting alongside the people - even at their head - in their struggle against the oppressor. In short, to make *Tsogt Taizh* a patriot, and therefore a positive hero without regard for the mission he had as an author to properly educate the people about what the class struggle was and why it existed.

This kind of declination of the social and historical role of authors, which is both "avant-garde" (in the sense that they must show the way) and partisan, appears in articles introduced by a reminder of the marked attention that the party, the MPRP, has always paid to literature, considered – as has been said – as a weapon in his indoctrination policy.

It is accompanied by a chronological presentation of the different stages that this literature has gone through since 1921, the year of the revolution, insisting each time on the privileged themes for each period, also at the request of the party.

We read for example under the pen of the literary critic Luvsanvandan that the figure of the new man, a fundamental characteristic of socialist realism, came to the fore in Mongolian literature in the 1930s to enable it to "highlight the active role played by the people, by the common man in history". Mongolian literature was then able, he wrote, "to

²⁹⁶ Лувсанвандан, р. 21-22.

show that the builder par excellence of social change according to the objectives of socialism is man. The fundamental aesthetic principles of the new Mongolian literature were thus laid down". The 1940s, according to him, allowed for the deepening of certain themes, namely the struggle for national liberation, the victory of the revolution, the defence of the socialist motherland against foreign aggressors. Among the subjects that marked this period, he mentions "the glory of the Mongolian and Soviet peoples in their historical and social action", those of their two armies, their victory against Japanese militarism in 1945 (*yapony militarizm*), against German fascism in the "Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union" of 1941-1945 (*Zövlöltiin Ayгаа Ikh Dain*) and at the battle of Khalkhyn Gol in 1939. It was also at this time that the theme of the working class successfully reached a new stage and matured in its literary treatment. The following sentence is worth quoting:

"The stories (**tuuzh**) by D. Tarva, D. Namdag, D. Danzhaa focus on the worker as a social animal. At the stage of revolutionary democracy, the aesthetics tended to blur the rationale of the conflicts, by reducing them to portrayals in black and white for their character and attenuating the historical role played by the people while honouring single protagonists".²⁹⁷

This passage tends to suggest that the Manichean opposition between "white" and "black" characters is insufficient for it doesn't account for the origins of the class struggle, thus failing to make the readership considered excessive and whether more subtlety in the representation of the individual is considered desirable or not. Luvsanvandan then notes that this "new literature" in Mongolia was for a time strongly dominated by the poetic genre, before the socialist system was established and the other literary genres developed to achieve a balance. And he points out, for example, that in the 1960s, which is about the time he is writing, the theatre in particular was able, by tackling social problems, to give powerful expression to the socialist ideal, to the social and everyday life of the people and to their worldview.

There is, however, one thing worth noting about Luvsanvadan, and it is one that is found consistently enough in the writings of the time to be considered representative of a widely held viewpoint. It will be recalled that one of the criticisms that Morson levelled at Western analysts, who were a little too quick to denounce a socialist realism that was too uniform, prefabricated and devoid of nuance in their eyes, was precisely that they were not themselves a little more subtle in their approach, refusing in particular to see that within this current there coexisted numerous national traditions marked by the particular culture and history from which they had emerged. However, in the articles on literary analysis and theory of literature published in Mongolia from the late 1950s onwards, this type of dogmatic definition of what the literature of a socialist society claiming to be such is or should be often appears at the end of the article or at the beginning, quite obviously occupying a minor place compared to what seems to be much more important for the authors, *i.e.* the question of the renewal of the tradition (*ulamzhlal shinechlel*). On this issue, the tone changes significantly, the discourse is much more "embodied" and aims at

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 6.

justifying the reintroduction of the national literary heritage into the new literature by trying to show forcefully that it does not contradict socialist objectives. This is a point that is well underlined by Tsetsentsolmon, who also gives only relative importance to “socialist realism”, and writes:

“I argue that the socialist literature was acclimated into the Mongolian social context as it was not a simple parody of the Soviet literature. The process of creating the socialist Mongolian literature remained not only within official institutional relations but complex social relations of “preference for local homeland” (**nutgarkhakh**), connection (**naiz nökhöd, tanil tal**), personal attitudes of vindictiveness, or the race for higher positions, in parallel”.²⁹⁸

This is in line with Morson’s point of view as it stresses the importance of the specific historical and cultural context (here Tsetsentsolmon lays the stress on the structure of social relations)²⁹⁹ in which “socialist realism” is given birth.

“ Building on an aesthetic tradition rooted in history and national culture, our authors have been able to draw from our heritage what goes in the direction of democracy and progress and integrate it into their works, thus giving birth to our new, socialist and revolutionary literature. This was a decisive step in the renewal of the tradition”.³⁰⁰

He then recalls the importance of the cultural and civilisational base that humanity has built up in the course of its history, which is an indispensable condition for the appropriation of socialist culture:

“The rule has thus been firmly established of selecting the democratic and socialist aspects of this heritage, its progressive, democratic and revolutionary tradition, in order to advance it by fighting the culture of the exploiting class and nationalist ideology”.³⁰¹

We can see here that while defending firmly the literary heritage, he is cautious enough to precise that not the whole of it is worth preserving but only the part of it that expresses the socialist ideal. To prove that such an ideal was already present in Mongolian traditional literature is a recurrent concern in the articles published at that time. Here again:

²⁹⁸ Tsetsentsolmon, 2018, p. 229.

²⁹⁹ The importance of social networks in Mongolia is a point on which Kaplonski also draws our attention.

³⁰⁰ Социалист реализмын арга Монголын уран зохиолд төлөвших явцад манай зохиолчид үндэсний уран сайхны соёлын түүхэн туршлагыг шүүн тунгааж ардчилсан, дэвшилтэй шилдэг уламжлалыг бүтээлчээр залгамжлан хувьсгалт шинэ, социалист урлаг утга зохиолыг бий болгон уламжлал шинэчлэлийн асуудлыг шийдвэрлэсэн юм. (Лувсанвандан: 10-11)

³⁰¹ Ийнхүү социалист соёлыг хөгжилтэй зайлшгүй нөхцөл болсон хүн төрхөлтний туршид бүтээсэн соёл, иргэншлийн туршлагад эзэн болох, асуудлыг шийдвэрлэхдээ соёлын өв уламжлалаас чухамхүү ардчилсан социалист бүрэлдэхүүн хэсгийг сонгож, түүний хувьсгалт, ардчилсан дэвшилт уламжлал, туршлагыг дарлагч ангийн харгис соёлын эсрэг үндэсний үзлийн эсрэг хөгжүүлэх зарчмыг тууштай баримталж ирсэн юм. Ibid

“The people of Mongolia is rich in its literary heritage at its best, both its written works and its oral tradition, reflecting the pugnacity and heroism of its struggle for the independence of the motherland and its fight against social exploitation”.³⁰²

And he specifies, mentioning in particular the example of Izhinashi:

“The end of the nineteenth century marked a turning point in the development of Mongolian literature, which, under the influence of the social and national liberation movement of the Mongolian people, strengthened its democratic orientation by paying tribute to the laws of the universe, embracing the notion of citizenship and expressing social criticism”.³⁰³

Oral literature forming a major part of what one would call the “genuine” literature of Mongolia – with all the precautions the use of this word must implies - it is not surprising that he emphasises it as an expression of working class interest. In the following extract, he goes so far as to call it a “weapon” in the fight against the nobility, the Church and foreign oppressors:

“Popular oral literature (folklore) has played an important role in this respect. Folklore is the source from which literature is drawn, and the basis for its continuous aesthetic development. In the bitter struggle of the people against foreign aggressors, against the lamas and nobles of the old regime, folk art has proved a very powerful weapon”.³⁰⁴

At this stage of his article, Luvsanvandan turns his attention towards the new literature, and argues that this had successfully draw on this heritage to “enrich” it “with the content of the new revolutionary ideals”:

“Our socialist artistic culture was born with the song “Shivee Khiakta”, composed and sung under the fire of the people’s revolution by the heroes of the revolution, the people’s soldiers. (**üüniig zalgan**) In the revolutionary song we find the figures of folk and historical songs, the form of theatrical dialogue songs, the teachings and morals of folk tales and legends, the poetic **yerööl** (wishes) and **magtaal** (praises) of the

³⁰² Монголын ард түмэн улс орныхоо тусгаар тогнолын төлөө нийгмийн дарлал мөлжлөгийн эсрэг хийсэн мятаршгүй тэмцэл, баатарлаг явдлыг үзүүлсэн ардын аман зохиол, уран зохиолын шилдэг бүтээлийн баялаг өв уламжлалтай билээ. Ibid

³⁰³ Ер нь XIX зууны эцсээс монголын ард түмний нийгэм, үндэсний эрх чөлөөний хөдөлгөөний нөлөөгөөр монголын уран зохиолын арьдчилсан дэвшилттэй хандлага гүнзгийрэн хөгжихийн хамт нийт уран зохиолд ертөнцийн ёсыг талархах иргэний шинжийг эрхэмлэх, оршин буй ахуйг шүүмжлэх хандлага нийтлэг болж ирсэн юм. Ibid

³⁰⁴ Үүнд ардын аман зохиол чухал нөлөө үзүүлсэн байна. Ардын аман зохиол бол уран зохиолын уг үндэс уран сайхны хөжлийн дундаршгүй эх ундарга мөн. Хуучин нийгмийн үед харийн түрэмгийлэгчид, дотоодын лам, ноёдын эсрэг ард түмний тэмцлийн хурц бөгөөд хүчтэй зэвсэг нь ардын уран бүтээл байлаа.

poems, enriched with the content of the new revolutionary ideals. This is the expression of the history of popular and progressive literature in its entirety”.³⁰⁵

He then takes the examples of *Üüriin Tuya*, *Tungalag Tamir*, which we will discuss later, and *Ulaan Naran*, which, in his view, demonstrate the success with which the historical novel has been able to integrate into its structure the forms of traditional literature: popular legends (*ardyn domog*), storytelling (*khuuch yaria*), but also figures and themes halfway between historical reality and folklore, such as the “*Shiliin sain er*” (Brave men of the hills), all the while changing. The revolutionary novel is thus, according to him, a mastery of the “dialectic of continuity and change”, or what in more contemporary terms could be called the “reinvention of tradition”.

Luvsanvandan article is a good example of what was involved in the slogan “national in form, socialist in content”, one that also apparently reveals us that the Mongol critics of the time were aware of the importance of the national heritage and made their best to preserve it. Yet, at the end of her article, Tsetsentsolmon asks once again the question whether “socialist realism” was not just an “abstract concept that artists could not easily apply or practice” and this time - though she did assert that Mongolian socialist literature was not just a pale copy of the Soviet one - she also involves the slogan “national in content and socialist in form” into the matter. Quoting the researcher S. Dulam, she writes:

“Dulam admits that one could hardly see the “national form” realized in literature as writers mainly used forms such as poem, verses, novels, and stories that were not national but common worldwide. “Styles were also mainly adopted or translated from foreign literatures so that one could not identify the “national form.” Very few works such as “The Story How a Truly Brave Hero Bold Defeated Big Swallower Black Monster” (*Eriin sain erelkheg Boldbaatar khamgiig zalgigch khar mangasyg darsany ülger*) by Lkhamsüren, some plays by Namdag, novellas by Rinchin and poems by Badraa could be identified as “national in form””, Dulam (Interview, September 15, 2015) continues”.³⁰⁶

Our research will allow us to deepen this reflection by taking as a basis the study of the novels forming our corpus. What we can already advance at this point is that, regardless of whether or not this objective was achieved; there was a will in Mongolia at the time to bring the national literary heritage into existence within the new society founded on Marxist-Leninist basis. It is clear that, according to the principles of historical materialism, the ideology imposed by the party at the time, and which literature, was resolutely evolutionary: the victory of the revolution and the advent of a communist society could -

³⁰⁵ Манай социалист уран сайхны соёлын анхны бүтээл “Шивээ хиагт” дууг ардын хувьсгалын галын шугамд хувьсгалын дайчид, ардын авъястан нар зохион дуулсан билээ. Үүнийг залган хувьсгалын зуунд ардын болон түүхэн дууны дүрслэл, жүжигт харилцаа дууны хэлбэр, үлгэр-өгүүллэгт ардын үлгэрийн ёс суртахууны сургамж, нийтлэл яруу найрагт ерөөл, магтаалын шүлгийн ур, дүрслэл хувьсгалт шинэ үзэл санаа, утга ажуулгаар баяжсан юм. Ер нь ардын болон дэвшилт уран зохиолын бүх л түүхийн туршид нэвтрэн гарах шугам болжээ

³⁰⁶ Tsetsentsolmon, 2018, 225.

according to the doxa - bring nothing but progress, announcing “bright tomorrows” (cf. the title of Rinchen’s novel “Rays of Dawn”).

If we want to take a stock to conclude this chapter by referring to what was mentioned above in our review of the many theories of nationalism, we can say that, if we adopt the modernist scheme, Mongolia at the beginning of the twentieth century had the characteristics of a society in transition which, according to this approach, is a fertile ground for the spurt of nationalist movements. Let us recall what we noticed at the time: schematically the “theories of modernisation” adopt an instrumental perspective to study the emergence of nationalism conceived as a co-process of the transition from traditional to modern society. While most European countries place this transition at the time of the Industrial Revolution, Mongolian historians consider that the contemporary period begins for them in 1911 (historians of the socialist period unsurprisingly set the turning point at 1921, the year of the revolution). As far as literature is concerned, the song “Shivee Khiakta”, composed by the revolutionary forces, during the capture of the city by the **patriotic** army led by Sükhbaatar in 1921, is said to be the first contemporary literature work. This period was marked, as we have just seen, by intense propaganda activity, with the ruling party paying particular attention to literature, which seems to be in line with theories that place particular emphasis on “social communication”. In particular, let us remember Deutsch’s theory according to which an “accentuation of social mobilization - which is here the case even though authoritatively steered by the party - would enhance the importance of language and culture, and hence, nationalism”. On the one hand, as we have just seen, a certain form of national pride could in our context express itself on the condition that it would not contravene to the principles of Marxist-Leninism. But on the other hand, and consequently to this condition, this pride could by no means be termed as “nationalist” (*üundesnii üzekh üzel*), the word considered appropriate being “patriot” (*ekh oronch üzekh üzel*). We also mentioned Hroch who argued for a theory emphasising the role of communication and education in the development of nationalism, distinguishing three main stages in the development of modern society: first a transition from feudalism to capitalism through bourgeois revolutions, then the consolidation of capitalism and the emergence of an organised working class movement, and finally global integration and the development of communication to an unprecedented level. In the case of Mongolia, as we have seen with Bawden, it did not really pass the stage of capitalism. The first revolution of 1911 did not bring about any great changes to the old system, with the church and nobility even strengthening their influence and power, working class and bourgeoisie remaining almost non-existent. As for Gellner to whom nationalism is the “unavoidable outcome of an industrial society which requires a spatially ductile labour force” especially when the state is in a position to “provide the kind of “cultured persons” required by the process of industrialization, and to do so through the fixation of an official language and the control of the educational system”. Again, we need to be careful before global “nationalism” is banished from the discourse, but the context as described by the model fits relatively well with that of Mongolia and may allow us to predict the expression of the above-mentioned - albeit covert - national pride through the literature.

Chapter four: The History of twentieth-century Mongolia through its literature

A telling of History in line with official narrative?

As we have seen, the Mongolian literature, socialist and revolutionary, had the mission to carry the ideology of the party by illustrating it in a literary form that would be both realistic and accessible to the people. And in order to be grasped by the Mongols, the authors had to make the Marxist-Leninist doctrine fit into the continuity of the national heritage. Hence this heritage was to be kept alive but also modernized.

To what extent did they fulfill this mission? Our corpus of novels provides us with the material to discuss this question. Perhaps more than any other literary form, the novel as a genre allows itself to historical treatment. Bawden has been used as a reference and despite its weaknesses in order to build for ourselves a set of commented chronological reference points against which to situate the discourse of our authors. With his book, we have some clues as to the key events and themes that were considered significant in order to account for the evolution of the country in the twentieth century, which means in accordance with the propaganda and therefore with the scheme proposed by historical materialism. Let us go again along the path already taken but this time with the paper heroes created by a Rinchen, a Lodoidamba, a Namdag and some others. As announced, *Üürin Tuya* and *Tungalag Tamir* will be our main sources, the other novels will mainly serve as complements.

The action in *Tungalag Tamir* begins on the road along the river Tamir in 1915. The information is not given directly, at least in this form - and we remember what Pomian wrote about contextualizing the historical novel by introducing turns of language and expressions in force at the time represented, and not according to the author's contemporary usage - but with reference to the *Olnoo örgögdön* "Exalted by all", the founding event of the Bogd Zhavzandamba regime, which is said to be in its fourth year. However, the entry of Erdene, probably the main character of the novel, immediately takes us back several years before to have us understand how he got there. Let us discover with the author who Erdene is:

"His name was Erdene, a man of the Olgonuud clan, in the *khoshuu* of Zasagt Khan. The elder of two brothers, orphaned at an early age, he had spent his youth moving from one camp to another, selling his arms to whoever would employ him. His brother, Tömör, had joined the "Braves of the Hills" from the age of sixteen, and very quickly, his uncommon courage and astuteness brought him fame as Tömör the "Silex": Tsakhiur Tömör of Zasagt Khan, a quasi-legendary character, whose exploits were extolled in the four aimags of Khalkh and the Shavi". (*Tungalag Tamir*)

In this brief excerpt from the incipit, the geographical indications clearly situate the novel in a period prior to the time of writing, thus respecting historical consistency. The expression "the four *aimags* and the Shavi" refers to the great hereditary provinces, and here more precisely to that of the Zasagt Khan. The reform of 1930, which established the

division into *aimag*, *sum* and *bag*, had not yet taken place, so we learn that Erdene came from the *khoshuu* (banner) of the Zasagt Khan and the author, through a note, precises that this region corresponds to the present-day sum of Tümen and Taishir in Govi Altai.

The introduction of the character of Tömör into the novel is important in several respects. *The Shiliin sain er* (translated here as Brave of the Hills) is an emblematic figure of Mongolian oral literature, especially the *khuuch yaria*, which draw abundantly on historical reality that continual transmission constantly reinvents or recomposes, giving them here a local colouring, adding there a crisp detail. Bawden refers to these “Robin-Hood like figures” in his *Modern History of Mongolia* and it was also the typical illustration of the spontaneous struggle led by the people against their oppressors even before the events of the twentieth century organized it.³⁰⁷

If his brother made the radical choice of marginality, Erdene himself tried to speak out against the injustices of his time. This is what we learn from the very first pages of the story:

“By the time he was 18, he had “united the pillows” with a girl from the surroundings, Dolgor, with whom he had set up his own *ger*, acquired a dozen yaks, two or three riding horses and some sheep. Agonizing in turmoil, rejoicing in moments of happiness, suffering in hunger and answering hatred with hatred, Erdene was no different from other men. But when the new Zasagt Khan, Gombozhav, had come to power and begun to oppress the people without restraint, he could not stand it any longer and went to complain about this cruelty to the head of the League, so that he could bring the matter before the Manchu ruler...

He should have thought better. “Watch the bottom of your *deel* when you tease a dog, watch your ass when you irritate a nobleman”: we know the proverb and it is not a vacuous saying. Drawing on the *khoshuu*’s coffers, Gombozhav had spread bribe to have the insolent one who had dared to rebel thrown in prison. This is how Erdene had ended up in the gaols of Uliasutai, where he had languished for more than a year, shaggy and riddled with vermin and lice. But this was precisely the time when Mongolia, freeing itself from the Manchu yoke, had gained its independence. Power was handed over to the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt, a great reincarnation adorned with the epithet “Sunlight with a thousand-year life span”, revered by his people and who would henceforth enjoy both political and religious authority. His accession to the throne was marked, among other things, by the pardon he had granted to the prisoners, and Erdene had been released. [...]

Once free, Erdene had immediately faced the Khan’s resentment and had no choice but to leave the region. He had paid the tax, distributed all his meagre resources, and loaded what was left onto a cart. And so they had left, he, his wife and son, with just one horse to pull their load to Khüree, where they would go to worship at the feet of the Bogd Gegeen”. (*Tungalag Tamir*, 18-19).

These are characteristic features of the hero demanded by the socialist regime. It will be seen that these characters are not limited to these biographies, which are brief but which

³⁰⁷ Cf. Luvsanvandan, op. cit. p. 11.

shows that the novel is part of the genre ordered by the party and puts us from the outset in the presence of a latent conflict between oppressors and oppressed. *Tungalag Tamir*'s first book is composed of chapters which, like in the theatre, transplant us each time to a new setting, allowing us to follow in parallel the stories of several characters whose destinies will soon come together. The adventures they face, in small successive steps, draw for the reader a society whose iniquity he can measure by himself.

The social picture is even more accentuated in *Üüriin Tuya*, which begins much earlier: as the very title of the first book – “Under the Manchu Yoke” (*Manzhiin talkhind*) – indicates. Here, the romance often gives way to the meticulousness of the descriptions, which gives the novel a different colouring, less light, but nonetheless very piquant, thanks to the very well brought satires.

1. Feudal society

A very unequal society

Through the story of Erdene, who was forced to flee his home region for having jerked himself in believing that he could oppose his Khan and claim justice against him, the opening chapter of *Tungalag Tamir* immediately suggests that the society depicted is marked by inequalities. This becomes clearer and clearer in the following chapters, as new characters enter the scene, each representing a class, a social category, with its prerogatives or obligations, its conditions of existence and its relationship with other social groups.

Pürev *Taizh* is a secondary character, but each of his appearances allows the author to mock this class of aristocrats who are imbued with a superiority inherited from the lineage of Chinggis Khan, to which they claim to belong, but which in fact tends to fade with the multiplication of titles and distinctions distributed by the Emperor first, the Bogd then, as well as in the face of the rise in power of a few herders and merchants who, although of popular extraction, have managed to climb high enough on the social ladder to be able to vie.

Pürev *Taizh* intervenes for the first time in chapter four, when Tömör, on the run after escaping from the prisons of the *khoshuu* of Luu Gün, has stopped for a while to regain strength in a miserable camp of the Sayid Van *Khoshuu*:

“[...] Tömör was about to leave when the one known as the “terrible Sakhuis of Sayid Van”, the *taizh* Pürev, arrived. Frightened, Ölzii hurriedly arranged a cushion to seat him and bowed reverently:

– The miserable slave (*bool*) that I am is delighted to see his humble abode irradiated with light by the presence of our lord, he murmured, clasping his hands together.

There was no *arkhi* to offer, and the *taizh* – who had already had a good drink of it – made a fuss about it:

– You starving bastard, that’s how you get! You are a disgrace to your region! – He was staring at Tsend with a lewd light in the eye, while having at Tömör with the evil glances of an alpha male on the prowl – I’m dead drunk. The girl will take me home. Saddle a horse. And not too wild! Come on, let’s go!

He signalled to Tsend to follow him and went out. But Ölzii had guessed his intentions. It must be said that Pürev was known to have sullied the honour of many young and pretty girls in the country. Worried, he followed him:

- Please! I will gladly escort our *taizh* myself, a worthy descendant of Tenger. These words only reignited the fury of the cruel Pürev. He shouted:

- Does your ass itch? Do you want me to help you scratch it? Do as I say! Send the girl!

Ölzii fell to his knees, imploring. But Pürev, out of his mind and convulsed with rage, pounced on him and struck him several times with his heavy whip. This was too much for Tömör, who stood up abruptly:

- Coward! It is easy for a *taizh* to beat his *khamzhlagas*! What did that man do to you? Nothing! Dirty brute.

He might as well have thrown a spark into a powder keg.

- Where are you from, you beggar? You've never heard of Pürev *Taizh*! roared the man, brandishing his riding crop.

Tömör seized it with one hand and pushed him away violently. Pürev fell backwards... right into an *argal* basket. He got up, but it was on Ölzii that he started to scream:

- Wretch! Giving refuge to such rebels! You will see what it is to brazenly undermine the lineage of Chinggis Khan! The day the cane rains down on your spine, you will regret your crime!"

Pürev is brutal, rude, and almost always drunk. He's a "villain as we like them" if I may say, imagined by the author to make him detestable. If we go a little deeper into the matter, we might find extenuating circumstances for him, but at first glance, there is little to support him. In this excerpt, we see him martyring an old man, Ölzii, for the simple reason that the latter did not serve him alcohol. This is the situation as it can be understood from a novelistic point of view. But the exchange between the three characters also reveals the social divisions that were very marked at the time.

Privileges, taxes and corvées

"*It's easy for a taizh to beat his khamzhlagas*": the sentence pronounced by Tömör clearly refers to the statutory differences between the two men, one of whom, the *taizh*, has almost all the rights over the other, his *khamzhlaga*. Indeed, one recalls Bawden's definition of the latter: "The class of so-called *khamzhalgas* or personal retainers of the *zasags* and *taizh*, left to them for their economic support by the Manchus" and he adds further: "the *khamzhalgas* were not legally entitled to move about and dispose of their labour as they wished, since this deprived their feudal overlord of part of his subsistence".³⁰⁸ In another scene in the novel, we see the same Pürev beating his *khamzhlagas* who have come, obviously not so willingly, to shear the sheep for him in the autumn, after the wool has grown back:

"Pürev *Taizh* had reassembled his *khamzhlagas* and boiled black tea in big "sheep-pots". The work lasted more than ten days. And at the sight of the large tufts of hair

³⁰⁸ Bawden, 1968, p. 143.

that remained here and there on the backs of the animals – often covered with scratches, incidentally, the residue of clumsy scissor blows – the *taizh* almost went out of his mind. The raw flesh was even sometimes suppurating and eaten by worms. - But who gave me such subjects! That’s how you wreck people’s fortunes. There are blows to the arse with a stick and slaps that are lost! he shouted, handing out three or four strokes of the whip in passing. But his gesticulations did little to advance the work. On top of that, the *khamzhlagas*, who had not come to work for him so willingly, kept on fighting. Two of them even ended up getting injured”.

This description appears to be simply a setting for the scene that follows. Yet, incidentally, it also allows the author to illustrate, without giving the impression of giving a history lesson, the functioning of this system of serfdom which fixed the respective social positions and mutual relations of the *taizh* and *noyod* on the one hand, and the *khamzhilgas* on the other. In the first excerpt, reference is made twice to the prestigious ancestry of which the *taizh* boasted, referred to in the passage as the “sons of Tenger” or “descendants of Chinggis Khan”, a prestigious ancestry that served to justify the prerogatives and rights they enjoyed over the men and families allotted to them. A character comparable to Pürev can be found in Rinchen in the the *taizh* Zhamstranzhav. The following scene also bears witness to this state of subordination, although this time it is not a question of services in kind owed by the common people to the *taizh*, but of the latter’s impunity, which gives him the right to burden his subjects with the debts he has incurred:

“Batbayar and the old *zangi* exchanged the ritual tobacco and then came to the usual greetings, asking each other about their health, family, herds, the state of the pastures and the water supply at home. But as to the object of his visit, the old *zangi* beat about the bush for a long time. At last he made up his mind, it was about that filthy drunkard *taizh* Zhamstranzhav who had once again got into debt by losing at gambling, and that of course not failing to order a great deal of wine and *arkhi*, coming back with one thousand five hundred *lan* of trouble... for the *khoshuu*.

Batbayar sighed:

– This libidinous drunkard, when is Erlig going to get rid of him so we can have some peace! A beast to cry over, but he’s dragging the whole population of the *khoshuu* into the abyss. This autumn, I came across him in a Naimaa counter (*püüs*) in Da Khüree. I thought that we will be the ones to suffer the consequences of his actions. And this *taizh*, completely plastered, with his fried whiting eyes, was flanked by one of those Naimaa girls, hardly better than him. He was sitting with her next to the stalls and was about to offer her some silk when I greeted. But then this drunken *taizh* jumped on me: “You miserable old serf! Haven’t you been taught the customs? Didn’t you see who you were dealing with? Greet me, too. And this girl too! Just by sleeping with me, compared to you, this girl you see there is almost a daughter of heaven. And he showed me the girl who was already half-drunk. But when I greeted her too, it turned into a row: “Damn serf! So you dare to look at people, eh? Insolent! You think that because I’m sloshed I can’t see anything? You think you can pretend I’m not there? No matter how shabby he is, the kite is still the breed of the Royal Gardi, no matter how shabby, your man is from the lineage of the Great Chinggis. The dirty slaves of your kind, I

will teach you to respect us, the *taizh*, the descendants of Tenger. Hey you, scribe! Get out the account book. I said that I was offering this girl the necessities for a silk *deel*, right? Finally I offer it to her for two *deels*. You mark my words! As long as these beasts of burden of commoners are around, there will always be someone to pay the debts of the sons of Heaven!"... That's the story".³⁰⁹

And the *zangi* comments :

“- Khüree must be full of similar *taizh*, who, trapped by the cunning of a few merchants, allow themselves to become drunk and accumulate debts, enriching Naimaa at the expense of the people of their *khoshuu*.”

In this passage from *Üüriin Tuya*, the social situation is not described in a purely factual way, but is clearly denounced, and not by an external narrator but by the characters themselves. This is a procedure that Rinchen uses very frequently: many chapters are taken over by a character who testifies for one or more others about something seen or heard, or tells a legend or story. Although this is less often the case in *Tungalag Tamir*, the injustices of the society of the time are also observed through the eyes of the characters.

Sometimes they are simple observations, a little disillusioned perhaps, or at least resigned...

On their way to Khüree, Erdene and his family have their horse stolen, and they have no choice but to place themselves at the service of Itgelt, also a commoner, but who has

³⁰⁹ Батбаяр, өвгөн зангитай тамхилж, амар мэндийг мэдэж, мал сүрэг нутаг усаар мэнд байгааг мэдэлцээд, өвгөн занги ирсэн учраа холоос тойруулж хэлэх гэж, сониноо ярьж гарав.

Сонсвол, өнөөх архич муу Жамсранжав тайж дахиад л өр шир тавьж, архи дарс ууж, мөрийтэй тоглоом хийсээр мянга таван зуун лангийн гай чирч гэнээ гэж зангийн хэлэхэд Батбаяр сүүрс алдаж, -Тэр завхай архичийг эрлэг хэзээ татаж аваачаад, амьтныг амруулдаг юм бол? Харахад ой гутмаар өөдгүй амьтан мөртөө хошуу нийгмийг чирэгдүүлдэг, лайтай амьтан даг аа. Хавар би, Да хүрээний Наймаа хотод тэрүүнтэй нэг пүүсэнд дайралдчихаад, тэрний хүрээнд наргидгийн лай ланчиг нь бидэнд л өр шир болж тусах нь дээ гэж бодсон юмаа. Тэр согтуу тайж үхсэн загасны булингартай нүд гаргачихаад, наймааны согтуу хүүхэнтэй хамт лангууны хажууд сууж, түүндээ торго авч өгч байсан билээ. Миний ёслоход,

- Хөгшин боол чи, яаж ёс алдаж байна? Чи намайг хэн гэж бодов? Над бас нэг ёсол. Энэ хүүхний өмнө бас ёсол. Надтай унтдагаараа чамайг бодвол, энэ хүүхэн бас, тэнгэр язгууртантай чинь сацуу болж байгаа юм шүү гэж согтуу тайж, тэр ам халсан хүүхнийг зааж намайг загнаж билээ. Тэгээд тэр эмд бас ёс хийхэд, тайж агсамнаж,

- Муу боол чи, хүний өөдөөс яаж харж байгаа амьтан бэ? Намайг согтуу байвал юм хардаггүй хүн гэж бодож байна уу? намайг тоохгүй шинжтэйеэ чи? Элээ муу боловч хан гардийн аймаг, энэ бие муу боловч, эзэн Чингисийн угсаа. Би муусайн боол та нарыг тэнгэр язгуурт бидний тайж нарыг хүндэтгэх ёс сургаж, цээрлүүлэн хүмүүжүүлж өгнө. Хүүе бичээч, дансандаа тэмдэглэ. Би энэ хүүхэнд нэг зах торго өгнө гэсэн билээ. Одоо хоёр зах торго өгөхөөр боллоо. Дансандаа бич. Энэ муусайн харц боол байгаа цагт тэнгэр язгуурт тайж нарын өрийг төлөх хүн олдono гэж загнаж байсан билээ гэжээ. *Üüriin Tuya*, 1971, p.13-14.

Зальтай хэдэн наймаачны аргад орж архинд дэвтээд, өр шир тавьж, наймааг баяжуулж хошуу нийгмийг хохируулдаг тайж хүрээнд олон байх шив дээ. Тэр жил би ноёны бараа болж Хүрээ ороод, бээжин Содномдаржаагийн пүүснийхэн манай ноёныг зочлон будаалж билээ. Би архинд нь согтоод буодыг дагаж зээл тавьж эхнэртээ нэг луучин гутал, хүүхдэд хоёр жин чавга авсан чинь хожим, харин гурван бүдүүн ирэг өгч салсан шүү гэж зангийн хэл[жээ]"

managed, through hard working, to build up a comfortable capital, to the point of becoming the richest man in the *khoshuu* of Luu Gün. One day, while he is on his way to the centre of the *khoshuu* with Erdene and Nyam the old shepherd, both of whom are in his service, the three men stop at the house of a man called Badarch, the *takhar* (equivalent of gendarme) of the *khoshuu*. The rich *takhar* serves Itgelt a fine *arkhi*, and also serves the other two, but this time a different kind of alcohol, and old Nyam is quick to point this out. These are Erdene's thoughts on this episode:

“Erdene had liked the old man's frankness, revolted at this Badarch who had served them this residue of distillation. But he remained silent, ruminating on the idea that it is in the order of things, in this world, that it is always the rich who have their back scratched up. There must be strong and weak, rich and poor, that is also one of the laws of the universe. There is nothing we can do about it”. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

His misadventures, to put it mildly, have undermined Erdene's hopes of making things happen (at least at this stage of the story, we'll come back to that). Itgelt is not ready to revolutionise things at the risk of jeopardising his relatively enviable position, but he is nonetheless lucid about the aberrations and injustices of the feudal system which, from his point of view, are damaging the economic health of the country:

“Itgelt was usually as level-headed as he was careful. But this time, overheated by alcohol, he had let slip the secret thoughts that his prodigal nature contained. He felt a deep jealousy of the nobles. The *taizh* especially, who were not even able to give up a single orphaned lamb to the community, while he himself was lavish with money. “Those bastards suck the *khoshuu* to the bone, eating like crazy and drinking like sponges. They can't even get a few *khamzhlagas* to work. Good-for-nothing! But they still manage to screw things up. Imbeciles but greedy...” Hatred filled him every time he thought about it. “If I were head of the *khoshuu*, I'd find better things to do than raise taxes to make people like me pay off the debts these morons incur from the counters by eating out of the hands of the Chinese like children. I'd round up the beggars of the whole *khoshuu*, and see if I couldn't get them to weave cloth as strong as ticking! He had reached this point of hidden resentment”. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

This brief commentary on the state of mind of the wise speculator recalls some of the mechanisms which the functioning of this feudal society was based on: debt and taxation, knowingly maintained by the Manchus and the Chinese. As we have just said, Itgelt's first concern was his own security. In the end, therefore, he is quite satisfied: having succeeded in gaining the respect of the nobles, he is not at all prepared to fight against them on behalf of those who suffer much more than he does. This is what he explains to Erdene when Erdene reveals the real reasons for his exile:

“That evening, on the way to Pavlov's house, Erdene told Itgelt the real reason why he had left his homeland.

– So that’s is the matter indeed. I did think you were quite a guy! My good Erdene, if someone decided to unveil all the filth that plagues this *khoshuu*, we’d have enough to fill an ocean... But no one has the guts to do that.

– Itgelt Guai, one needs power to overthrow the powerful. The nobles have power and money. If you want to assert your rights against them, being aware of their dirt is a fact, but you need money to pay bribes. Those who, like me, have neither horse nor goat, can only get into trouble. Those who, like you, have quite some ownership, on the other hand... Erdene had spoken quietly, in a soft, steady voice.

Itgelt interrupted him:

– When you have worked day and night without respite all your life, when you have deprived yourself almost to the point of starvation in order to make up a little capital, you cannot spend it indiscriminately.

Itgelt envied the nobles, but he had never thought of confronting them openly. He didn’t see the point. “With all their privileges, they are not as powerful as I am. He who, a few years earlier, had just a few spare mounts had become one of the biggest breeders of the *khoshuu*. The *taizh* themselves came to borrow money from him, patted him on the back and offered him the best of their *airag*, their *arkhi*. This was enough to flatter his pride, confident as he was in his entrepreneurial abilities. Although he envied them, over time he had begun to despise them, and did not hesitate to look down on them whenever he saw them”. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

Here we see another social reality of the time, already noted earlier with Bawden: the erosion of the power of the *taizh*, who were sometimes even reduced to having to place themselves at the service of rich commoners. Again, it can be recalled:

“So the *taizh* gradually degenerated to the point where many of them became denuded of their personal retainers, and might even be taken on as wage-earners by those who were nominally subject to them. In the early nineteenth century their special status was also eroded by their being made liable to pay state taxes, like any commoner”.³¹⁰

The character of Itgelt has particularly aroused the interest of Mongolian critics, especially after the democratic transition, which has allowed a new analysis of it, since the minds were then much more open to the market economy mindset. Some people have even fiddled about the question of what would have happened to Itgelt if the people’s government had not come to power, we can come back to this later. We have just seen that Itgelt was a rich man, sufficiently wealthy to be able to look down on the nobles, even though he did not enjoy the same privileges and exemptions as they did. This is the portrait the author paints of him at the very beginning of the book, when he first appears:

“A man, dressed in a dark blue serge *deel* and wearing old summer boots, came out of the large *ger*, the one to the southwest. He had a finely chiselled metal sheath on his belt, into which was inserted a richly carved knife. His eyes were bright and constantly

³¹⁰ Bawden, 1968, p. 88.

moving, his face was round and his complexion mat. A thick braid of black hair fell down his back.

He swept his eyes over the horizon. The first light of dawn was just beginning to break. This was Itgelt, 32 years old. Neither of high lineage nor a great heir, this man would have stopped at nothing except perhaps gnawing stones to live comfortably and had thus become one of the richest herders in Luu Gün *Khoshuu*. At the age of 19, he had married the daughter of a nobleman, Luvzan *Taizh*, of the Dalai Choinkhor Van. And it was on the small capital received as a dowry that he had built his fortune. Keeping only a few animals around him, he entrusted the care of his herds to the poor of the region.

Together with his wife, Dolzhin, his 10-year-old son, Khongor, and his 7-year-old daughter, Solongo, they formed his household.

From first light to nightfall, Itgelt never gave himself a moment's rest. And he urged those around him to do the same. Always up before the others, Dolzhin was always the first to milk and graze the cows. And if anyone was ever ahead of them in any way, they would not loosen their teeth all day in rage. Their staff knew their character and so people did not get up until they heard the tea boiling in the 'large ger'. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

This abnegation on the part of the wealthy herder is constantly recalled in the story, often by the character himself, through his comments or inner monologues. But his self-sacrifice is not without an ability to take advantage of others. Itgelt is the one who always sees very clearly where his interest lies, and knows exactly how to manage to reach his objectives whatever they may be. Thus, when Erdene comes to him to ask him to give up a horse, he begins by playing it safe when he learns that he comes from the Zasagt Khan Aimag and states that it would be better for both of them to confine themselves to the usual greetings without seeking to go further in their relations. At the same time, Galsan, who is one of the poor people he has surrounded himself with, arrives with a letter. Itgelt cannot read, but Erdene can, and offers to do so. The attitude of the former changes completely:

“Erdene took the letter and unfolded it: “Message from Zhamsran, Governor of the Akhai Bees”, he began in a clear voice.

It was about the debts that the *khoshuu* intended to settle with Itgelt, who had borne the burden of the relay-service for it at the Dariborin relay. Erdene had read the words written between the red lines of the parchment in one go and without the slightest hesitation. Itgelt was stunned. That this man in rags, with an emaciated face and hands calloused from hard labour and life in the open air, could read messages written by nobles and officers in silk deeds and thin white hands seemed incongruous, to say the least. When he was young, Itgelt had tried to learn to read, but had never succeeded. Today, when he kept his accounts, he used symbols. A circle in a square for pregnant animals, a simple square for sterile animals. To have a scholar come to work for him was a boon he would not have dared to dream of.

– Your people are said to be tough... but there are small trees as well as big ones, some men are good, others bad. And since when would a Mongol not help a brother in need? You can come and settle by my side from now on, he said in a voice full of empathy.

When a man is at the bottom of the abyss, it is not difficult to gain his trust. Erdene regained hope. Itgelt lent him a cart and two *khainag*³¹¹ as strong as elephants. Erdene was about to leave when he called to Galsan:

– This man is exhausted! Lend him a hand. We are all equal here, right?” (*Tungalag Tamir*)

Later, the author explains that this opportunism is not accidental, that it is in Itgelt’s nature to do so:

“Itgelt was not a man to leave anything to chance. When someone could be of help to him in his affairs, he was as gentle as a young calf. But he could be as treacherous as a poisonous snake with those who tried to obstruct his will. When it came to work, he was as hard-working as any member of the staff, of whom no more zealous could be found on the camp. Nothing was dearer to him than his desires and aspirations. His own. And he knew how to give without counting the cost to those who could satisfy them. But as much as he did not skimp on spending in difficult times, he would not have given the slightest penny, and was intractable towards those who did not need it. But this Erdene was very useful to him. So he behaved like a docile steer with him. Erdene was intelligent and resourceful, but Itgelt had also spotted his naivety. To ensure his trust, he treated him with brotherhood and respect, trying not to make him feel the de facto hierarchy that existed between them. And while he enjoyed humiliating Galsan with his bullying, and constantly made fun of Nyam, with Erdene it was quite different, he affected an air of respect as well as friendship. But he also had an idea in mind. Dolgor’s haughty beauty, a beauty that not even the hardships of life could alter, tickled his senses”. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

We could multiply the examples, but from the point of view of history, what this portrait seems to reveal is that there existed among the people a certain number of rich men (or families) and that this wealth earned them a significant prestige. Itgelt is well aware of this:

“He knew that all those gathered in the tent were doing their best to please him, and this could only make him proud. He felt that he was the master of the world, and that a simple word from him could change mountains into steppes, deserts into wooded mountains. He had Erdene sing “Er bor khartsaga” five times, just for the pleasure of showing off his superb tenor voice to the others. Then people started to play “Guess how many fingers I have?” as the tongues heated by alcohol were loosened and the discussions became more animated”. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

In Rinchen’s novel, we find characters quite comparable to Itgelt, rich but without noble ancestry. In the very first chapter, the name Zhamba is mentioned (which will be the occasion for us to introduce him, as we will talk about him later). The man, about whom we still have very little information, has just crossed a poor woman carrying an argal basket

³¹¹ The crossing of a cow and a yack bull or of a bull and a yack cow.

and flanked by four young children. Seeing the rider casting a curious eye on the youngest child lying in the basket, she offers to adopt him, after a brief discussion, the said Zhamba accepts:

“ Well, I will take your son. Actually, my wife and I did not have a child. After all, perhaps this boy was destined to inherit my fire. I will give you a tent. It has had its days but it is still good enough. And also a cow with its calf, and an old but strong ox. This will help you to carry your brat and your old clothes. My wife can give you food and some clothes if necessary.

– Yes, let us do as you say, Zhamba Akh min, nodded the woman with resigned humility.

Zhamba cleared his throat. And to let her know that this was the only time in his life that he, known and respected in the region, had stopped in the steppe to talk to a nobody:

– I am adopting your son, but that is no reason to cling to me like scabies to the skin. You can stay for a few nights, until the child gets used to my home, but after that we would better go our separate ways. Well, you stay here. I am going to get a cart from some local people to take you to my house”. (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971, p. 6-7)

We see here the arrogance with which Zhamba can afford to treat those who are clearly inferior to him on the social scale, in the same way that Itgelt can despise the people who are at his service like Nyam and Galsan, even use their wives - we will come back to this - and even look down on the *taizh* who, despite their ancestry, are less rich and less powerful than him. There is, however, a major difference between the character of Rinchen and that of Lodoidamba. While Itgelt reigns as the undisputed master of his camp, Zhamba knows how to show humility in front of Batbayar who, although very poor, is older and more experienced than him, which is why, in traditional Mongolian society, he enjoys the respect due to elders, especially when they are gifted with great wisdom and wit. And this is his case, as we shall see later. In Rinchen, the realism with which social relations are portrayed, in all their complexity, is particularly reinforced, thanks to the multiplication of scenes which may remind the reader of the project announced by Balzac in his introduction to the *Comédie humaine*. One of these, both cruel and ironic, concerns the character of Lodoi. Importantly, the scene is set in spring, a particularly harsh time for poor households whose food supplies are depleted while the animals have not yet given birth. Everything is running out. Lodoi, who like Itgelt is rich beyond measure, has nothing to worry about. Meat is plentiful in his house, and the chapter begins by describing the ritual with which he begins his day. The scene is quite delectable, no pun intended:

“Lodoi threw his *deel* over his shoulders and went out, walked unhurriedly around the big yak with its long horns and frost-silver fleece, “took a look at his horse”³¹² before returning to the *ger*, carefully lifting the curtain that covered the threshold and entering an interior bathed in the delicious smell of tea sweetened with yak milk. He sat down

³¹² Morio kharakh: an expression which means to pee.

at the entrance near the copper sink to run water over his hands and wash them, following with his face, before wiping himself with the bottom of his *deel*.

- Tea!

Scarily thin and with eyes drowning in grief, his wife came and placed on the low table decorated with arabesques the copper dish in which the meat from the previous evening had remained, a silver bowl, a bag of *changaamal* and a copper plate also filled with *khuruud* accompanied by *öröm* and *tos*. Next to it, she brought a silver teapot.

The rich Lodoi was used to begin his working day with a hearty meal and plenty of tea. He poured himself a cup full of tea and began to chop his meat into small pieces, filling it up as he sipped the tea, then ate while smacking his lips like a foodie. He then poured himself another cup, but this time of *changaamal*, to which he added the cream and butter plus tea to soak it up, after which he licked it until not a trace of it remained. Finally he poured himself a little tea to rinse his mouth, ran his tongue over the corners of his mouth, then wiped them with his fingertips, rubbed his mouth with his thumb, with the back of his hand, with his forefinger again, and when he had thus finished his toilet, full, he moved away from the table to sit behind it, took his pipe out of his boot, stuffed it, lit it with the fire that his wife had just brought him, drew on it several times greedily, took out the ashes into a silver *tsokhiur*,³¹³ stuffed it again with cigarette tobacco with a good floral scent, then relit it with the still red ashes in the *tsokhiur*, drew on it, remained for a moment pensive, closing his eyes” (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971, p. 45).

As far as eating his fill is concerned, Lodoi is not worried, even in these lean times. And he is not worried about the work for the coming days either: he has divided the tasks and the pastures are rich. What worries him is that he has to anticipate the work of the autumn. This is the ransom of wealth, his herd of sheep has reached such a size that if he has enough staff to look after them, for the shearing of the back season, he will be short of hands:

“That year - Burkhan be praised - the herds had reached eight thousand head and he had shared them among thirteen households. But for the calving and shearing it was another matter. There was a lack of manpower. The solution was to take advantage of the hungry gap of spring, a harsh period of dearth when carcasses, fat and all the food gathered in the autumn ran out, and when the children cried in the evening for broth. That was the right moment. Afterwards it would be too late, he would find no one... “Well, here the tobacco has finally clogged up this pipe, it looks like it has gone out”.
- Fire!

He relit his pipe and took a puff, dropped the ashes then put it back in his boot and resumed his calculations, patiently.

Well... Today we should start by going to see the women sheep herders. To find out what they really have left to eat at home. The truth comes out of the mouths of little kids and senile old men. What is needed is to identify the homes where there is no

³¹³ Knocking-pan for a pipe intended to hold the hot ashes. (Bawden)

more food or drink, where people curse their stomachs. To these we would offer a little meat, fat, flour and autumn wool in exchange for their arms for shearing sheep”. (Üüriin Tuya, 1971, p. 46)

The author indulges in showing the reader the misery in which those who had no animals or so few to support them could live, a cruel portrait of a society in which some fill their bellies happily while others compete with scavengers for bones to colour their broth a little. This is literature, let us not forget, but we have seen with Bawden that this reality has been documented. In these scenes of daily life described by Rinchen, literature flirts with ethnographic testimony.

“[...]... two young children were driving some gaunt goats and sheep.
– Is your mother here?
– Yes, she is.
– What did you eat last night?
– Black tea before we went to bed.
– And this morning?
– We shared a piece of *khuruud*³¹⁴ crumbled in boiled tea, what was left over from yesterday.
– Do you have a lot of *khuruud* and dairy products at home?
– Counting in the bag, Mum said there was hardly any left.
– Well then, tell her to come and see me, I’ll give her some meat, fat and flour. In return she will come to my house to help shear the sheep, won’t she? Do you understand? And tell her to hurry up and come, or I will find someone else. Here, take one *khuruud* each. I want you all the best, my dear little ones, still hanging from the teat. Tell her that its out of pity for you that I want to give you something to eat and drink.

He continued with other shepherds’ children and was able to learn what he needed to know about the families in the vicinity and went round the poorest households. In these lean times of spring, the poorest had little choice but to accept the devious and vicious deal of the rich Lodoi, so much so that for the meat of a sheep, for a cauldron of flour and grain, they agreed to give him nights and nights of work when it was time to give birth and shear the sheep. For him this was no great sacrifice.

In households with few livestock and little milk, the hunger gap is a terrible time, children often sleep on an empty stomach and their parents are reduced to telling them to go to bed and lying to them, promising that the meat will be there when they wake up. And if on the rare occasion they manage to dig up a few bites, the mothers distribute them in equal, tiny portions, bite by bite, as they would a rare and precious good. “When the meat turns to gold, mama turns to *chötgör*”³¹⁵, an old childhood saying that comes to us from the depths of time. But the unfortunate mothers who are cornered by famine and gnawed by scurvy would obviously like not to act like *chötgör*

³¹⁴ A type of dairy product made from naturally soured skimmed milk pressed into the shape of a coin. (Bawden, 1997)

³¹⁵ One of the numerous kind of Mongolian devils.

and to be able to make meat much more abundant than gold. But where would they find this meat, to feed their young?” (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971: 48-49)

Our novels depict very crudely the social situation as it was at the turn of the century. People who, at the time, thought like Itgelt or Erdene were probably in the majority: who were aware of the inequalities but would never think of committing themselves in having things happen. Another example of this can be found in *Üüriin Tuya*. The scene takes place in the Orkhon Valley region where a Russian scientific mission has come to explore the ruins of the ancient city of Khar Balgas (also known as Ordu Baliq), mission to which the orientalist Radlov and Iadrintsev, who really existed take part (they became famous among other things for their work on the Orkhon inscriptions which they discovered and were the first to study. The inclusion of these two characters in the novel allows us, incidentally, to set the scene in 1891). Yadrintsev, who hopes to be received by the Sain Noyon Khan, asks for directions from a man he meets along the way, Zhamba, the relatively well-to-do commoner already familiar to the reader at this stage of the story, who is bewildered to see the foreign expeditionary travelling in such humble conditions, when he is used to seeing the lords and nobles of his country always travelling under heavy escort and without depriving themselves of all the privileges that their status allows them to enjoy. And he does not refrain from stating it:

“...Talking in mid-voice with the interpreter, he was astonished to learn that this small group was part of a large-scale scientific exploration of the ruins of Khar Balgas.
- What! You are on an official mission and you travel without an escort, like common pilgrims? In our country, people of power don't behave like that! The dog lifts its paw on the idol that bows, says one of our old proverbs. Even the last accountant of a Chinese *püüss* (counter) goes nowhere without a scout, a relay, a postmaster to gallop in his wake, and everywhere he will ask for fat sheep to eat, choice horses to ride and beautiful *ger* to spend the night in, all the while raining down torrents of *tashuur* blows. Who will deign to give you a glance? Who will look for suitable livestock if you travel in such wretched equipment, like poor beggars?” (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971, p. 36)³¹⁶

The differences in viewpoints become very clear when the scholar retorts that in his country “it is not customary to bow down to the rich and powerful while oppressing the people”,³¹⁷ a statement that leaves Zhamba even more puzzled:

“The smugness of the people in the administration, their way of abusing the prestige of their mandate, was in the order of things, at least that's what he had always thought,

³¹⁶ -Та нар, албаны хүн мөртөө, жирийн ядуу мөргөлчин шиг даанч тусгүй явж байнаа даа? Манай ноёд дарга нар ингэж явдаггүй шүү. Номхон бурхныг нохой долоодог гэж хуучны үгэнд байдаг. Хятад түншийн пүүсний адгийн муу бичээч хүртэл өдий төдий газарч, улаач, бошго дагуулан давхиж, явсан газартаа идэх тарган хонь, унах сайн морь, хонох сайхан гэр нэхэж, нүүр нүдгүй ташуурдаж явдаг шүү дээ. Та нарын ингэж гуйлгачин царайлж, ийм ядуу хэрэглэлтэй явахаа, хэн та нарыг тоож, олигтой унаа хөсөг нийлүүлдэг юм бэ? гэж тэр хэлмэрчид хэлэхэд нь, орос эрдэмтэн, хэлмэрчээс.

³¹⁷ Манай ёсонд ноёд дарга нарын өмнө зусардан гуйж ардаас хяхан хавчиж явах ёс байдаггүй юм

always until this Russian scholar affirmed the contrary, leaving him stunned, perplexed”.³¹⁸

He is even more surprised when they arrive at the *khüree*³¹⁹ and the researchers stop at a poor family. He thus announces that as for himself he will stay with a lama of his acquaintance. The next day, the foreign expeditionaries present themselves to the local authorities (*tamgyn gazar*) and ask if they can be received by the Sain Noyon Khan. The magistrate, a lama, welcomed them with courtesy, the *amban* of Uliasutai having letting him know of their presence in the region with orders to do everything to facilitate their mission. He then asked them where their leader was, to which Yadrintsev replied that the head of the expedition had remained in Khar Balgas, being himself the leader of this small detachment that had come to study funerary vestiges on the banks of the Tüi River, and provided him with all the necessary documents to prove that his situation was in order, the visa that had been issued to him by the Russian consul in Da Khüree, as well as a route map. Then, explaining that their animals have suffered from having to make their way over rough terrain, Yadrintsev asks if spare animals can be lent to him, adding that he would like an audience with the Sain Noyon Khan. To which the lama replies:

“– Kh kh kh! Of course, I'll go and tell him right away. Will you wait for me here for a few moments?

[...] After more than an hour, the lama returned, he joined his hands together and gave the answer with great ceremony. It had been agreed that they should be provided with people to show them the way:

– We will send two guards to help you and guide you on your way. As for the use of the *örtöö* (relay service), the decision will be made tomorrow. You may go and rest. He repeated his bows.

– But when will the Sain Noyon Khan give us audience?

The lama-officer joined his hands once more to reply that the Khan was feeling unwell and that, to his great regret, it would be impossible for him to meet the members of the expedition for several days, and that he asked them to excuse him.

– Well, can we visit the *khüree* then?

– Well, you know, we don't allow foreigners to enter the circumambulation path of our temples. As our lamas abhor miscreants, we do not even allow Chinese merchants who live in the city to enter the enclosure.

– How strange... I have often had the opportunity to visit Mongolian lamaic enclosures, I have even been to Erdene Zuu and Baruun Khüree. And I was able to walk around all these places without any restrictions. I have never been forbidden to enter a temple or a monastery.

– Well, I will ask the patrons of the lamasery for confirmation and come back to you with their answer.

³¹⁸ түшмэлийн дээрэнгүй, албаны сүрээр далайлгаж явдгийг тийм л байдаг ёстой юм. Дээгүүр их хүн албан түшмэл болбол, бусдад эрх чадал давууг үзүүлж явдаг ёстой юм гэж боддог байснаа сайхь орос эрдэмтний үгийг сонсоод гайхнам бөгөөд ичингүүрнэм билээ.

³¹⁹ Khüree can designate the basic organizational unit in the ancient Mongolian nomadic economy or large lamtasey (for the most important meanings of the words at least. There are some others).

And once again he prostrated himself'. (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971, p. 39)

Running into them a little later and seeing their dejected faces, Zhamba gently mocks them by pointing out that he had warned them:

“The dog lifts its paw on the idol that bows down, did I not tell you? To Me he gave audience, Lam Gegeen, and I was able to prostrate myself at his feet. The Sain Noyon Khan is already on his way to see him off. Here, you see? There!” (Ibid)

This is followed by a description which is worth reading as it provides us with a sample of that literature which was encharged of illustrating realistically and didactically the class struggle. Let us recall Morson’s suggestion that socialist realism may have produced works that were less insipid than Westerners wanted to believe. Although this is not here question of judging on aesthetic grounds, the history of literature cannot be studied while totally avoiding the issue. So let us read it:

“And indeed, in the direction he was pointing with his *tashuur*, very large camels with red and blue carpets loaded with the *ger* of the great lama, his chests and trunks were already lined up, a superb caravan above which were floating banners, pennants and flags, chiming with all the bells hanging from the animals’ necks.

– Hey, look. On that terrace, five hundred metres from where we came down... Looking at those animals and that bustle, that’s Lam Gegeen’s escort.

On the terrace of which the interpreter spoke, a bustle of lamas in purple and gold, on foot or on horseback, was bustling around a silk tent crowned with superb arabesques, muffled by the noisy creaking of an oxcart. Just as the expedition members reached their *argal*–smoke–soaked, wind–and–sun–tanned tent, which seemed to go hand in hand with the shabby, torn *ger* in whose shadow they had taken up residence, Gegeen’s escort emerged from the enclosure with great pomp. When, preceded by elegant lamas with silk banners fluttering above them, the richly decorated yellow chair flanked by four porters galloped past the mission tent to the terrace, the great lama lifted the moiré curtain from within to take a curious look at these astonishing figures dressed – as yet unseen in this country – in European style, and stopped beside a poor *ger*, one of the most wretched of all.

Behind the chair galloped riders wielding huge silk fans and a crowd of zaisan lam.³²⁰

Finally, closing the march far behind, a long, rich, sleeveless, dark blue coat pulled over his *deel*, proudly displaying his *otog zhins*³²¹, a man with a haughty bearing galloped on a splendid white horse, escorted by a whole company of followers. Zhamba:

– The Sain Noyon Khan.

– But weren’t we told that he was feeling ill?

– And did I not say to you “fickling dog, flattering lord”? If you used the privileges of the powerful, do you think that people would return those marble faces?

³²⁰ Title of an official in the administration of a lamasery or an ecclesiastical estate [hist.]

³²¹ Button of rank.

– I can see now that in your country the lords look at the appearance before welcoming people and notice their titles before escorting them home. So yes, your high officials, we could present them with the greatest of scientists, but they would hardly give him the consideration due to a human being.

And with that, the old scholar limped back to his tent.

A rich, influential, and powerful Church

This passage also allows us to introduce a new point, that of the place of the Lamaist clergy in this society, its power and the overwhelming hold it had over the minds. This episode probably refers to a visit by the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt to the Sain Noyon Khan, and it should be noted that in view of the period in which the scene is set, 1891 if we rely on the presence of the Russian expedition, the former is still only the highest dignitary of the Church, he has not yet been crowned king. Nevertheless, he enjoys great prestige and wealth, as evidenced here by the pomp and circumstance described by Rinchen.

The weight of religious beliefs, their deep and lasting rooting in the minds as well as in society, appears very clearly in our novels, and perhaps more so in *Tungalag Tamir* and in *Üüriin Tuya*, in it is one of the essential themes. In order to respect the chronology while remaining in the Manchu period, we can stop for a few moments on the chapters of *Üüriin Tuya* which precede the one we have just commented on, chapters in which it is a question of having a young man, Nasanbat, expelled from his *khoshuu*, chosen to assume the role of the expiatory victim (*zolid*) whose sacrifice should allow the local lord, Lkha Beis, to recover his health.

One of the scenes described shows the two specialists in the healing of illnesses that the *beis* has called to his bedside, both representatives of the Lamaist faith, but one is the lord's personal physician, the other a master of astrology (*zurkhai*) and exorcism rites (*gürem*) whom the patient has brought from Tibet. Although apparently cordial, the conversation between the two men is cut-throat. The scene is very revealing of the power of the Lamaist Church in Mongolia. We can see all the sects and ramifications of this church, as well as its ability to appropriate practices that are outside the teachings of the Buddha but that are likely to win the support of a population in whose minds shamanistic influences still remain. Finally, the political – geopolitical – implications of this obedience to Tibetan Lamaism are also suggested here, a way for the author to recall the complex strategic relations between Mongolia and Tibet.

Lkha Bees, the *zasag noyon* of the *khoshuu* was bedridden in his palace, unwell. This *noyon*, with his short, pointed nose, broad, balding forehead and *chavgants*³²² face, was lying in bed with a fever, sweat dripping down his flabby cheeks.

Beside him stood his personal physician, Zhamts Maaramba³²³, an old lama with a doctorate in Tibetan therapeutics, with greying hair shaved very close to the head, chubby hands and very folded flesh. He gave the *noyon* a remedy to bring down his temperature and, while he waited for the potion to diffuse, began chatting in a low voice in that Tibetan language that no one but them could understand with the diviner specialising in *gürem* who had arrived at the patient's bedside before him, Vanchiknorpil.

³²² Chavgants can designate a nun, an old woman who has taken some religious vows but lives at home but also a old woman

³²³ Specialist in Tibetan medicine, lama doctor of medicine [Tib. sman-rams-pa] (Bawden, 1997: 206)

The presence of this cunning Tibetan in the palace had immediately annoyed the *noyon*'s private physician, who already saw himself joined by a rival. Without letting on, he put on an affable face:

- My potion will bring down the fever. It's only recently, since he went to Beijing, that the *noyon* has lost his health and started dreaming at night, having nightmares. The demon of evil is doing its work, but thanks to the theurgy of Burkhan, I think I'll be able to cure him.

The Tibetan had a completely different theory:

- According to astral conjectures, our *noyon* must have the *zorig* expelled by an emissary who will carry him outside to let grace blossom behind him. The honourable *zangi* Gombo and Lodoi, the rich lord of mercy, have offered to find the one who will be expelled, taking with him the evil from which the *noyon* suffers. But suspecting that you, honoured physician, might not lend credence to this enterprise, they have informed me that placing it under your aegis would be all the better.

He blathered caressingly, waiting for the other to say something.

- I'm a doctor, so my skills are limited to administering treatments. Your analysis of astral conjecture and your exorcisms are impenetrable to me. To give you a comparison, I'm as ignorant of your practices as you are of my knowledge of medicines.

The Tibetan did not take the Maaramba's jab at him, and continued with extreme courtesy:

- Would it be going too far to imagine that my highly respected interlocutor might have in his kit a filter capable of numbing a man's conscience?

- Do you intend to force this man to bear the burden of evil?

- No, as far as I'm concerned, I don't force anyone. The man who takes on the role of *zorig*, whether he does so voluntarily or is pushed into it, is neither my business nor yours. But if we want to get rhetorical - does it really make sense to talk about someone volunteering to be the emissary of evil? He says yes with his mouth, but in his heart it's the torments of misery that force him to sacrifice himself. Would you, for example, this *noyon*'s private doctor, who has known neither hunger nor cold, who has not had to submit to the diktat of the suffering of those who tire themselves out to the point of exhaustion, willingly offer to bear the evil of your *noyon*? You'd never take on the role of *zorig*-bearer, would you?

If I'm asking you to help me, to vouch for me, it's out of compassion for this poor animal condemned to exile by the pangs of poverty. But if, thanks to your filters, you help this person, that you stun his conscience and ease his torments, then use them also to soothe the heart of your *noën*, and try to convince him that, having been delivered from evil, he must vow to enter the metempsychosis of the holy *khutagt*. Once the heart is at peace, the body follows, and this is already the path to healing, according to one of our precepts.

The private doctor responded:

- I am a Buddhist monk, I cannot follow you in what you say.

The other:

- I too am a Buddhist monk. And it's even the teaching of Tsong Khapa lam who conceived this rite with a view to ensuring the well-being of creatures, so if we use it, it's out of concern for others. The man who is sacrificed to the demon that possesses the walnut tree and hunted to exorcise it will find himself blessed with a thousand and one virtues, thanks to which the land of the pure will open up before him and he will attain the status of the saints who have penetrated the mysteries of Baruun Zuu³²⁴. He who, in the name of the well-being of others, takes upon himself the evil one could achieve metempsychosis long before any of the presumptuous people who take all the glory of being Buddhist monks, he says with a smile, "take that! I too can throw stones wrapped in cotton wool. He looked for me, he found me, that Mongol".

But the Mongol in question caressed him with a kind smile and shot him another verbal arrow:

- But then, this man who knowingly lets himself be possessed by evil in order to exorcise someone else could find the key to divine bliss before the great demon-slaying *giiremch* that you are?

- In all humility, I let myself be guided by the words of the Bodishattva, who says that once the creatures of this world have reached osmosis, the path to Nirvana is clear.

And with that, he put on a serious face and added:

- You will help me, won't you, Honourable Doctor? If you don't have the filter I need in your remedy kit, I'll have no choice but to refer the matter to the *noyon* and ask him to invite a Tibetan colleague from Lhasa.

³²⁴ Lhasa.

The private doctor was only too aware of the veiled threat behind these words. Given the blessings of the *noyon*, wasn't it better to let the Mongolian dogs enjoy them rather than abandon them to dogs from Tibet? He hastened to acquiesce and did what the Tibetan *güremch* wanted.

The scenes that follow in the novel are of interest to ethnology as well as history. Although it is not a true ethnographic field report, the description of the expulsion ritual of the expiatory victim is a realistic reconstruction that can most likely be considered faithful to reality, at least that is the opinion that Bawden held of this novel, of which he wrote:

“Ray of Dawn” by the Mongol scholar and poet Rinchen, though fictional in form, this work, published in the 1950s, is a mine of factual information about life and society in the early years of this century. [...] ³²⁵

In Üüriin Tuya:

“The Noyon’s palace was also a hive of activity. The lamas in their orange robes were coming and going non-stop, while in a special *ger*, a disciple of the *güremch*, a small Tibetan with a marked face, had joined an elderly lama from the lamaic enclosure dependent on the *noyon*, with whom he was putting the finishing touches to the *sor*. In a rectangular wooden tray had been planted a mat of the same material with at its top a board whose four corners held artificial red flames made of papier-mâché. In the centre, sheets of paper covered with esoteric formulae stylised with *ugalz* illuminations.

At the very top, fashioned from clay by the old Mongol before being brushed with white paint in which the red of the cavities of the eyes, mouth and canines stood out, a skull stared terrifyingly out of its hollow sockets, red, blood-red like the threat of its fangs.

Next to the one where the *sor* was being prepared, in a small *ger* of four *khana*³²⁶, the *güremch* tangut³²⁷ was carefully observing the domed back of Nasanbat’s skull as he finished explaining to the troubled-looking young boy how the zolig emissary should behave:

- You Mongols have a saying that an “ouch” does not follow a “yes”. A very wise saying. Once you’ve agreed to a question that’s been clearly put to you, there’s no going back, you’ve been told that, haven’t you? OK, now make sure you remember what I’m going to tell you again. Tomorrow, at the end of the ritual, you will be exiled in the name of the Noyon, taking the evil one with you. The zolig must be chosen by a triple roll of the dice. On the last roll, the spell is clear: it will have fallen on you. So you throw the dice that have gone against you to the ground and trample them underfoot before heading out to the north-east”. (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971 : 22)

The ritual takes place as settled in the following chapter:

³²⁵ Bawden, 1968, p. 172.

³²⁶ Szection of a yurt wall.

³²⁷ An ancient Asian people whose origins, probably Tibetan or Turkish, remain uncertain. The Qiang of Sichuan (China) claim descent.

“The frightful ritual of expelling the expiatory victim was drawing to a close with the mournful groans of the *kangling* flutes carved from human femurs, answered by the roaring percussion of the great *khengereg* with its large paintings of *zömbör* interwoven in various colours, sometimes interspersed with the sound of the conches which from time to time drowned out the prayers of the lamas adorned in their sumptuous *zhanch*, and always, always these drumbeats. Then came the fateful hour when fate would designate the expiatory victim to be expelled. The bistre-skinned Tibetan gently threw the dice, counted the holes and held up his five outstretched fingers. The expiatory victim, the one who was to be exiled, his face painted with black and white stripes, a goat’s skin with fur worn off over his shoulders and a bristling yak’s tail in his hand, threw his die three times, a large wooden die whose faces all marked the same one, and pretended to be angry at seeing it fall on the one three times, throwing it against the ground with such violence that it detonated as it bounced back to hit the *güremch* in the chest.

Intimidated by the terrifying aspect of this grandiose ritual performance, those who, like sheep, had gathered in a compact herd to witness it, all let out a cry of fright as they leapt to their feet. The frightful, almost bestial wail of the bone flute known as the “*kangling gandan*” and the copper flutes, the roar of the conches and gongs, and the big, hoarse voice of the mastodon horn had taken over the entire sound space, crushing all other sounds with their power, as the expiatory victim, ready to be banished, ran off towards the south-east, where a grease-soaked pyre had been set up, made entirely of kindling and straw oozing with fat.

A crowd of lamas followed him and as soon as, in perfect synchronicity, those lamas carrying the *sor* representing Lkha Bees reached the pyre, the *güremch* seized it with his powerful, tanned leather hand and launched into a tsam dance, a gigantic bird beating the air with the flap of its *deel*, rolling a terrible gaze with its bulging eyes from which lightning seemed to flash, jumping, leaping from one foot to the other in this frenzied pantomime, as if to take flight, gleaming the whiteness of his teeth that revealed a bestial and terrifying smile, whirling around like a huge bat that had seized between its claws this skull and crossbones of dazzling white and flaming red, and then, suddenly, he made a few great leaps and threw the *sor* on the pyre that was beginning to crackle and immediately the Berdan and flintlock rifles of the soldiers unleashed their salvo of fire. Suddenly, there appeared in the *güremch*’s hand the black *khadag* tied to the end of the *tunraa*, the black horn of the *dharani*, and it was amid the detonations of the firearms and the howling of the horns that the *güremch* turned his *tunraa* towards the flames to let out the magical incantation that commands the evil one to leave, and three times he repeated the injunction. Those who had brought the *sor* then all stepped back in perfect agreement. Erlig’s envoys had taken away the one sacrificed to them”.

Before coming to the period of autonomy, let us illustrate by one last example the aura enjoyed by the lamas in Mongolian society at the beginning of the century, and in particular the first of them, the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt, which will allow us to make the transition to what will follow, namely his accession to the head of the new state.

Here we find Zhamba on his way to Khüree to prostrate himself before the Bogd and present him with a white horse. On the way he meets a *badarchin*, an itinerant lama, to whom he lends a camel. The lama then tells him some of the popular stories for which the *badarchin* are famous. They concern the *amban* of Khüree, who has recently arrived from Beijing, but also, through him, the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt, who is supposed to have come to his rescue several times using his extraordinary powers:

“...Riding alongside Zhamba, he began to tell her fabulous stories about the miracles credited to the Bogd Daranat, who had been born eight times in the lands of Outer Mongolia.

The sinful creatures from whose eyes tears, whose hearts blood flow say that his Luminous Eminence indulges in alcohol. But when the Radiant One gets drunk, it is for the good of the children of the Faith that he consents. I am going to tell you about an adventure that happened to Amban Gui, the consul. And the *badarchin* turned on his mount to face Zhamba.

When he came from Beijing to take up his post in Khüree, the *amban*, who was a bit sulky from always travelling in a cart, asked to ride. So, at the stage, he asked for a mount chosen from among the best in the herd, a swift steed moving so fast that not even the swirling wind could catch him. He galloped off, sowing the seeds of his following, but the horse, probably frightened by something, suddenly leapt sideways and the *amban* fell off, with one foot still attached to the stirrup. Scared to death, the people in his escort rushed forward, only to see him glide through the air rather than bounce off and hit the ground, as might have been expected, and finally land softly. When, at the height of their panic, they reached his level, it was to see him get up without a scratch and get rid of the stirrup in which his boot was entangled but whose strap had been cut with a knife. And everyone congratulated him on the quick reaction that had enabled him to escape such a peril unscathed...But the *amban*:

- My reactivity had nothing to do with it, and I thought I was going to die, dragged to the ground by the stirrups. But then, all of a sudden, a young monk on a white horse appeared to save my life. And that's not all, he said that twice he would be called upon to rescue me from danger.

He went on to describe the lama in question. Well, I can tell you that the portrait he painted of him corresponded in every way to His Luminous Eminence, whom the *amban* had never seen. Needless to say, we never tired of being amazed. And once we arrived in Khüree, we went to ask his Radiant Grandeur's people what had happened that day. And behold, the most intimate of his servants replied that on that very date, the Most High had ordered *arkhi* to be brought to him, a wish that was naturally fulfilled, but now, at the height of his intoxication, he asked for his beloved white horse to be saddled, and there he went, beating the steppe, almost drunk as they say. In full gallop, he leaned over the side brandishing a knife and made the gesture of slicing something. Once back at the palace, he announced that he had gone to the aid of the consul appointed by the emperor, adding that he still had to save his life twice, making a total of three times.

So spoke the *badarchin*.

- And of course everything turned out just as the prophecy foretold? exclaimed Zhamba.

The badarchin:

- The second time, our Celestial Irradiation pronounced a *zarlig* even before daybreak, demanding that tea be brought to him. But the tea had just begun to boil and had not yet been sweetened with milk. In a hurry, it was poured as it was, still black and full-bodied, into a *dombo* that was brought to him. Bogd Gegeen immediately grabbed it and poured the contents eastwards, in the direction of the consular district. It turns out that at dawn the consulate had caught fire. According to those who were trying to bring the fire under control, a black cloud suddenly appeared from the west, above Bogd's palace, and a brown rain, the very colour of strong tea, began to fall. In no time at all, the flames were a thing of the past. The people who were fighting against it can testify to this: the downpour gave off a delicious smell of black tea. And so it was that His Luminous Eminence, with his redeeming and magnanimous finger, twice touched the *amban* with his grace and saved him.

As he told his story, the itinerant lama displayed infinite devotion". (*Üüriin Tuya*, 1971: 51-52)

2. Autonomy

In the incipit of *Tungalag Tamir*, it is said that it was thanks to the ascension to the throne of the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt, a great reincarnation adorned with the epithet "Sunlight with a millenary longevity" that he was released from prison. Since the action of the novel itself begins some years later, this independence is only mentioned through the retrospective comments of the characters. In *Üüriin Tuya*, the events just preceding it, as well as the coronation ceremony, are described with an attention to detail and historical accuracy that is worth looking at.

The news reaching the Khüree embassy from Beijing was more sombre by the day.

The Manchu amban, a true despot, had hitherto thought that Outer Mongolia had to be held with an iron fist and that any complacency would have been to encourage the Khalkhas to raise their heads higher than they should. But the prestige of the Qing was crumbling daily in the eyes of the Mongols. And like the camel in the fable that is frightened by the skull of a dead fellow camel, the minister plenipotentiary, the resident of Ikh Khüree, was a mere shadow of his former self, having lost all room for manoeuvre and now content to wave in vain a ceremonial power that was no more than an empty shell.

Having received strict orders from the amban not to stir up the Mongols' hatred, not to oppress, not to humiliate people arbitrarily at the risk of alienating the population, the soldiers of the imperious Manchu army of occupation, including the highest-ranking chiefs, were still strutting around the Khüree markets, puffing their chests just as before, but the bullying and beatings that rained down on passers-by at the slightest movement were a thing of the past.

The Mongol officers who were quick to bend over backwards, who took pleasure in peppering their sentences with Manchu words in every conversation, thinking that this would make them seem very learned, and who could talk for weeks on end about the slightest futile word the amban might have said to them, the slightest perfunctory question he might have asked them. "The Manchu amban asked me this, and I answered that", you had to hear them... But now the same people were singing the praises of the Mongolian nation, of the Mongolian people. "By the grace of destiny, we are born to serve our Bogd, his disciples, his slaves" had become their new credo, and they would not let a word out of the Bogd's mouth go unheard. However, this did not stop some of them, convinced that this state of affairs would not last and that it was

better to have their backs in the upper echelons, from recording everything their peers said without missing a beat, and then giving wind of it to the amban via his galai da, hoping to get into his good graces.

But the camel doesn't do it to its rider, as the old saying goes, and the noyod, who knew the amban's suspicion of the Mongols and suspected that he was listening, also knew that sooner or later a word dropped inadvertently could be fatal to them, so they exercised caution and if that didn't stop them from speaking, they only did so in small groups and in front of close friends they were sure they could count on.

The supporters of independence among the noyod and khaad, who were in favour of separation from China, were very pleased to see the power of the Manchus crumbling under the constant battering they were receiving from a Chinese revolutionary party in full expansion, but at the same time they were very worried to see democratic ideas gaining ground. When rumours began to circulate that a similar threat was swelling up beyond the Great Wall and its thousands of kilometres, these descendants of the lineage of Genghis, the noyod and the khaad, suddenly stopped fighting over the throne of a State that had yet to be founded and had no choice but to bury the hatchet and, Panicking in the face of the growing republican wave in the Middle Kingdom, they all agreed to install the eighth emanation of Ikh Khüree's Zhavzandamba Khutagt on the Mongolian throne. Tradition now dictated that he should be Tibetan, and the first of the title, Öndör Geegen, was born in the house of the Tüsheet Khaan Ochir Bat, the great Khalkha khaan, so he belonged to the line of Genghis.

And so the question of who would ascend the throne of the State to be born, which was to become of the utmost importance for the Mongolian nobility, was decided. And it was to the Tsar of all the Russias, whom the lamas had seen as the reincarnation of the White Tara since the time of the great Catherine II and her son, that they turned, hoping that he would be able to protect their hereditary privileges from the spectre of the Republic, which was casting its menacing shadow over them from beyond the Great Wall of China.

For these representatives of the feudal order, the imperious emblem of the Tsar with its double-headed eagle, whose coat of arms depicted a warrior slaying the Sino-Manchu dragon, was a veritable symbol. In the Middle Kingdom, the Manchu rulers may have feigned indifference to the rising tide of revolution, pretending to reduce it to a mere association of traitors and thieves, but in truth they were doing little about it. At the same time, the people of Mongolia were finding it increasingly difficult to put up with the discretionary rule of the officers and soldiers, and were finding it increasingly difficult to accept the greed of the merchants, to be sucked dry by all these speculators. Over the last few years, taxes had risen considerably, to the point of being unbearable, and with them a growing sense of detestation. All these factors considered, the time had perhaps come to kick out the Manchu amban and proclaim Mongolian independence from China. At least that's what the nobles thought, and in a daring move they reached agreement and began plotting in secret.

Among those who harboured this desire to see Mongolia emancipate itself from the tutelage of the Qing and govern itself on its own were those who thought that the Bogd should be made accountable for the situation, that the four khaan called upon to centralise power in this autonomous Mongolia should ally themselves with the lamas, whose aura was no longer in doubt, and finally that it was necessary to obtain the support of Russia, a man who abhorred the Chinese and the Manchus to the very depths of his being, namely Khand Van, the general of the aimag of the Zasagt Khaan. Then there was Da lam Tserenchimed, patron of the Great Shavi of Ikh Khüree, the shavi of Zhavzandamba Khutagt. Tserenchimed had earlier been to Saint Petersburg with the same Khand Van and felt that if anyone was going to hold the tail of the snake, it should be the Russians and not them. The other three included Namsrai Van, also known as the Bogd's drinking companion, the head of the Khan Uul League, Chagdarzhav Van, and finally the general of the Tsetsen Khan Aimag, Dalai van Gombostüren. These were the five men who came together to form a collegiate executive.

In the third year of Pu Yi's reign, on the ninth of October, to mark the birth of the new state, the five members of the said collegial body met secretly in council to organise the ousting of the Manchu amban in Khüree.

The imposing and massive Khand Van tapped his pipe against the wooden ashtray and, in the semi-darkness illuminated only by the flickering flame of the red carrot-shaped candles, turned to his acolytes to recite in a calm and composed tone, giving the curious feeling that he was speaking only to hear the sound of his voice echoing:

- The warning message that we secretly sent to amban Sandoo through the intermediary of the toin Zhamba, whose faith cannot be doubted, has so far gone unheeded, and there is no sign that he has been

overly moved by it. Indeed, from the looks of it, the amban is not worried and has no intention of leaving Khüree. Here too we need a strategy. Tomorrow morning, we will receive a letter signed by the zasag noyod of the four aimag khalkhas asking him to urgently provide equipment and weapons for the four thousand soldiers they intend to march on Beijing to protect the Emperor from the rebel rioters. The aim was to make him feel threatened. "See the great army we can count on and tremble" is the message they want to get across.

Counting his rosary with the deliciously bewitching scent of sandalwood, Da Lam :

- And this official letter, carried to the amban by an emissary representing the four zasag noyod, must give him no more than three hours to reply.

- And if he hasn't replied by then, we'll have a pretext for expelling him. Then, by decree of the Bogd, we form a plenipotentiary provisional government and take power. If we don't, the people will rise up and stir up trouble, and instead of holding the reins we'll end up hanging on by our tails, it's inevitable.

Khand Van had barely finished his sentence when Namsrai Van began to worry, exhaling alcohol at the top of his lungs:

- But which of us is going to take charge of going to Sandoo?

- There's no way the Da Lam and I can go this time. Amban wanted to have us both brought before the League for going to Saint Petersburg, but as he had no evidence to convict us, he's been harbouring a deep-seated hatred for us ever since.

- Namsrai Van hastened to add:

- It has to be someone with a lot of authority for that to carry any weight.

This is not the place to develop in too much detail the literary procedures that make these characters unsympathetic to the author, but the contribution of discourse analysis to ethnology and history cannot be denied and it would be wrong not to take advantage of it. In accordance with the party's accepted reading of events, the first revolution or declaration of independence is presented as a reaction of the privileged classes to the danger posed to them by the proclamation of a Republic in China and the democratic ideal (*ardyn erkh yos surtal*) associated with it. The choice of the alliance with Russia is motivated, and this is expressed very clearly in this passage, by the conviction that the Tsar is best able to defend the interests of the aristocracy but also those of the Church, as the lamas consider him to be the reincarnation of the White Tara (*tsagaan dar ekh* in Mongolian), as the text says. If we compare this extract with non-fictional and academic sources, we can only note the precision and accuracy of the facts related, with in particular the introduction of fictional doubles of historical figures who played a leading role at the time: Da Lam Tserenchimed, Chin Van Khanddorzh, Namsrai van (Mizhigdorzhii Namsrai), Gadinbalyn Chagdarzhav, Dalai van Gombosüren, who between them formed the very first Mongolian government, set up at the time when the head of state was entrusted to the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt, as well as Sando - the *amban* of Khüree. The satire does not spare anyone, neither the Manchu minister who desperately tries to drape himself in his pompous arrogance but who already has no control over anything, nor the Mongolian "flatterer" (*suslagch*), those nobles and officers who suddenly become the nation's champions after having eaten out of the hand of the said *amban*, but who remain on the alert, ready to turn tail once again if the wind changes. The five main architects of this takeover are not treated with any more leniency: although they conspire together, we see them hiding behind each other so as not to be asked to confront the Manchu *amban* in person, rejoicing like Gombosüren when they

feel assured of having someone to throw to the malcontents in case things go wrong.³²⁸ It's a question of who can get the others to "hold the snake", to borrow a Mongolian expression used by the author.

The scene of the exchange between the *van* Namsrai and the *amban* is marked by a cruel irony that highlights the "immaturity" of the Mongolian leaders of the time that Bawden pointed out. To the envoy of the provisional government, who has given him an almost ultimatum, the *amban* asks whether he would even be serious about responding to such a childish request, clearly taking pleasure in showing his interlocutor that he is not fooled by their attempt at intimidation: the army of four thousand soldiers with which they hoped to intimidate him is, he reminds him, composed of men who have never learned anything but how to strike rosaries and turn prayer wheels.

In *Tungalag Tamir*, apart from the first chapter already mentioned, the independence of 1911 is mentioned in a rather cursory manner in chapter six by Zhambal, a lama who is said to have been one of those who stoned the sedan chair of the Küree *amban* some time before the takeover. Lodoidamba's novel is much less precise than Rinchen's about the historical facts that proliferated during this period. When they are included, they are discreet and serve to set the scene in a realistic world without constituting a storyline in themselves.³²⁹ In the following excerpt, Zhambal addresses Tsamba, another lama who is also his very close friend:

- "Exalted by all!" Talk about a state. Crumbs nibbled by all by now, yes! grumbled Zhambal, swallowing a bowl of arag.
- Do you really think so? Yet the Bogd Gegeen's accession to the throne promised better days...

What we have just read from Rinchen's pen already foreshadowed what, in retrospect, the character of Zhambal observes and denounces in *Tungalag Tamir*. Tsamba's response, however, shows that this proclamation of independence may have initially raised some hopes, hopes that were almost immediately dashed. This disillusionment appears clearly as early as the enthronement of the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt, of which Rinchen gives us an account. Here is an excerpt of the chapter:

"Prostrate yourselves and listen to the Bogd Khaan, Light of the day-star destined to shine for more than a thousand years, holder of joint authority over the temporal and the spiritual, emanation of Vajparani the designer of the balance between the male and female principles, the Oroin Chandmani Erdene, messenger of heaven, promoter of faith and artisan of happiness exalted by all, listen to him now announcing his sovereign grace.

³²⁸ "Томбосүрэн, өөрийн биеийг голохгүй, гагцхүү тушаал ахмад хүний бараа болж дагалдан явах болсонд баярлаж, хэрэг буруутвал, түлхэн зайлах хүнтэй боллоо гэж инээн өгүүлрүүн".

³²⁹ In *Üüriin Tuya* this episode is also discreetly mentioned in the course of a sentence, the author pointing out that Amban Sando had retained a panic fear of it, which was certainly not for nothing in his immediate capitulation when he was ordered to leave Khuree.

And the Da lam Tserenchimed prostrated himself to receive the Khaan's declaration, which he raised to his forehead to receive the grace and thus declaim the first encyclical of a henceforth sovereign state, which announced the appointment of ministers of state as well as the awarding of bonuses and promotions to all nobles and officers. But the two danzhaads were not forgotten, the two Chinese trading post owners introduced to the State Palace among the Mongolian nobility on the day of the coronation, Khishigt and Buyant, who had found favour with the Bogd and become his exclusive suppliers, satisfying his every whim, were not forgotten, as the two usurers were awarded the title of fifth-rank officer, which would allow them to wear the associated *zhins* and an ocean-coloured peacock feather on their hats.

The rich Lodoi felt a fire rising in his face as his ears seemed to ring with exultation, as he heard his own name being pronounced among all the names of those who had been graced with a fifth-class officer's *zhins* and a peacock feather.

As the long litany of nominees for promotion and reward drew to a close, it was time to consider the pardons for the prisoners. The oldest would be released, while the youngest, still robust and able-bodied, would have their sentences commuted but would be automatically enrolled in the army. And while the list of pardons granted by the Bogd was being unrolled, the very young *bandi* who, with their light and nimble steps, entered and left the palace under the control of the terrible doorkeepers, not losing a crumb of what was happening inside, rushed to report to the crowd massed at the entrance.

- There they promoted the nobles. Khand inherited the title of chin van and got his emoluments doubled, and Da Lam would henceforth be exempt from any kind of tax or charge", reported one of the little boys.

- Tell me little one, does this speech of mercy from the Khaan, to us men of the world, men of nothing, mere subjects or *khamzhlaga*, say anything about what will be granted to us? Have you heard anything? Is there any mention of tax relief for us? Has our saviour the Bogd Khaan, in his paternal mercy and benevolence, planned to exempt us from repayment of the debts accumulated by our *taizh* to the Chinese *püüs*?

- Oh no, grandpa, he didn't mention that. What I did hear was that these two danzhaad called Buyant and Khishigt and a certain Lodoi, a nanti from the *khoshuu* of Lkha Beis, were each given a night-coloured peacock feather and a quartz *zhins*.

The old man spat contemptuously:

- May he die, that rich man, and the two *danzhaads* too!

Altankhutag, who had listened very attentively to what the little boy had said, asked him:

- All right, but then, in this speech, about us, the people, the subjects, what is it about?

- The prisoners will have their sentences commuted: instead of languishing in prison, they will serve in the army.

At these words, Altankhuyag turned to the old man:

- Hey, Alas! So this is what the Bogd's "mercy" to us is all about. We come back from abroad, my companions and I, from a region that is not our own, to return home, to a nation that is now sovereign, in the hope of hearing something that heralds better days for the people, and there all these nobles and officers are adorned with pearls and feathers, are handsomely rewarded, eat to bursting point without even having time to

put down their knife or their glass because the *arkhi* is flowing so freely!” (*Üüriin Тууа*)

Олноо өргөгдсөн, шашныг мандуулах, амьтныг жаргуулагч аврал итгэл, хамгийг айлтгагч оройн чандмань эрдэнэ, арга билгийг хослон таалж зохиосон Очир дар, шашин төрийг хослон баригч наран гэрэлт, түмэн наст Богд хааны өршөөлт зарлигийг сөгдөн сонсогтун! гэхэд даа лам Цэрэнчимэд, хааны зарлигийг сөгдөн хүлээн авч, адис аваад, төрийн олон сайдыг тохоон тавьж, ноёд түшмэдэд хишиг хүртээсэн шинэ хааны анхдугаар зарлигийг уншсаны дотор, Богдыг хаан ширээнээ өргөмжлөх тэр ёслолд төрийн өргөөнөө бусдын хамт байсан бөгөөд хутагтын санд хүсэх зүйлийг нийлүүлж дотно болсон, мөнгө хүүлэх хятад пүүсний нэрт данжаад, хааны сэтгэлд нийлүүлж чадсан Буянт Хишигт хоёр хятад худалдаачныг тавдугаар зэргийн түшмэлийн жинс, хөх отгоор шагнан хөхиүлснийг мөн сонсгожээ.

Мөнхүү тавдугаар зэргийн жинс, отгоор шагнуулагчдын дунд нэрээ гарсныг сонсоод Лодой баяны нүүр халуу оргиж, чих шуугинан лүг лүг лугшив.

Олон ноёд, лам түшмэдийг шагнан хөхиүлсэн өдий төдий нэрийг уншиж гүйцээд гянданд хоригдогчдод ялыг үрж хэлтрүүлэх хишиг хүртээнийг уншсан нь, гянднаа хоригдон бий нас өтөлсөн ялтанг суллаж, бие чийрэг, нас залуугий нь ялыг зольж, цэрэг болготугай гэж зарлигийг уншин сонсгоход, төрийн өртөөнд байгаа шадар хаалгачин лам нарын гарын дор зарагдаж байсан хөнгөн шаламгай багачууд банди нар, хааны төрийн өргөөнөө чухам юу юу болж байгааг Шар ордны хүрээний гадна цугласан олонд нэвтрүүлэн уламжилж,

- одоо ноёдыг шагнав. Ханд чин ванд ханы ямба давхар пүнлүү, даа ламыг аливаа албан гувчуураас үүрд чөлөөлөв гэж нэгэн бяцхан банди олонд сониныг хэлж өгөв. Тэгэхэд, хөдөөний нэгэн өтгөс асууруун,

- Хүүхээ, хааны өршөөлт зарлигт, харц ард, албат хамжлага бидэнд чухам ямар сайхан хишиг хүртээв. Юм олж сонсов уу? Албан татварыг хөнгөн болгох тухай юм сонсоогүй биз? Аврал итгэл, арга билгийг хослон таалж зохиосон Богд хаантан, ард албат биднээ нигүүлсэж, хятадын мөнгө хүүлэгч пүүсэнд ноёдын өр төлөхөөс чөлөөлсөнгүй юу хүү минь гэж асуув.

- Үгүй, өвгөн гуай, тийм юм, ер сонссонгүй, Дуулснаас, харин, мөнгө хүүлэх пүүсний Буянт, Хишигт гэдэг хоёр данжаадыг, бас, Лха бэйсийн хошууны нэг Лодой баян гэдгийг хөх отго гэгээн болор жинсээр шагнаж гэнэ гэхэд,

- Тэр баян чинь, хоёр данжаадтайгаа хага бууг гэж өвгөн малчин нулимжээ.

Алтанхуяг, тэр цовоо сэргэлэн жаал хүүгийн нэвтрүүлэн уламжилж байгаа сонинг чих тавин сонсож, тэр зарлигт албат ард бидний тухай, бас юу байна гэж асуувал,

- Ялтны ялыг зольж, цэрэг болгох юм гэнэ гэхэд нь, Алтанхуяг, саяын өвгөн тийш хандаж,

- Ай чааваас даа, ард амьтанд хүртээсэн, хаань хишиг нь энэ болж дээ өвгөн гуай минь!

Бид хүний газар бусдын хошуунаас гэр нутагтаа харьж, улс төрдөө хүрч ирээд, ард олонд аж төрөхөд нь хөнгөн дөхөм болгох зарлиг олж сонсоно гэж зүтгэсэн маань талаар болжээ. Одоо энэ олон шагнуулсан ноёд түшмэл бүгд, шинэ отго жинсээ мялааж, хутга тавилгүй мах идэж хундага тавилгүй архи ууж наргих юм биз дээ. Энэ олон ноёдод давхар пүнлүү шагнасан нь ямар, дээр өндөр хөх тэнгэрээс бууж, дэгнүүл дээр тогтох эргээс нурж, цэцгээс дэлбэрэх юм биш, өнөөх л зовлонг биднээс гувчих юм байлгүй дээ. Энэ голын архич хөх тангад бидэндээ ийм хишиг хүртээдэг байжээ гэж гаслав.

3. The Treaty of Khiakta or treaty of the three nations (“*Gurvan Ulsyn Geree*”)

The following years were relatively turbulent for Mongolia. As Bawden pointed out, the international position of the new regime was most fragile and internally the situation was equally unstable. This is understood in *Tungalag Tamir*, not through a description by an omniscient narrator, as was largely the case in the two chapters of *Üüriin Tuya* presented above, but through the account given by Dorzh, a soldier in the Bogd's army, of how the signing of the Treaty of Khiakta and the withdrawal of the Mongolian troops who had nevertheless reached Inner Mongolia, under the command of the Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav, was announced to them. Dorzh tells his story to Khuyag, a soldier just like him but who had been considered dead by his comrades after being mowed down by a stray bullet. The two men meet again in Khüree, where Khuyag has arrived after being bedridden in the Chakhar for a long time, we are told, and has been living off begging ever since.

We can listen to them:

“– After losing you, by the grace of the Bogd Gegeen, we slaughtered black people and even reached the Great Wall in several places. We could hardly hear the dogs of Peking barking. Mongols are not sheep! We are the valiant descendants of Chingis! They must have noticed!

– And now, where is our army?

– Back home, Dorzh sighed in frustration.

–What ! But why?

– I wish I knew! In the spring, we received the order to withdraw...” (*Tungalag Tamir*)

The following account is in free indirect style, but it is clear that it is Dorzh's point of view that is being expressed:

In 1914, following an injunction from the Russian Empire, the Mongolian army withdrew from Inner Mongolia. After three days of fierce fighting against the “Blacks”, whom they had literally cut to pieces, the soldiers of Dorzh's unit had set up camp at the foot of a mountain in Chakhar. Tents with torn, sulphur-soaked canvas had been pitched, small banners raised, horses put out to pasture and sentries posted at the front. The whole bivouac exuded the panache and valour of a victorious army. In front of the tents campfires were burning. Some were preparing food, others were mending their clothes, or undertaking to delouse them. How sweet it was for these men, proud of their victory, to breathe in the pungent smell of smoke tickling the nostrils, to listen to the contented grunt of horses snorting among the young shoots of green grass! Sitting by his tent sewing his *deel*, Dorzh sang. A veteran had come to sit beside him. He was from the Darkhan Beis *khoshuu*. He had taken off his shirt and started to dig out the lice, which he threw to the ground still alive.

– Wouldn't it be easier to roast them while holding your shirt over the flames? They'd fall off by themselves, Dorzh commented with a sly smile.

– These lice are one of us, they are from Mongolia.

Impassive, the old man continued his work. In one of the tents, someone intoned in a lilting voice, “At the pace of a 100-lan mule”, to which a lower tone replied, “Carried in a litter”, before everyone repeated in unison, “We will raise the Bogd Lama to the

throne of Tsong Kha-pa”. And Dorzh, like the old man, joined their voices to those of the singers.

– When will this war finally end? asked the veteran between two verses.

– I am neither the Dalai Lama to fathom the unfathomable, nor the black raven to see beyond seventy mountains. How do you expect me to know?

– And we hope to defeat this anthill of a Black army...

– Historically speaking, there was Chingis. And on the side of the guardian spirits, we have Ochir Dar, guarantor of the happiness of all creatures, reincarnated in the person of the Bogd Gegeen. Finally, in terms of command, we have the Khatanbaatar at our head. How do you expect us to lose?

– It is said that, during the last fights, his head had taken on disproportionate proportions and that a scarlet foam was foaming from his lips.

– Not surprising for an emanation of the Red Sakhius! replied Dorzh, very self-assured. They remained silent for a moment. Someone was singing the “Er bor khartsaga” in a vibrant tone”.

As we have just noticed, Lodoidamba tells us the story through the eyes of his characters, who unlike an omniscient narrator do not have all the keys in hand to understand what is really going on. By adopting this strategy, the authors succeeds in making the reader perceive the hesitations and anxieties, but also the hopes, that may have been those of the Mongols of the time, whether they were soldiers as here, simple herders or representatives of the nobility, as we shall return to. The influence of the Lamaist Church is again very perceptible in this exchange, as is its ability to exploit popular beliefs when it comes to the rumours that surround the character of Magsarzhav with a halo of mystery. We will return to this chapter when we discuss the construction of national heroes.

Soon after, a bugle call sounded and then Magsarzhav arrives along with his right-hand men, to expose the situation to his soldiers:

“They leapt to their feet and ran back to their tents to pick up their weapons and line up with their ten. From the army of soldiers lined up in several columns behind their leaders, it was clear that a great man was being announced. Five horsemen came galloping from the west. At their head rode the Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav, mounted on a high grey horse with a bright red fringed rump. He rode majestically, proudly wearing his *otgo*.³³⁰ His thick braid of black hair whipped the air. [...]

At the head of the Mongolian troops, Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav had quickly turned the tide, halted the advance of the Black Army and launched the counter-offensive. Much ground had been gained. Magsarzhav used to repeat: “We don’t care about their territories. The time has come for us Mongols to emerge from the lethargy into which the opium of the Manchus has plunged us for too long. We must show them that we are also capable of punching them in the face!

He was not in favour of the Three-Power Treaty. But how to deal with China and Russia together? There was hardly any way out. He had come to believe that if they wanted to carry out this gigantic undertaking, they would have to wait. Their time

³³⁰ Button of rank.

would come. “Until Mongolia becomes independent we will not part with our guns and horses. Our forces are small, but we will regain our sovereignty, no matter what. We will not give up the fight until we have lost our last man and our last horse!” And when faced with the Black Army’s emissaries, who had promised quantities of gold and titles in case of surrender, he retorted: “The Mongols vomit up the gold of the Manchus. They have been gorged with it too much. For them to regain their health, there is no better remedy than Mongolian *khyaramtsag*, so say the *otochs*”.

Coming to stand in front of the ranks of soldiers, the Khatanbaatar had been acclaimed by deafening cheers. A whole army shouted as one. Hoping to catch his eye, the officers and head of units raised their heads as high as possible, puffing their chests, no doubt hoping to stand out from the crowd. Lips pursed, noses wrinkled, their faces twisted into funny grimaces. Magsarzhav’s horse pawed as he shook his head, pulling sharply on his bit.

– Soldiers! Mongolia, Russia and China have signed a treaty. Our troops must withdraw. I am leaving today for the capital. You may return to your homes. We have given everything and this will go down in history. Long live independence! Long live Mongolia!

The men cheered his speech with a thunderous hurrah. Twice more he looked at the long line of men, then turned his horse around and rode off, followed by his escort.

– Long live the Khatanbaatar! shouted a soldier. Immediately, imitated by all the others”.

The ins and outs of the treaty are not developed here. The author leaves the reader in the same expectation as the soldiers he portrays. He insists more on the words attributed to the Khatanbaatar, words of emulation that were also more likely to resonate in the ears of the common people than long geo-strategic speeches. If we compare this extract with those of *Üüriin Tuya* commented on earlier, we can without too much hesitation consider that Lodoidamba and Rinchen explored different forms of realism but that the mission they were given to make their contemporaries masters of their history seems to be respected.

At the end of the story, the character of Dorzh comments on the signing of the Treaty of Khiakta, and it is again through his reactions – his perplexity, moreover – that we are invited to reflect on this event, that is to say, constrained by the limits imposed on us by Lodoidamba regarding the conditions that led to this decision:

Dorzh did not answer. To interrupt a war that one is about to win, to abandon the territories just taken from the enemy... He felt a revolt coming over him. But he refrained from criticising a decree of the Bogd: “The Bogd Zhavzandamba knows things that I don’t. It was probably the best thing to do”. He did everything to reason with himself. But torn between confidence and bitterness, he couldn’t stop thinking about it.

A few days later, the soldiers had broken camp and returned home, leaving small bundles of dried white mushrooms scattered behind. When they arrived in the country, *takhil* were raised to the spirits of the place, and everywhere there was joy at the reunion. The children came running, elbowing to be first. One or two people, however, sometimes stayed behind. But to see their gloomy faces, one had only one desire, it

was to shout to them: “Come on, don’t worry, my brothers! The Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt surely has something in mind!”

[...] After this long account, he sighed sadly:

– Korostai, the Tsar’s minister, made a dumpling of the document that Da Lam Chinsushigt Chin Van Tserenchimed had come to bring him, and threw it in his face. And he insulted him too. Between the Chinese and the Russians, we are really caught in a vice.

– Can’t we play them off against each other?

– Probably not. In Khiakta, China has prepared a treaty that allows them to take over a whole piece of our territory. Manlai van Damdinsüren refused to sign. “There’s no way we’re going to sell our ancestors’ land, the land where they were born and raised, to a foreign country”. He wasn’t going to sully his name by signing the damn paper, that’s what he told them. He left, sword in hand. A man like few others, this Manlai van!

That was indeed the rumour at the time about what was going on at the highest level of the state”.

Later, another scene in the same novel takes us back to this treaty. Here again we are limited in the information we have, but this time, through a rather virulent exchange between several speakers, Lodoidamba reveals the diversity of points of view. The debate takes place in the *ger* of a very wealthy man from Ikh Khüree. Younden, this is his name has invited Itgelt and Erdene who have come to the capital with a caravan of goods for dinner. Also present are a nobleman, the *beis* Dovchin (and his wife), who occupies the post of Minister of Internal Affairs in the novel, Chuluun, the Minister of the Armed Forces, and an officer of the Bogd’s army, Darzhaa Baatar. It should be noted that unlike the historical figures that Rinchen had included in the story when recounting the proclamation of independence, these are likely to be purely fictional characters in this case:

This officer had shined in the wars against the Black Army, and this valour had earned him the rank of *gün*. He was now a unit leader in the “Silk Army”, the close guard of the great Bogd. Darzhaa Baatar, who never missed an opportunity to talk about his military campaigns, began almost every sentence with “By grace of Bogd”.

– By grace of Bogd, we were slashing through the ranks of the blacks with our swords. The blades sparkled, whirling over the heads. And I shot and shot, meeting no less than six Blacks, slaughtering them all and seizing their weapons – war capture which I loaded onto my horse before returning to ours... – If this Three-Power Treaty had not been signed, for sure, by the grace of Bogd, we would have crossed the whole of Inner Mongolia and even passed the Great Wall.

Dovchin gave a pinched little smile:

– What’s the point of all this nonsense? If this treaty had not been signed, the Tsar would have stopped supplying us with weapons. The country would have gone to the dogs.

Chuluun intervened:

– No, no! At least that is not the opinion of the great majority of our officers. Think about it: if all the aimag of Mongolia were to unite and found a sovereign state... We

have no lack of strength or resources. We have no lack of strength or resources. We are perfectly capable of facing this Black army and protecting our territory. But we are not! We had to abandon all these ligues and banners of Inner Mongolia to the foreigners. All these territories reduced to servitude!

– Exactly! Those who signed the damn treaty sold the sacred lands of our ancestors! And for what? For titles. But by doing so, they have sullied their names for generations, said Darzhaa Baatar bitterly.

– You understand absolutely nothing about the subtleties of politics. Prudence commanded the Most High to sign this treaty. Who are you to dare to argue with the Bogd’s decision said Dovchin in a tone of disdain.

Darzhaa Baatar pointed a threatening finger at him:

– It’s people like you who are dumbing down the Most High with your short-sightedness, you who would not hesitate to sell the motherland to get your small-time fat.

– Darzhaa, don’t you think you’re making a bit too much of your glory? “What the soldier’s spear cannot defeat, the sage’s pen will”, Dovchin professed sententiously, quoting the verses of a bard from the Chakhar that he had heard sung many years before.

But Darzhaa, whose head was swollen with alcohol, began to shout and wave his fist:

– You filthy sold out!”

The themes of betrayal, opportunism and greed are recurrent in this literature. But beyond fiction, these are also the factors that are highlighted by historians to explain the failures of the revolt movements and the late appearance of what can be called “nationalism”, in the political sense of the term. We have also seen this previously in *Üüriin Tuya* and the fieldwork suggests that this representation of Mongolian history is very generally shared and deeply internalised. The spectre of disunity, as we have seen with Billé, can generate authoritarian tendencies in response, which can prove very oppressive for minority groups (we talked about women, homosexuals).

Returning to the beginning of the twentieth century and our novel, we note that neither Itgelt nor Erdene, although present, intervene in this chapter. On the way home they comment on the debate they have attended. Very slowly, Erdene, the protagonist, begins to be penetrated by new ideas which his new friend, Pyotr, an exiled Bolshevik, gradually introduces to him. Let us read the conclusion of the chapter:

“But on the question of the Treaty, their opinions differed: Itgelt thought that in any event, this agreement would take them away from China and bring them closer to Russia, which was no bad thing. But Erdene was not convinced: “Your state is nothing but a puppet state. And now all the Russian emperor has to do is share it with the Chinese”; Itgelt’s remark had reminded him of Pyotr’s words. And it seemed to him that this famous treaty concealed political ambitions that augured very ill for the integrity of Mongolia”.

4. The fight for power between lay and clerical feudals and Chen Yi's sixty-four points

Later in *Tungalag Tamir*, we find the same characters, this time dealing with the events that ended with the abrogation of autonomy. Once again, differences of opinion are brought to the fore through a lively conversation between Ayoush the lama, who is said not to refrain from trading, Chuluun and Dovchin Beis (the latter accompanied by Erdene, who has left the Itgelt camp before fleeing to Khüree, being sought by the authorities for reasons that do not interest us at the moment).³³¹

“Joined on the way by Chuluun the glorious soldier, and Ayoush the lama, they finished the road together. Ayoush was one of those lamas involved in business. He was a big trader and had just been ennobled to the rank of beis, which he took great pride in. Moreover, thanks to the good care of Danigai, who had the ear of the sovereign, and by paying several hundred lan, he had attracted the favours of the Bogd and thus had been designated the one that fate had chosen for him. To top it all off, he also inducted Badamdorzh Shanzav as Finance Minister. As he boasted, Chuluun could not put up with it any longer:

– You lamas are getting too confident. You'd better stay in your place. You have no business meddling in the affairs of state, he scolded.

Outraged, Ayoush cleared his throat:

– The fate of the Khalkh depends on the auspices of the Yellow Faith. Without us lamas, politics is blind.

– Like a *ger*, the state rests on two pillars. On the one hand the magistracy: *van*, *beil*, *beis*, *gün*, on the other the reincarnated emanations: *khutagt khuvilgaan*, *khamba*, *tsorzh*, in other words the representatives of the faith. Both are needed to hold up the building, so we must carry it together, Dovchin professed pedantically.

But Chuluun retorted:

– The lamas should be busy praying and leave it at that. If the state has two pillars as you say, the first is the administration, the second the army. There is no other!

Who knows how far this tussle would have taken them if they had not reached the Tsogchin temple at that time?”

The narrative choices made by Lodoidamba allow the reader to gradually penetrate the story, to discover and understand the issues at stake at the same time as the characters understand them. In this sense, he has perhaps more than Rinchen respected the party's instruction that historical and partisan literature should be accessible to the people. We discussed earlier with Pomian the issues raised by the historical novel in terms of the complex relationship between literature and fiction. As we will see in the following scene,

³³¹ One thing should be noted here, in connection with what we noted earlier about the interweaving of fiction and history which can lean more or less to one side or the other depending on the author, it is possible that here Lodoidamba has confused or switched two of his characters, Chuluun appearing here to have inherited the features and biography of Darzhaa Baatar.

the confrontation between the lamas and the nobles is illustrated in a way that tends towards the burlesque, while at the same time addressing a very serious theme.

In front of the temple, it was a long parade of peacock feathers that the wind made slightly undulate: dressed in the costume that befits their rank, nobles and high officials crowded at the entrance. Doormen built like rocks blocked the entrance.

– Why aren't we moving?

– What are they doing not allowing us to pass?

Protests were coming from all sides.

– No one gets in! Order of the Shanzav!

The temple guards began to turn them away. Dovchin emerged from the crowd and roared:

– Do you know who you are talking to? You have in front of you one of the two pillars of the new regime.

Shaking his head with presumptuousness, he took a few steps forward, letting his long sleeves hang down in a swinging motion. But the guards would not hear of it. Whips here and sticks there, they began to beat him mercilessly. The tiger's tails scratched the air and the spiked triques tickled the leather of all these nobles and magistrates. Some officials tried to make them see reason, others used their rank, and all swore at them:

– Who do you think you are? You lousy-assed bandits! You'll see what it costs to attack the judiciary.

But nothing could be done. As noble and influential as they were, they eventually retreated to their horses in a scattered order. A tiger's tail slammed into Dovchin's back and he fell backwards, then a wet willow branch stung his face. He ran belly down towards his horse, which he reached willy-nilly, and ran off without asking for help".

Like the *taizh* Pürev, the *beis* Dovchin is a particularly ridiculous character in this story, arrogant but cowardly. Not surprisingly, both are noble and represent the class enemy who must be as detestable as possible.

At this point in the narrative, the setting gives way to a brief summary of the situation by an omniscient narrator, who explains the reasons for this confrontation between clerics and laity:

“At a time when the battle between the “yellow” and the “black” feudalists was raging, by this action the Da Lam Badamdorzh shanzav, the spiritual patron of the Great Shavi of Khüree - a veritable state within a state - hoped to achieve a decisive victory over the temporal authorities. The indignant officials sought redress, but the lama minister argued that he had acted on the Bogd's decree and fined them a thousand candles each. As if this was not sufficient and thanks to the support of the Bogd, the same Badamdorzh Shanzav was able to take over all the reins of power, now as Prime Minister. The “yellow feudalists” now had a free hand at the head of the state.

But it was at the same time that the fall of the Russian Empire and the October Revolution gave rise to the glimmer of hope that began to spread in Mongolia. Its name was freedom.

Frightened by the spectre of the great proletarian revolution on the one hand, electrified by their hatred of the Yellows on the other, the nobles and civil dignitaries ventured to grasp the knife by the blade by selling themselves to the Chinese. They asked for an audience with their ambassador, Chen Yi, to offer to come under their rule. The centuries-old courageous struggle of an entire people was being trampled underfoot, their hard-won autonomy sacrificed for honours and titles. A bitter song soon circulated in the streets of Khüree. It said:

Sold, sold! Sold our Bogd!

Sold, sold! Sold our country!

With your *deel* embroidered with gold and silver dragons,

Are you happy to have sold us?

The ruling capitalist government in China, which had been waiting for long for the moment to absorb definitively what had been the Mongol Empire, eagerly accepted”.

Unlike in Rinchin, here the events follow one another with a rapidity that allows us to quickly return to the interpersonal intrigues of the protagonists, the story is condensed into a few paragraphs: Chen Yi’s sixty-four point agreement, Xu Shuzeng’s power grab, the rise to power of Badamdorzh the Shanzav of the Great Shavi of Ikh Khüree.

In the passage quoted, it will have been noted that reference was made to the “spectre of the proletarian revolution”,³³² the other factor – the first being this rivalry just illustrated between “black” and “yellow” feudalists – which played in favour of this “betrayal”³³³ of the Mongolian nobility. We have to go back a little in the novel to hear the first echoes of this. In *Tungalag Tamir*, the events that directly concern Russia are introduced through Pyotr and Pavlov, who represent the ideals of the Reds and the Whites respectively. The biographies of these two characters allow Lodoidamba to allude to the Russo-Japanese War or the failed coup against the Tsar in 1905, opening a window on events outside the chronological framework of the story. But to remain in the present of enunciation, it is through them that we are made aware of the outbreak of war between Russia and Germany in chapter fourteen of the first book, of the fall of the Tsarist regime a little before the events we have just commented on. A word perhaps about the first of these events: interestingly, there is never any mention of the other forces involved, the author has chosen to tell us about the world war as a very distant event, which we see only through the eyes of our Mongolian characters, who are far removed from the geopolitical realities which at the time shook Europe. Paradoxically – but paradoxically in appearance only – this choice reinforces the realistic character of the story. Indeed, let us remind once again of what Pomian wrote about historical fiction, which endeavours to describe the reality of the past

³³² The Mongolian text does not contain the word “spectre” or an equivalent, it speaks of fear, anxiety, which we have interpreted in this formulation in the French translation.

³³³ I emphasise that the term is used here because it corresponds to the discourse of the period under consideration. Whether it is right to speak of betrayal is not the point.

by striving to match the psychology, mentalities and outlook of the characters with the situations they face. This is how chapter seven of the second book begins:

“It was one of those winter days when the damp, freezing fog grips you as soon as you approach the river. Two riders were galloping along the dusty road across the frozen Tamir. Their horses were white with frost. Itgelt rode ahead, Galsan following. As soon as he had heard that morning that Pavlov had returned, Itgelt had jumped in the saddle to see him. It was still winter. He couldn’t have arrived so soon. Something must have happened.

Getting lost in conjecture, Itgelt was eager to know more. That summer, the profits had been so juicy that they had talked about taking over new pastures in the Tunkinsky together. Was this what Pavlov wanted to talk about? Was he planning to speed up its implementation? During the summer months he had been inexhaustible about the situation in Russia. The emperor had been deposed, a new government had been formed and the wind was blowing in the right direction for the savvy speculators of them. The expected victory in the war against Germany had caused the price of cattle to skyrocket... All this smacked of fresh money”.

In *Tungalag Tamir*, the outbreak of the First World War has a more or less direct impact on the lives of several of the characters. Can it be said that it changes the course of the novel? In any case, it gives it a new twist. For Bat, Erdene’s son, and for Khongor, Itgelt’s one, it marks the beginning of a new life, the latter having decided that in times of trouble it was best to entrust the two boys to a lama in the lamasery of Zaya bandi, to study religious education and prepare themselves to embrace this path. We will see in a later chapter what this step means in Bat’s journey in particular. For Pyotr the Bolshevik the outbreak of hostilities has direct political implications as he decides to return home. It is interesting to read his reaction to the news as he comments on the situation for Erdene, who gradually opens his eyes to what is happening at the time:

“As soon as he had heard the news, [Pyotr] had turned gloomy. Keeping the brows knited, he had suddenly become taciturn, visibly concerned. As he and Erdene set off to hitch the horses, he commented:

- Erdene, this war will once again bring more misery and suffering to the common people. It has been declared only to allow the wealthy of the world to become even richer. But from the tears of those that it is going to separate will come the fire of resentment, a fire in whose flames these war-makers will eventually burn their wings”.

The next day Pyotr announces to Erdene his decision to return to Russia.

The revolution breaks out a little later. Here too, the reader learns about it from Pavlov, at the same time as Itgelt:

“– Russian ahoy, do you have something to drink? he laughed in his small, thin voice. Pavlov grinned. Obviously, he was not in the mood. He was usually so jovial when they got together, but this time his features were tense with who knows what bitterness.

Itgelt noticed immediately. Pavlov leaned against the doorframe, gloomy, frowning the brows.

– Moe pochtenye, Itgelt greeted cheerfully.

Pavlov did not reply. He walked straight to him, hugged him vigorously and kissed him.

– My good Itgelt. Russia is screwd up, a real disaster!

Itgelt opened his eyes in amazement.

– Don't play the bird of ill omen... he said, not understanding what he meant.

– No, it's the truth. Just believe me. Pavlov's voice was shaking.

– What do you mean? Defeated by Germany?

– Worse than that... But let's go in and I'll tell you.

A pungent smell of dampness wafted through the poorly heated house. Furniture and dishes were lying on the floor.

– The Reds rose up. Those beggars overthrew the government and looted our house, our possessions. I took everything of value and fled with these two, he moaned, pointing to his wife and daughter.

The woman was crying her eyes out:

– They are pagans, people without faith, without God!

Itgelt stood there for a moment, but then said:

– Terrible indeed... But why didn't you send in the artillery and shoot them?

– Pfff! Most of the army lined up behind them, Pavlov angrily replied”.

Historical fiction makes it possible to bring the great moments that marked their era back at a human level, I mean at the level of the individual, so as to show how they impacted their personal and sometimes sentimental lives, their day to day existence. As we have seen, this does not prevent the narrative from taking some more hindsight so as to point out the consequences for state policy. The balance between these two strategies varies from one author to the other.

5. A deep feeling of humiliation as the trigger of the revolutionary wave

To avoid finding themselves in the situation of Pavlov and of all those in Russia who could not rejoice in the victory of the Bolsheviks, the Mongolian nobles decided to come back under the tutelage of Beijing as we have seen. What the literature of the time allows us to say, given its mission to teach the “correct” reading of history, is that this gesture was to be considered as a betrayal. And this betrayay was all the more serious because the abrogation of autonomy gave rise to a ceremony experienced as a humiliation of the entire Mongolian people in the person of its Bogd. Let us remember what the historian said about it:

“In February 1920 the actual ceremony of the handing over of authority to the Chinese took place in [Khüree] under humiliating circumstances. The twenty-two items of the ceremonial included the kowtowing of all officials to Hsu and the personal reverence

of the [Khutagt] to the Chinese flag. Immediately afterwards the five Mongol ministries were dismantled and their archives transferred to the Chinese authorities, and the Mongol army was demobilized, with a few minor exceptions such as the fifty soldiers retained at Khiakta. Weapons and equipment were confiscated by the Chinese”.³³⁴

We can read it in *Tungalag Tamir*:

“A few days later, the autonomous government fell. One of the most demeaning celebrations of the fall saw the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt prostrate himself before the portrait of Yuan-Shikai: it was the holy reincarnation of Ochir Dari humiliating himself before the Chinese president.

Reaping all the dividends of the annexation, the Badamdorzh Shanzav grew rich beyond counting.

Mongolia was about to sink into the dark mists of subjugation and humiliation, and the bloody aftermath that lay ahead would strike the people right in the heart.

One day, Erdene bumped into Dorzh in the street, completely despondent:

-My God, Donoi, what infamy!³³⁵ Our king humiliating himself in front of that Chinese portrait! And we have to accept this? If only we had fought! Darzhaa Baatar hammered it home: “No surrender!” He urged the Most High to continue the fight. But a decree would have been issued. Tomorrow morning, we surrender. - So we're going to let ourselves be enslaved again? - Enslaved by slaves, yes! But Mongolia is destined for a great destiny. Times are hard, but happy days will come. Dorzh did his utmost to remain hopeful, but he had no idea how or when they would reach that radiant horizon. The next day, Bogd's army surrendered. Weapons that just a few days ago they still held in their firm grip and with which they had won so many victories. But the soldiers remained dignified, proud and brave in their torn Mongolian deels. It was a sad sight, and Erdene felt anger and hatred welling up inside him. Not only he, but all the Mongols, in their hearts wounded by humiliation, felt the same fire of anger and hatred ignite”.

The rest of the story will tell us how the Mongols will then turn to revolution. In the following chapter we will focus on the role endorsed by the characters and on their staging.

³³⁴ Bawden, 1968, p. 205.

³³⁵ Erdene lives in Khüree under a false identity, being researched as a plunderer for having beat Itgelt.

Chapter five: Heroes, exemplars, mediators

Representations of the “new man”, the architect of Mongolia’s future

Divided here for the purposes of analysis, the role of the individual and that of society in the production of history cannot in fact be separated. Individuals and groups interact on an ongoing basis, with each step taken by one having an impact on the other, implying adaptation and transformation on the part of the other.

Literature often reveals this to us, all the more so when highlighting this process is one of the priority missions imposed on authors by the regime’s propaganda organs. Yet, despite the vigilance of the censors, each author’s own sensibility and writing style remained relatively free as long as it complied with the requirements of “socialist realism”. The writings of Rinchen and Lodoidamba for example - to stay with our main sources - differ in the way they approach this articulation. I propose to discuss it in this section.

Having looked at the way in which these novels stage the history of Mongolia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in the first half of the twentieth, let us now turn our attention to the “artisans” of this history, to the way in which individuals are portrayed in the novels. As we are dealing with historical novels, we will once again be called upon to question the way in which historical figures who did exist are represented: Sükhbaatar, Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav, Damdinsüren, to take just a few examples. A narrative that implicitly raises the question of “myth”, in the sense that anthropologists debate it today.³³⁶ But the hero of the novel of the period known as “socialist realism” was not, strictly speaking, the illustrious character who had to be magnified through fiction. That’s true too, but the party in power was clear in its instructions to authors: their mission was to portray the *common* man, the *simple* farmer, the *simple* soldier, the *simple* worker, with an emphasis on the “simple”. S. Luvzanvandan, who in his 1985 article recalled:

“The figure of the new man is a fundamental marker of socialist realism. In fact, particularly in the 1930s, the narration of the historical role played by the masses, by the common man, became a basic element of socialist realism.”³³⁷

“Шинэ хүний дүр бол социалист реализмын үндсэн шинж билээ. Тиймээс чухамхүү 1930-аад оны үед идэвхтэй олон түмэн, эгэл жирийн хүний түүхэн ролийг үзүүлсээр социалист реализмын гол шинж төлөвшсөн байна”.

³³⁶ This is part of a current of thought that proposes a very broad definition of “myth” based on discourse analysis and Saussurian linguistics, with particular reference to the essay by the French philosopher Roland Barthes, published by Threshold in 1957, which includes a text entitled “Myth Today” in which the author proposes an analysis of the phenomenon. Barthes Roland, *Mythologies* followed by *Le mythe aujourd’hui*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1957.

³³⁷ С. Лувсанвандан “Монголын уран зохиолд социалист реализмын арга бүрэлдэн хөгжсөн түүхэн туршлага”, 1985, *op. cit.*, p.5.

This quotation is just one example of many that could have been given to show the sustained attention that the literary analysis of the time paid to the **character** (*dür*).

The underlying idea was explicit, and the party made no secret of it. The mission of authors of fiction was to provide “the people” with models on which to model their behaviour, men who resembled them, heroes with whom the reader could identify. In this way, the historical and social role that these heroes assumed in the novels was to be seen as the goal to be achieved by everyone.

We will have to focus here on both the former, *i.e.* the **historical figures** exploited by fiction, and the purely **fictional characters**, which is all the more inevitable as their interactions will also prove essential to the discussion. There is an abundance of literature on the subject, and in this section I will be relying mainly on three sources: “The Cult of International **Heroes** in Post-Soviet Bashkortostan” by the Hungarian ethnologist Boglárka Mácsai (2009), “**Exemplars** and rules, Aspects of the discourse of morality in Mongolia” by the British anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, and French anthropologist René Girard’s theory of triangular desire (*désir triangulaire*) for its focus on the question of models and **mimeticism**.

“The Cult of International Heroes in Post-Soviet Bashkortostan”

Boglárka Mácsai’s article examines the question of hero(s) through the prism of identity dynamics and the construction of memory in the service of a social project. Her work is based on fieldwork in the Bashkortostan region (between the Volga and the Ural Mountains) in 2008. Her starting point was a visit to several museums, all designed along the same lines and housed in old schools, where were retraced the history of the schools and their pupils and teachers, many of whom died fighting in wars. The remembrance of these war heroes is the focus:

“The paper discusses the symbolic forms of the incessantly renewed alliances, closely bound up with the question of local, ethnic, national and state identity. The key symbols of this alliance are remembrances of three wars and their heroes.”³³⁸

Her work focuses on the period after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and enabled her to observe the transformations undergone by the objects of memory that symbolized the friendship of the Russian and Bashkir peoples. Boglárka Mácsai’s article therefore raises questions that are essential for our purposes: the use of symbols for identity political purposes, their malleability and their capacity to adapt to change. Notice that the layout of the museums and the items on display are all reminiscent of the socialist period:

³³⁸ Mácsai Boglárka, *The Cult of International Heroes in Post-Soviet Bashkortostan*, in Vargyas Gábor, *Passageways. From Hungarian Ethnography to European Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology*. Budapest, L’Harmattan – Department of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, The University of Pécs, 2009, p. 360. The article is of particular interest to me because its subject echoes questions that I had already addressed during my ethnology thesis, notably in an article that also dealt with the remembrance of heroes who died, not “in war” but “for France”, where the question of the “materiality” of this remembrance was raised. Cf. “Épaves et cénotaphe, le face à face”.

“In the school corridors posters and paintings invite the visitors to remember, and in the school courtyards there are monuments, each of which – similarly to the exhibition spaces – is closely connected to *Soviet socialist symbolism*”.³³⁹

This reference to Soviet art necessarily brings us back to our subject, and the fact that the museums are housed in schools is anything but insignificant for our purposes. Mácsai also points to the tenuous link that seems to be emerging between education, knowledge, patriotism, war and heroism. This extract from *Tungalag Tamir*, is very characteristic of the spirit that permeates all the literature we consider in our research.

“Right now, there is one thing more important than guns and sabres. It is education”.³⁴⁰

In Mácsai’s article, the social and instructive dimension of the “mission” with which the image of these patriots is charged is also very present:

“In the space of the school and the museum the heroes appear as **examples**, with their heroism shown as **the behaviour to be attained**. It is not accidental that these museums and war monuments are connected to the institution of the school, for as a secondary venue of socialization the school substantially influences the children’s **identity and behavioural patterns**”.³⁴¹

I highlight these passages because they are reminiscent of the mission entrusted to authors of historical fiction by the Communist party in power in Mongolia. In our field, the mission is twofold: the patriot is both (1) the hero of the novel, whose historical and social role must be able to serve as a model for the reader, on which to model his ideals, and it is also (2) the author himself who, by taking on the role that the party constructs for him, sets himself up as a model of patriotism. But let Mácsai continue:

“Heroism is thus the subject of a process of **transmission**, a value that is preserved by acquisition and practice. At the head of the chain of transmission are the soldier who have testified to the possession of this heroism with their deeds and at its tail are the oncoming generations who are the heirs to these values and their future preservers (cf. Shils, 1987: 32.). In this way, the practice of heroism becomes part of the tradition passed down from generation to generation, with military service and participation in war as its fixed form”.³⁴²

³³⁹ Ibidem.

³⁴⁰ The end of the sentence is also eloquent. He adds: “I intend to open a school soon to train future teachers whose job will be to pass on knowledge to the children of the people”. To set the scene, at the very beginning of the third book, Bat and Zhargal are two teenagers who, through the ups and downs of life, find themselves left to their own devices and forced to live off begging in Khüree before being “adopted” by the Red Army troops who have just liberated the town. Entering the homes of elderly people to beg for some milk, they find themselves in the presence of General Sükhbaatar, and Zhargal has just begged him to take them into his army.

³⁴¹ Mácsai, op.cit, p. 364.

³⁴² Ibid. p. 365.

In this last passage, I particularly note the idea of transmission. Here the hero and what he symbolises becomes the mediator who weaves the link between the past and the future. Through this link, the malleability of which Mácsai's article aims to reveal, it is possible to question the fate of novel heroes and their authors, seen as symbols and models once the regime that had "commissioned" them, if I may put it that way, has been replaced by another model carrying a significantly different ideology.

"Exemplars and rules, Aspects of the discourses of moralities in Mongolia"

Caroline Humphrey's article, "Exemplars and rules, Aspects of the discourses of moralities in Mongolia", will enable us to continue thinking along these lines. In this 1997 work, the British anthropologist also looked at the ways in which values are transmitted in Mongolian culture and society, observing that the process operates, perhaps more on the basis of "models" or "exemplars" than norms, as would be more the case in Western culture (or so she suggests).

"Our paper is more concerned with locating the moral discourse of the Mongols than describing its content", she warns. Her thesis is as follows:

"The concern here is with cultivation of the self as a moral subject in relation to **individually chosen ideals**".³⁴³

If we want to take a moment to consider this proposition in relation to our subject, and if Caroline Humphrey's argument proves to be true, we can then wonder about the effectiveness of models "ordered" by the party according to criteria it defined. The question to be asked would be: how (for the Mongolian authorities of the time) could they ensure that those targeted by their propaganda campaign would individually choose these models that were opposed to them, in preference to others. Caroline Humphrey's analysis of the particular **guide/disciple** relationship, which many anthropologists have highlighted as a structuring factor in Mongolian society, provides food for thought. Once again, applied to our reflection, the question can be broken down into two axes, or even three here: (1) the guide/disciple relationship as represented in the novels (i.e. between the characters, Erenchin/Bat (*Tungalag Tamir*), Sükhbaatar/Gombo (*Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*), to take just two examples that I will develop later); (2) this same relationship when it is established between the reader and the novel's hero proposed as a model (we will ask ourselves which are the most suitable to be "chosen" by the reader; (3) and finally, when it is established between the author and the reader, the former being supposed to belong to an *avant-garde* that should lead the national movement towards the construction of a new society and a new man.

According to Caroline Humphrey, Mongolian morality is viewed in a radically different way to the way it is thought of in Europe. She explains:

³⁴³ Humphrey Caroline, "Exemplars and rules: aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia", in Signe Howell (ed.) *The Ethnography of Moralities*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 25.

“The point to be appreciated here is that in Mongolia, unlike in Europe, in practice almost no space is given to general ethical precepts as emanations of God or society. Rather, such precepts tend to be authored, and they then appear in relationships as tied to the personalities of both the mentor and the follower”.³⁴⁴

In order to understand the originality of a “morality of exemplar” it is useful to specify what it is opposed to, according to the theoretical proposal of the British ethnologist, in other words the conception of moral regulations in **Western culture**.³⁴⁵

In Western culture: “1- [Moral principles] are the same for everyone, or for everyone of a designated category ; they suppose the sameness to the subject i.e. human equality, or they are designed to promote such equality.

2- Rules and codes must be in principle consequential and consistent such that if you obey one rule you do not thereby disobey some other rule in the code.

3- The discourse of rules aims at maximum clarity, eliminating ambiguity, such that the subject knows immediately what is a right action and what is wrong”.³⁴⁶

In contrast, she draws three conclusions about the “ethics of exemplars”:

“a- It constructs a particular kind of individuality or culturally specific concept of the person which relates in a very interesting way to assumptions of individual difference and social hierarchy.

b- It contributes to the crystallization of a variety of different ways of life which acknowledges rather than denies social conflicts.

c- It requires that the subject do some work that is ponder the meaning of the exemplar for him or herself and on this sense exemplars as moral discourse are open ended and unfinished”.³⁴⁷

Caroline Humphrey offers a positive, one might say seductive, interpretation of the relationship between mentor and disciple. In her view, knowledge is not transmitted according to imposed, inculcated norms, but via a discursive interaction through which the individual charts his or her own course. As it is supposed to be transmitted according to her hypothesis, this morality of exemplars respects “free will” as it would be termed in European culture. It would be “internalised and subjective”:

“The development of the personality that is of a source of awareness, knowledge, reason and moral judgement constitutes a self”.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

³⁴⁵ i.e. In the Catholic catechism and in the French and American Constitutions in particular. Ibid, p.34.

³⁴⁶

³⁴⁷ Ibidem. We will soon be able to discuss this interpretation, which I would be tempted to describe as “irenic”, of the mimetic relationship between the “mentor” and his “follower” by drawing on the concept of mimetic rivalry that underlies the theory of triangular desire by the anthropologist René Girard.

³⁴⁸ Ibid; p. 36.

It is not “learned” but appropriated:

“It is as though all sayings should have an intentional meaning that is a meaning beyond their overt sense. [...] Although the surgaal or uliger appears from the teacher, it is the disciple, by actively paying attention, who provides the agency that transforms the words/acts from merely having happened to something that is an exemplar.”³⁴⁹

We shall see that the *bagsh/shavi* relationships depicted in our novels tend, in some cases, to validate the ethnologist’s interpretation. However, this perspective, which I am tempted to describe as “irenic”, would be worth confronting with René Girard’s much darker vision of the mimetic relationship. The theory of “triangular desire” forged by the French anthropologist and philosopher was designed to be universal in scope, so ideally it should also apply to the Mongolian case, so I think it’s worth summarising his thinking.

Mimetic rivalry and the model of triangular desire

Girard’s theory is based on the study of a body of novels in which a model of complex relationships between two individuals linked by the same object, an object of desire, emerges. He later extended it to take it out of this literary framework and exploit it in an anthropological framework, applying it to human relationships in general.

Girard’s “**mediator**” is similar to what Caroline Humphrey calls an “**exemplar**”: a model that the individual admires and strives to imitate. The object comes into play in this relationship as something the mediator “possesses”, to which his admirer is irresistibly drawn and want to possess in order to resemble his model. The object of desire can take the form of a concrete reality, such as a woman, or an abstract one, such as power, prestige, knowledge, etc.³⁵⁰ Girard envisages two scenarios: (1) in the first one, an “irenic” interpretation such as that proposed by Caroline Humphrey in a Mongolian context remains possible; (2) in the second one, the desire to possess leads the disciple to hate his model while continuing to admire him. According to René Girard, this is the source of the violence in human relations. Lets quote the author:

“Novels therefore fall into two basic categories. We will speak of **external mediation** when the distance is sufficient for the two spheres of possibility, each of which is occupied by the mediator and the subject, not to be in contact. We will speak of **internal mediation** when this same distance is small enough for the two spheres to penetrate more or less deeply into each other”.³⁵¹

These two variants of mediation, in Girard’s theory, lead us to distinguish two categories of model. In one, admiration predominates, but in the other, rivalry takes over, accentuated by the disdain of the model who refuses his admirer, giving way to hatred. He

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 37. Without questioning Humphrey’s distinction between this type of transmission of values and knowledge and the mode of instruction that prevails in Western culture, I can’t help but think of Socratic maieutics, and the idea of the wise man “midwife” ‘midwife’ of his disciple’s knowledge.

³⁵⁰ In this theory, the important thing is not the object, which is ultimately removed, leaving only the desire to possess, which can be fixed on anything.

³⁵¹ Girard, op. Cit. Pdf version, p. 10.

adds: « The hero of external mediation proclaims the true nature of his desire. He openly venerates his model and declares himself his disciple”.³⁵² The hero of “internal mediation”, on the other hand, “far from glorying, this time, in his project of imitation, carefully conceals it.” Let’s read what Girard writes:

“The impulse towards the object is basically an impulse towards the mediator; in internal mediation, **this impulse is broken by the mediator** himself, since the mediator desires, or perhaps possesses, the object. The disciple, fascinated by his model, inevitably sees in the **mechanical obstacle** that the latter puts in his way proof of a **perverse will** towards him. Far from declaring himself a faithful vassal, this disciple thinks only of repudiating the bonds of mediation. Yet these bonds are stronger than ever, because the mediator’s apparent hostility, far from diminishing his prestige, can only increase it. The subject is convinced that his model considers himself too superior to accept him as a disciple. The subject therefore feels for this model a heart-rending feeling formed by the union of these two opposites, the most submissive veneration and the most intense resentment. **This is the feeling we call hatred.**

Only the being who prevents us from satisfying a desire that he himself has suggested is truly the object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself because of the secret admiration that his hatred conceals. In order to hide this distraught admiration from others, and from himself, he only wants to see his mediator as an obstacle. The secondary role of this mediator is thus brought to the fore and conceals the primary role of the model religiously imitated”.³⁵³

On the face of it, our novels, written in part on party orders and intended to carry the propaganda of the time, should only lead us to consider the first scenario. But if, like Caroline Humphrey, we want to draw on these sources to discuss a “morality of exemplars” that would structure social relations in Mongolian society - a different way of looking at morality from that which prevails in the West - it will not be uninteresting to compare the British ethnologist’s reading of the relationship to the model with Girard’s much more cynical and pessimistic one. Girard begins by deciphering from a literary point of view the way in which the works he considers exploit the mimetic relationship, in order to draw conclusions applicable to human societies. In the same way, we shall use these realist novels - which can therefore be assimilated to ethnographic material, albeit with the necessary precautions - to try to understand how mimetic relationships affect Mongolian society and to ask ourselves whether we can identify any significant differences from the West.

³⁵² Ibid, p. 11. Girard takes as a typical example of this mediation Cervantes’ Don Quixote who, he tells us, “renounced in favour of Amadis the fundamental prerogative of the individual: he no longer chooses the objects of his desire, it is Amadis who must choose for him”.

³⁵³ Ibid. p. 12.

Historical mythology or the cult of the national hero

Our sources will lead us to distinguish three types of models or heroes, three figures of patriotism, namely historical figures portrayed and promoted through fiction; the protagonists of novels or even secondary characters charged with representing the “simple” people; and finally the authors themselves who, by conveying the message of the regime through their writings, were seen as models for their contemporaries to follow.

The cult of the hero and its commemoration can crystallise on anonymous people,³⁵⁴ as in Mácsai’s article, or on historical figures, but the difference is not so profound, because in both cases they are treated as symbols, the human being stepping aside before the “myth”³⁵⁵ that springs from him. In the examples we will analyze, whether they were, in the words of Alain Bertho quoted earlier, “*des singularités quelconques*”, or national heroes elevated to the status of myth, it was for their propensity to embody, through fiction, national identity and the exemplarity of the (socialist) “patriot” that these “paper heroes” were created and glorified.

In using the term “myth” here, I rely on the very broad definition given by Roland Barthes in *Le Mythe aujourd’hui* (Myth Today),³⁵⁶ a short essay that attracted the attention of the scientific community at the time, and which follows on from an anthology of “contemporary myths” ranging from “the writer on holiday” to “saponides and detergents” and “the iconography of Abbé Pierre” to give an idea of the disparate nature of the “contemporary myths” under consideration. For the philosopher, myth is “a word”, as he states in a definition that is lapidary to say the least, specifying that by this he means that it is a “communicational system, a message”. His analysis borrows from both semiology and the theory of communication, as well as sociology, and consists of studying how the “sign” or “word” can be deciphered, or to put it another way, studying how any “object of the world” “can pass from a closed, mute existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society”. In my opinion, Roland Barthes’ very general theory applies very well to what the historian Pierre Nora and all those who have worked with him have conceptualised under the name “Lieux de mémoire” (place of memory), to which Mácsai refers in her article.

“Lieux de mémoire”, she reminds us, must, according to the three criteria highlighted by Nora, be “functional”, “symbolic” and “material”. The international heroes of Bashkortostan meet all three criteria: they are **functional** in that they “represent the value of heroism and set it as a behavioural pattern to be adopted by subsequent generations”, **symbolic** as “a hero becomes the symbol of all the values that he conveys to the community” and finally **material** through the life-stories and personal recollections put up on the wall-boards”. Let’s see whether national heroes as constructed by socialist literature also meet these criteria.

³⁵⁴ By this I mean that their names have not left their mark on history, and the way they are remembered in these museums, as the author insists, is through the individualisation of these fallen soldiers, via biographies combining text and images.

³⁵⁵ I will come back soon on the use of this word.

³⁵⁶ Barthes R, *op.cit*, 1957.

1. The invention of the national hero

One thing that an untrained Western eye, such as mine, cannot fail to notice after reading even two or three of the novels in our corpus is the recurrence of the character of Sūkhbaatar. It was after reading *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga* that I really began to take an interest in this character, whom I had already met in *Tungalag Tamir* and who, in both cases, was clearly to his advantage. Damdinsüren, Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav and Choibalsan, though curiously to a much lesser extent, also often feature prominently. One only have to open the first chapter of S. Luvsanvandan's *History of Contemporary Mongolian Literature* to see that this recurrence is no coincidence. On the third page of the book we read:

“Thus, the friendship between the Soviet and Mongolian peoples and the people who laid the foundations for it, the great Lenin and the valiant Sūkhbaatar, occupy a prominent place among the themes of our Mongolian literature”.³⁵⁷

In his book *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes*, Christopher Kaplonski examines the relationship between politics, history and identity through the glorification of the ‘hero’ and in particular the transformations undergone after the democratic transition of 1990, through the image of three emblematic figures of Mongolian national identity. Sūkhbaatar is given half a chapter, as is Zanabazar, while Chinggis Khaan unsurprisingly has his own chapter. Although he counts literature as one of the channels through which Sūkhbaatar's memory was formed, Kaplonski makes no mention of novels. He may have not be acquainted with them, and some observations could have provided further support for his analysis.

Out of the ordinary beings...

In the socialist novel, whenever Sūkhbaatar, Magsarzhav or Damdinsüren appear, or almost - this should be qualified, particularly in the case of Magsarzhav³⁵⁸ - it is their exceptional skills and various qualities that are highlighted.

This can be done through the narrator's discourse, whether he presents himself as an outsider or adopts the point of view of one of his characters, or through dialogue between different characters. In *Tungalag Tamir*, we have to wait until halfway through book two to see Sūkhbaatar intervene; note that in the exchange that follows, he is referred to not by his name but by his nickname, something that, combined with a laudatory discourse, seems to me to reinforce this effect rather than attenuate it, even if this nickname of “*goimon*” (a variety of flat noodle, a reference to his size but also to his athleticism according to some sources, translated here as “*tagliatelle*”) is not *a priori* as laudatory as “*tiger*” or “*eagle*” (to take totally arbitrary examples) might have been. The dialogue features two soldiers who used to be comrade-in-arms in the Bogd army during the period of autonomy. After the abrogation of autonomy, Dorzh, who followed military training at the Khuzhirkulan camp,

³⁵⁷ Luvsanvandan, op. cit. p. 5.

³⁵⁸ The detailed discussion of this matter would stretch outside the scope and the size limits of a dissertation and will be addressed in a separate study.

joined the first supporters of the People's Party, and this is what he tells his friend Khuyag, who returned to civilian life during the autonomy after being wounded in combat.

“He told them about the latest events: the arrival of the gemon, the confiscation of weapons and the humiliation of the Bogd, who was forced to kiss the portrait of the Chinese president.

- It's time to wake up. The alternative is death. And nobody wants to die. So it is time to wake up, shake up and fight. Starting by driving out of our borders this bunch of foreigners who are shamelessly pillaging our country.

- But how, if the weapons have been confiscated? Khuyag stared at him, full of hope. Dorzh returned his gaze.

- Weapons can be found. You've heard of “General Tagliatelle”, I suppose? he replied, fluttering his eyelids.

- Of course I have! An exceptional man!

The Mongolian term used is “*zolboo*”, the Mongolian definition of which suggests an idea of perfection and completeness. According to the online encyclopaedia of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences :

The quality of a being whose intelligence, strength, clothing and gestures form a graceful, superb whole, exuding panache and energy.

“Хүний оюун ухаан, бие бялдар, хувцас чимэг, үйл хөдлөл цогц сайхан, цог жавхаалаг, сэргэлэн цовоо, хийморьлог байдал”.

Even demobilised, Khuyag had heard of the general and future leader of the revolutionary movement, and the account suggests that the action of the People's Party was already known to the people at that time. However, as we saw earlier with Bawden, the historical sources tend to contradict this.

A little later, the Patriotic Army, assisted by Red Army troops invited to liberate Mongolia from foreign invaders, entered Ikh Khüree. The cheers of the crowd confirmed what had been suggested earlier.

“Behind the flags, on a palomino with broad thighs and a matted mane, General Sүkhbaatar rode with his fist on his hip, the reins clutched in his other hand, deep in thought.

- General tagliatelle! exclaimed someone in the audience.

- What are you talking about with your tagliatelle? This is Sүkhbaatar, great general of the regular army.

- Excellent strategist! What courage!

- One that the destiny of our Mongolia will have revealed!”

Хоёр тугийн дараа сагсалсан дэлгэй өндөр цомбон биетэй, өргөн ташаатай ухаа хонгор морьтой Сүхбаатар жанжин нэг гараараа жолоо цулбуураа хумин атгаж, нөгөө гараараа ташаагаа тулан гүн бодолд дарагдан явна.

- Гоймон баатар гэж олны дунд нэг хүн дуу алдав.

- Юуны чинь гоймон. Ардын журамт цэргийн их жанжин Сүхбаатар байхгвй юу.

- Эр цэргийн эрдэмд нэвтэрхий, хатан зоригтой хvн гэнэ билээ.
- Манай монголын заяагаар тодорсон хvн дээ.

This brief dialogue is a good illustration of the definition of “*zolbootoi er*” (complete man) mentioned earlier, the noble and graceful bearing - *neg garaaraa zholoo tsulbuuraa humin atgash nögöö garaaraa tashaagaa tulun* - the ability to analyse - *er tsergiin erdemd nevterhii* - the courage (*zorig*) reinforced by the word “*hatan*” - *hatan zorigtoi* -. The last line adds the idea of a special relationship between the hero and history. It is very present in these narratives. This “completeness” is not just that of a man who has struggled his way up. For so many qualities to come together in him, he must have been “called” by some higher force, “chosen” by fate (*zaya*).

The passage in the novel in which the reader learns of the hero’s death clearly links his personal story to the history of Mongolia and of the Mongolian people. It reads:

“[Erdene] had gone to collect his mission order and was about to set off when a terrible misfortune plunged the Mongolian people into the deepest grief one could imagine. The man who had broken the chains of servitude, the chains that shackled and humiliated Mongolia. The man who had lit the torch of freedom to lead the fight with valour and without trembling, that man, Sükhbaatar, was dead”.

Эрдэнэ үнэмлэх заавраа аваад алсын замд мордох гэж байтал монголын ард түмнийг гvн гашуудал бүрхэж авлаа. Тэр бол монгол орныг хvлэн доромжилж байсан боолын гинжийг тас цохиж, эрх чөлөөний саруул бамбарыг асаах их тэмцэлийг толгойлсон аймшигтvй чин зоригт Сүхбаатар нас барснаас болжээ.

Strictly speaking, there is no reference in this passage to a mystical designation, at least not an explicit one. Nevertheless, the concept of “charisma” immediately springs to mind. The use of this term here implies a diversion through a few definitions. In French, the online dictionary maintained by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), indicates :

THÉOL. Don surnaturel extraordinaire octroyé à un croyant ou à un groupe de croyants, pour le bien commun de la communauté

Par ext. Autorité, fascination irrésistible qu’exerce un homme sur un groupe humain et qui paraît procéder de pouvoirs (quasi) surnaturels.

The English definition in the Cambridge dictionary is narrower:

Charisma : a special power that some people have naturally that makes them able to influence other people and attract their attention and admiration.

Üüriin Tuya offers us an excellent illustration of this definition. Shirchin, one of the novel’s protagonists, is a poor young boy brought up in a well-to-do family but who returns

to his original circumstances (after a series of events that are of no importance to us here), before enrolling as a soldier. In the scene that follows, he has recently arrived at the Khuzhribulan training camp, in eastern Ikh Khüree. The episode takes place during the period of Autonomy, so it's the Bogd Khaan's soldiers (the "Torgon Army", the Silken Army) we are talking about. Their living conditions are poor, but one of them, the soldier Sükh, refuses to give in to injustice and intends to assert the soldiers' right to decent food. Unscrupulous officers had bought and served rotten meat, full of worms, to their men, in order to save money and keep the margin for themselves. The soldier Sükh turns out to be Sühkbaatar; Rinchen adds as a footnote that this title was not given to him until later and that his first name was Sükh. The biographies of the general and leader of the Revolution give the episode as true. Rinchen does the same (the phrase "*ünen khereg*" - true fact - appears regularly as a footnote in the novel, as is the case in the considered passage).

“- Courageous and upright! Be him a commander, he really would make an excellent Look at the fire in his eyes, the ardour on his face! Such a man! agreed the old soldiers.

From then on, Shirchin felt galvanised every time he crossed paths with this giant, Sükh, whose face and bearing could only be those of an extraordinary being.

Even the garrison commander and the general officers singled him out from all the others, unable to mistake the extraordinary charisma of this man of iron discipline, unshakeable, gifted with an innate ability to attract all the soldiers to him in the same way that a magnet attracts metal. They had tried to bribe him, to buy him off with promises of rewards, distinctions, exemptions from corvées and guard duty, but to no avail. A man of few words, he had remained unmoved by money and pleasure. Realising that they were dealing with a man of integrity and incorruptibility. They gave up”.

– Шударга зоригтой хүн байна даа. Дарга болбол ёстой сайн дарга болох хүн. Нүдэндээ галтай, нүүрэндээ цогтой, ёстой эр хүн гэж өвгөн цэргүүд Сүхийг магтан хэлэлцэв. Ширчин, Үүнээс хойшт өндөр биетэй, шавхйисэн гаднаас царайгий нь харахад нилээд чанга янзын хүн бололтой Сүхтэй уулзах дайралдахдаа их л бишрэн хүндэтгэж болов. Цэргийн захирал дарга нар бусад олон цэргийн дотроос онцгой товойн ялгарч байсан бат сахилгатай хатан зоригтон тэр хүнийг өөрөө ямарч хүч гаргах оролдохгүйгээр олон цэргийн сэтгэлийг төмрийн үрдэс татагч соронзон гүрийн адил биедээ татсанаа, энэ тэрээс чөлөөлөх зэргээр өөр тийш татаж гартаа оруулах гэж оролдож үзээд, тэр үг дуу цөөнтэй цэргийг өнгө мөнгө, нүүр тал, эрх тушаал, аль алианаар ч сэтгэлий нь урвуулж болохгүй чин шударга хэн гэж мэдээд, биедээ татах гэж оролдохыг ч орхижээ.

A detailed analysis of the entire chapter would call for many comments. We will confine ourselves here to a few remarks, these that are essential for our purposes. The passage emphasises righteousness, integrity (*shudarga*), courage (*zorig/zorigtoi*) and the ability to lead men (*sain darga bolokh khün*). But these moral qualities are also reflected in his appearance and way of being. The expression "*nüdendee galtai, nüürendee tsogtoi*" is proverbial in Mongolian literary culture, and can be found in the epics and in *the Secret History of the Mongols* in connection with the young Temüzhin, the future Chinggis Khaan. Indeed, when the boy arrived with his father Yesükhei Baatar at the camp of Dai Setsen for

example, it is the expression used by the later to appreciate the qualities reflected in the Temüzhin's appearance, before agreeing with Yesükhei Baatar to betroth him to his daughter, Börte. But this passage does more than just highlight qualities that can be evaluated, albeit subjectively, it also suggests the presence in Sükhbaatar of an almost mystical aura to which the chiefs themselves are not insensitive, even though their status is higher than his (*olon tsergiin dotroos ontsgoi tovoин yalgarch baisan*) - they "singled him out from all the others"-. Sükhbaatar thus possesses an irresistible power of attraction of which he is not the agent - or author - (*ööröö yamarch хүч gargakh oroldokhgüigeer*), without himself making the slightest effort to do so, a power of attraction that operates "like a magnet" (*soronzon гүриин адил*). The expression "*bizhren khündetgezh bolov*" is also worth noting: while the verb "*khündetgekh*" expresses only the idea of respect, *bizhren* confers veneration. The French ethnologist Roberte Hamayon, in her article "L'anthropologue et la dualité paradoxale du 'croire' occidental" ("The anthropologist and the paradoxical duality of Western 'belief'"), states:

"As for the root *bishrek*, in addition to the noun *bishrel*, 'veneration', it produces the adjectives *bishrem*, 'admirable, worthy of veneration', and *bishremtgii*, 'respectful, deferential' ".³⁵⁹

The Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav also possesses these qualities of leadership and the ability to galvanise his troops. Again in *Üüriin Tuya*, in one of the chapters following the episode of the rotten meat at Khuzhirbulan, Shirchin has been selected from among the best elements of the training camp to take part in the military campaign to "pacify the western frontier" (*baruun khyazgaaryg ilben tokhinuulakh*) commanded by Generals Magsarzhav and Damdinsüren and the Zhalkhanz Khutagt Damdinbaazar. Caught under enemy fire, the young man, who found himself in the thick of the fighting for the first time, is extremely impressed by what was happening around him, but the calm and assurance of the general who is firing not far from him as him overcome his fear:

"Don't panic! Save your bullets. You have to hit the bull's-eye with every shot! Magsarzhav's voice nearby made Shirchin turn his head to discover "Ma Zhanzhin, comfortably seated in a sheltered spot from where he began to shoot, patiently adjusting his shots each time as if he were practising. Seeing the General's marbled face, perfectly free to move and betraying not the slightest hint of panic, eased the tension that was oppressing Shirchin, who for the first time was in the thick of the action, who for the first time was hearing the bullets whistle over his head and lodge in the ground, making him jump each time. But seeing the warlord so appeased suddenly dispelled the panic that had gripped him". (*Üüriin Tuya*)

– Битгий сандарцгаа. Хамаагүй бүү бууд. Дайсныг сүм тоолон онохыг хичээ гэж дэргэд нь Магсаржавын дуугарахыг Ширчин сонсож харваас Ма жанжин Ширчингийн ойр нэгэн тохилог сайн газар олж аваад суруулийн газар буудаж байгаатай апил маш яаралгүй самбаатай буудаж эхлэв. Жанжны талбиун цөв царай, ярах сандрахгүй маш чөлөөтэй

³⁵⁹ Hamayon Roberte N, "L'anthropologue et la dualité paradoxale du « croire » occidental", *Revue du MAUSS*, vol. no 28, no. 2, 2006, pp. 427-448. p. 338

хөдөл байхыг үзээд анх удаа дайнд явж, буугийн сум толгой дээгүүр шун хийж гараад газар шав шув гэж энд тэнд шигдэн байгааш сандархийн сонгсож байсан Ширчингийн дотор онгойж бачимдахыг байв.

In the next paragraph, an older soldier whom Shirchin knew in Khuzhirbulan, the shaman Shamba, also expresses his veneration while picking up, like relics, the Manchu bullets that ricocheted off a rock and hit Magsarzhav in the chest, without even wounding him:

“The boulder to his right was constantly throwing up projections from all sides. He glanced over to see Magsarzhav Zhanzhin shaking the front of his *deel* to knock away the bullets that had hit it. Shamba, who was nearby firing, picked up the shells that had been completely flattened by the impact against the rock.

- Khaltsgai! he exclaimed, pulling his handkerchief out of his *övör* to wrap them in it before pressing it back against his breast - When they say that zhanzhin is invincible to bullets. The sakhuis that watches over him has to be powerful indeed!

Ширчингийн баруун гарын зүгт байсан том чулуунаас хэмхэрхий чулуу зүг зүг үсэрч цацарсанд тэр зүгт юу болов гэж үзвээс чулуунаас ойж туссан сумыг Магсаржад жанжин энгэрээс сэгсрэн унагаав. Дэргэд нь буудаж байсан Шамба, чулуу мөргөөд хавтгай болсон, барихад бараг гар халам тэр сумыг шүүрч аваад, халцгай гэж алдаад, өврөөс алчуур гаргаж ороон авч өвөртөө хийжээ.

– Энэ лав суманд даагдахгүй жанжин ажээ. Бодвол, сайд сахиустай юм байлгүй.

In *Tungalag Tamir*, there is a comparable passage in the third chapter of the novel, when Dorzh and Khuyag, whom we have already mentioned, meet by chance at a market in Khüree (the scene predates that mentioned above). Wounded in battle, Khuyag has become a beggar, while Dorzh has just returned from the war after the army was demobilised following the Treaty of Khiakta. He recounts for his friend the campaign that led him to fight under Magsarzhav’s command. Then, the narrator tell us a little about who is Magsarzhav:³⁶⁰

“Intimately convinced that he was endowed with supernatural powers, his soldiers called him “Bagsh” (professor or master) : ‘As long as we stay behind the glorious Bagsh, we’re in the clear, luck can only smile on us and fate can be kind to us. This man is the emanation of the Ulaan Sakhuis,³⁶¹ capable of deflecting bullets as well as the iron of swords”, did they say in the army”.

Магсаржавыг цэргүүд нь багш гэж нэрлэх бөгөөд түүний ер бусын хүчинд итгээд эргэлзээгүй сүсэглэн итгэсэнээ:

Баатар багштай явсан цагт заяа орхиж, од харван, шоо цайгаагүй юм бол алзахгүй. Ирсэн сум, далайсан сэлмээс зайлуулж чадах улаан сахиусны хувилгаан хүн гэж цэргүүд ярилцдаг байв.

³⁶⁰ One detail that the author alludes to, but does not insist on, is the mention of something akin to relics, this time in the form of "white mushrooms".

³⁶¹ A Mongolian deity. This is the name given to the protector Zhamsran (Cham-sring in Tibetan), the god of war.

But whereas Rinchen is confined to reporting the point of view of Shirchin and the other soldiers, leaving the reader to form his own opinion, Loidamba reveals that Magsarzhav consciously acts on the minds of his men. He exploits their credulity to ensure their loyalty:

“Convinced that the key to victory lay in the strength of the army, he did everything possible to maintain the morale of his troops and ensure their loyalty, giving his men his undivided attention. Where had they grown up? What did they aspire to? He wanted to know everything about them. Taking advantage of their beliefs and superstitions, he had himself proclaimed choizhin (protector of the Law). In this way, he won the hearts and trust of all of them”.

Дайсныг цохиж тулалдааныг хожиход зэвсэг барьсан цэрэг гол хүч гэж бат итгэсэн энэ хүн цэргийн сэтгэлийг ямагт засаж, цэргийг өөртөө татахын тулд бүхнийг хийдэг. Цэрэгтээ үргэлж анхаарч, тэдэнд унасан газар, угаасан ус нь юу юм бэ, яах гэж байгааг ярьж тэдний сүсэг бишрэлийг ашиглан, өөрөө чойжин болох зэрэг олон аргыг хэрэглэн цэргийн дотор үлэмж алдаг хүндийг олоод, тэдний гүн хайр, бат итгэлийг татжээ.

Loidamba makes no moral judgement here. One can think that using people’s naivety, as long as it is for a noble cause, can be considered legitimate. In the passage quoted, it seems above all to be a sign of intelligence and the ability to lead people. The idea that the cause is just is quite explicit, as is the idea of destiny, of a fate linked to that of Mongolia:

“When the need arises, history knows how to produce exceptional beings. The Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav was one of these, a providential man guiding the Mongolian people at this decisive stage in their struggle against the Manchu oppressors. With his imposing build and broad forehead, this man whose face looked as if it had been cast in bronze had taken the lead in the fight for independence, leading his men from victory to victory. Van by inheritance, governor of *Khoshuu*, he had the clear-sightedness to understand that the enslavement of the Mongols had run its course. And when the amban of Khovd refused to obey the summons to withdraw, he took command of the troops, determined to dislodge him by force of arms”.

Түүхийн цаг үе хэрэгтэй хүнээ бойжуулдаг. Монголын ард түмэн манжийн ноёрхлыг эсэргүүцсэн олон зуун жилийн тэмцлийн сүүлчийн шийдвэрлэх үед төрж гарсан их хүмүүсийн нэг бол хатанбаатар Магсаржав байж билээ. Цутгамал хүрэл шиг гялалзсан хүрэн царайтай, өргөн цээж, тод магнайтай энэ хүн манжаас тусгаарлах тэмцлийн тэргүүнд явж, явсан газар бүхэн нь ялалтаар туяарч байжээ. Вангийн зэрэг залгаж, хошуу ноён болсон бөгөөд монголын ард түмнийг боолчлон суух үеэ дууссаныг ойлгож, эвээр нутагтаа буцах шаардлагыг хүлээж авалгүй эсэргүүцсэн Ховдын амбаныг зэвсгийн хүчээр тонилгох тэмцлийг хатанбаатар ван Магсаржав удирдсан билээ.

This extract echoes the one quoted at the very beginning of this section about Sükhbaatar, to express the same idea that these heroes are “revealed” or “produced” by

some force to accomplish a particular mission: destiny “*zaya*” in the first extract, history “*tüikh*” in the second.

This same association between the destiny of the man and that of the country can be seen clearly in the biographical fiction that S. Udval dedicated to Magsarkhav, where the title - *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* - calls for two possible interpretations, not mutually exclusive. If the reader knows that the novel tells the story of Magsarzhav, it seems logical to imagine that it is his fate that the title refers to. In the text itself, the expression appears twice. In the first extract, it seems to refer to the fate of the entire country:

“Magsarzhav:

- Bring in Lam-Avar!

A bound Lam-Avar was brought forward.

- What a savage! We seem to have an easy temper. So, now that you’re a prisoner, what do you think of all this?

- What I think is that you, Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav, betrayed our Bogd to make friends with these Reds.

- You are a bit quick to forget how many Mongolian *ger* you and your kind have destroyed and how many you have sacked! And what did you do with Chültem Beis? Go on, do it shoot him!

Lam-Avar:

- Don’t think I am going to beg for mercy. You may have defeated us, but you will end up being crushed by the Tsar’s army and the Japanese one!

- Your predictions have no chance of coming true. But our plan does! We will drive the enemies of Mongolia out of our territory to the last man, and bring all our strength to the Party and the People’s Government to see them shine. That is our great destiny!”

(S. Udval, *Ikh Khuvi Zaya*)

Магсаржав:

- Лам-Аварыг нааш нь аваад ир? гэсэнд түүнийг хүлээтэй нь оруулж ирлээ.

- Их ууртай догшин хэрцгий хүн дээ чи! Баригдсанаа юу гэж бодож байна? гэхэд,

- Хатанбаатар Магсаржав чамайг Богд эзнээсээ урваж улаан намынхантай нийлж гэж бодож байна гэлээ.

- Та нар олон монголчуудын амь сүйтгэж өчнөөн айл гэр баллаж тоймгүй их дээрэм хийснээ мартав уу? Та нар Чүлтэм бэйсийг яаж хороосон билээ? Одоо үүнийг аваачиж тонилго! гэхэд Лам-Авар:

- Би өршөөл гуйхгүй. Та нар биднийг дийлсэн ч цагаан хааны цэрэг японы цэрэг хоёрт ялагдана гэхэд,

- Чиний санаа хэзээ ч бүтэхгүй. Харин бидний санасан хүсэл бүтэж энэ монголын нутагт нэг ч дайсан үлдээхгүй хөөж Ардын нам засагт хүчээ өгч улсаа мандуулахад оролцсон маань **ИХ ХУВЬ ЗАЯА!**

In the second, Magsarzhav, speaking to an envoy from Sükhbaatar, believes that himself has been fulfilled by a “great destiny”.

“I would have liked returned. But I am happy that the Party and the Government have involved me, modest though I am. associated me, modest though I am, with their enterprise. It is not so much the fact to have become a minister in this People’s

Government, but to have met and made to have met, to have linked up with wise people, comrades, and thus to have found I am delighted. And after so many years of struggle, to taste such an achievement seems to me, your old brother, to be the mark of a great destiny”.

- Харих сан гэж бодох юм. Гэхдээ өчүүхэн намайг ардын нам, засгийн үйлст хүчин зүтгүүлэх болсонд би баяртай байна. Ардын засгийн сайд болсондоо ч биш, ухаантай улстай нөхөрлөж зөв зам олсондоо баярлаж, олон жил тэмцэсний эцэст ийм сайн цагийг үздэг нь **ИХ ХУВЬ ЗАЯА** гэж бодож сууна ах чинь

The use of the expression “*öchüüren namaig*”, which could be translated as “your humble servant” and which expresses modesty (real or calculated) as well as the allusion to the importance of comradeship for him, provides a good transition to the section that follows, where we see that despite his extraordinary qualities, the socialist hero must remain close to the ordinary people.

Who remain aware of their modest origin and close to the people

The party’s guidelines for writing were explicit on this point: the hero of the new Mongolian literature had to be the ordinary man, the worker, and authors were given the task of showing that it was indeed these workers from the grassroots, forming the society, who produce history (“МАХН- ын XI их хурлаас манай уран зохиолын гол батар бол хөдөлмөрийн шинэ монгол хүн гэж заасан бөгөд уран бүтээлийн амьдралд хөдөлмөрийн хүнийг түүхийн тавцнаа нийгмийн гол хүчин болгож үзүүлсэн байна”).

Minimising the role played by the “masses” in favour of a single hero is, says Luvzanvandan, a flaw in the works of the so-called “democratic” period in literature (in the same way as drawing caricatured characters, either all white or all black, and thus missing the objective of conveying the profound nature of the conflicts:

“Хувьсгалын арьдчилсан шатны уран сайхны сэтгэлгээнд зөрчлийг бүрхэгдүүлэх, дүрийг хар цагаан өнгөнд ялгах, ард түмний түүхэн ролийг буруулж, ганц нэгэн баатрыг өргөмжлөх хандлага үзэгдэж байв »³⁶²

Some ethnologists set themselves the main objective of giving an account of the “logic of others”,³⁶³ while others, even though not taking a diametral opposite stance emphasize more on contradictions - and this is more my case, as I explained in the introduction of this work - believing that they are inherent in the way society works, and therefore focus more on unmasking these contradictions behind a “mythical” narrative that claims to explain

³⁶² Here I am simply quoting the original Mongolian text of the quotation freely translated in the preceding sentence.

³⁶³ We can quote Philippe Descola among many others: “As I see it, anthropology’s mission is to attempt, alongside other sciences but using its own methods, to render intelligible the way in which organisms of a particular kind find a place in the world, acquire a stable representation of it, and contribute to its transformation by forging with it and between one another links either constant or occasional and of a remarkable but not infinite diversity” , Descola Philippe, *Beyond nature and culture*, translated by Janet Lloyd. London/Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2013. version pdf. p. 11.

them. According to this approach, a discourse is always in part a construction designed to persuade others of the logic of our contradictions.

Here, the government and the party were well aware of the desirability of creating national myths in the guise of a charismatic hero – Researcher would not refer to any “Cult of the Personality” in relation to Choibalsan if it was not the case - but they also saw the need to get the people (the readers) to subscribe to the idea that they themselves had a role to play. To resolve this difficulty, the great historical figures of the twentieth century, exceptional though they were, had to remain accessible characters, if not truly characters with whom readers could identify.³⁶⁴

Despite this “singularity” that distinguishes them as exceptional beings, Magsarzhav and Sükhbaatar remain aware of their modest origins (Magsarzhav was certainly of noble descent but did not belong to the high nobility). In *Tungalag Tamir*, the first mention of Sükhbaatar takes place in Ikh Khüree. The novel’s protagonist, Erdene, has left the Tamir valley after discovering that the wealthy herdsman who employed him, Itgelt, has had an adventure with his wife, Dolgor. Betrayed by the people he trusted the most, he is offered support in the capital by the wife of a nobleman, the *beis* Dovchin, who employs him and makes him change his first name to hide his identity to the authorities (he physically confronted Itgelt before leaving). It was there that he crossed paths with Dorzh, whom we have already met. Dorzh was then a soldier in the Khuzhirbulan camp. The historical sources - not fiction this time, but the material available to ethnologists and historians for that period - reveal the miserable conditions in which these soldiers lived. The novel illustrates this through the speech Dorzh makes to Erdene (who claims to be called Donoi as we just saw), explaining that he takes advantage of his leave to chop wood in the capital’s fireplaces in exchange for something to improve his daily life. To Erdene, who remarks that this is an opportunity, Dorzh retorts that, given their conditions, there is no other way to survive. That is when he alludes to Sükhbaatar:

“On the way, Dorzh told him about the hard life of soldiers, the hardships of the city and the young girl with her old mother whom he helped with the wood he split.
- It is a bit lucky that you find the time to chop wood to earn three or four pennies.
- You ain’t kidding! No, it’s our chief, the “general goimon”, at least he knows what it’s like to be poor. And as I’m not bad at shooting or sabre-rattling, and above all a good horseman, I’m entitled to time off”.

Замдаа Дорж цэргийн амьдралын зовлон. Хот газрын ширүүн амьдрал, амьтны түлээ хөрөөдөж чавганц охин хоёрын амьдралд тус болдог тухай ярьж байлаа.

– Ингэж түлээ хөрөөдөөд хэд гурван мөнгө олох зав олоод байдаг зүгээр юм даа гэж Эрдэнэ хэлэв.

– Тийм ч биш. Манай дарга гоймон Баатар гэж ядуу хүний зовлон мэддэг хүн бий. Бас тэгээд би цавчих, буудах, ялангуяа морин сургуульд овоо болохоор чөлөө өгдөг юм гэж Дорж хэлээд инээмсэглэв.

³⁶⁴ From this point of view, there are significant variations from one novel to another: in general, Sükhbaatar seems more accessible than Magsarzhav (in *Tsag Töriin Üimeen*, *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*, *Tungalag Tamir*) but the relationship is reversed in *Üüriin Tuya*.

This is followed by an episode in which the soldiers seek justice from the Ministry of the Armed Forces after being served rotten and worm-eaten meat on several occasions. Narrated through fiction, this mutiny did indeed take place. Sükhbaatar's biographies refer to it, as do other primary historical sources. The scene has become key to building the legend of the leader. In *Tungalag Tamir*, Sükhbaatar's role is not highlighted, but Dorzh's conclusion, after the soldiers have won their case by going together to complain to the ministry, that "solidary magpies can carry a deer" (*evt zhaazgai buga barina*) is an obvious reference to the chapter of the same name (except that the author has modified the proverb: for *evt shaazgai luu buulgadag* which we might suggest translating as "Solidary magpies would overcome a dragon) in Rinchen's *Üüriin Tuya*, where the intervention of the soldier "Sükh" is this time clearly highlighted. I referred to this same chapter a little earlier, but I will not go into further detail in view of the issue we are dealing with now, which is to show that Sükhbaatar is also presented as a man like any other.

In *Tungalag Tamir*, the author "solves" this paradox - that of describing a "hero" gifted with almost mystical qualities and close to men at the same time - as follows: As the regular army enters a victorious capital, jubilant at seeing itself finally liberated from Manchu rule and from the white invader led by Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, the narrator explains that Sükhbaatar is a man like any other - *engiin khün*: an ordinary soldier - but who, because of events, has had to take on heavy responsibilities:

"Sükhbaatar, a simple soldier who had become General-in-Chief of the Armies, was now entrusted with the onerous task of building this newborn state. He had to think about a thousand things he had never thought about before, and decide on issues he had never decided on before. From now on, he had to devote his actions to the cause of the State. (*Tungalag Tamir*)

Сүхбаатар бол энгийн нэгэн цэргийн эр байж билээ. Гэтэл одоо шинэ тогтож байгаа улсын бүх цэргийн жанжин, шинэ монгол улсыг байгуулах их хэргийг удирдах үлэмж үүрэг оногджээ. Урьд бодож байгаагүй юмыг бодож олох, шийдэж байгаагүй юмыг шийдэх, юм бүхнийг төр улсын өмнөөс харах ёстой болжээ.

An amusing scene illustrates this just afterwards, which is worth quoting.

Erdene's son Bat is a very small boy at the beginning of the novel. At the time of the capture of Ikh Khüree by the Mongol Patriotic Army, assisted by Red Army troops, he is around seventeen years old. He had gone in search of his father after the latter had left the Tamir region for the reasons mentioned earlier, and lived by begging in the company of another boy his own age, Zhargal, whom he had met many years earlier when he was a "novice" boarding with a lama in Zaya Khüree (in the centre of what is now Arkhangai aimag). Very briefly, when the victorious troops entered the city, the two boys attended the parade and Bat recognised one of the Bolsheviks, a friend of his father's, Pyotr, whom he had known as a child. The Soviet troops then "adopted" the two beggars. To get some *tarag* to eat (a kind of yoghurt) and other milk products, the two boys used to visit the whole neighbourhood, and Zhargal, very proud of his reputation as the "adopted children of the Nomkhon Bor" (the affectionate nickname given by Mongolians to Soviet troops at the time), used to abuse the credulity of ordinary people by boasting that he had taken part in

the fighting alongside the Allied troops. To give an idea of the incredible nature of his nonsense, which has the gift of scandalising Bat :

“She stood up and placed a bucket of tarag in front of them. Zhargal gulped down a bowl and, putting the cup in front of him as if to ask for more, he began to talk nonsense, recounting in no particular order how he had fought against the Baron’s army - a Baron he had even wounded with a gunshot - and shot carrier pigeons in mid-air with a well-placed Russian rifle. Bat’s elbowing to silence him had no effect. “Brave boy”, “What courage”, “Hey! without interrupting her work, the old woman punctuated each of her words with cries of admiration. Galvanised by this praise, Zhargal stood up straight and continued, his eyes full of stars:

- My comrade you see there has no equal when it comes to wielding a sword. You should see the sheen of the iron, the spinning... In a single movement, he cuts off three heads and sends them rolling. And when he twirls his blade, all you can see is a bluish halo! Extraordinary, I assure you!

Bat’s face turned crimson:

- Zhargal my friend, finish your tarag quickly, we’re leaving!

Авгай босож агар хувинтай тараг тавьж өгөөд Жаргал нэг том аягыг гүвдэж орхиод хоёр дахиа өмнөө тавьж Бароны цэрэгтэй байлдаж явсан, Бароныг хвртэл буудаж шархдуулсан, нисэж яваа шувууг орос ланжуугаар нэг л бууддаг гээд ум хумгвй туйлж гарахад нь Бат хичнээн нудравч тус болсонгвй.

Авгай юмаа оёх зуур «хөөрхий минь» «цогтой л хvv байна даа» «зайлуул, ёстой доо» гэнэ. Үнд нь зоригжсон Жаргал өндийж суугаад нүдээ гялалзуулан ярина.

– Манай энэ нөхөр бол сэлэмний эрдэмд хосгвй хvн. Ёстой л сэлэм гялс, толгой бөндөс гэж цавчина даа. Нэг цавчихдаа гурван толгой бөндийтөл нь аваад тээр тэнд өнхрүүлж орхидог эр дээ. Сэлэм эргүүлж байхад бие нь нэг бөөрөнхий хөх юм л харагддаг. Мөн ч мундаг гэхэд нь Батын нүүр чавга шиг болж

– Жаргал минь таргаа түргэн идээд явъя гэжээ.

When the two boys entered, they saw that a man was sleeping with his back turned, but without paying too much attention to him. And this is the very moment the man choose to intervene:

- Well! What a swordsman indeed.

The man who hadn’t moved from the bed until then had just burst out laughing. He turned round and... woe betide the “General Goimon” himself! The man who rode into town at the head of the patriotic army on his magnificent horse as golden as sand!

- How do you say he slashes the enemy with his sword? insisted Sükhbaatar with an amused smile.

For it was indeed he, Sükhbaatar, who had come to spend a few days resting with this old man who had been a close friend of his father’s when he was alive.

Zhargal scratched his head. He wasn’t saying anything. Bat had plunged his eyes into his bowl of tarag.

– Мундаг цавчдаг эр байна даа гээд орон дээр хэвтэж байсан хvн тачигнатал инээгээд эргэв.

Хараач, ардын журамт цэрэг хотод орж ирэхэд ухаа хонгор морьтой явсан, гоймон баатар гэж олны нэрлэж байсан эр байлаа.

– Яаж эргүүлнэ, цавчина гэнээ гээд Сүхбаатар хөгжилтэй инээмсэглэв.

Сүхбаатар эцэг нь амьд байхдаа үй зайгвй верхэж байсан өвгөнийд амралтын өдрөө ирээд амарч байсан нь тэр билээ.

Жаргал толгойгоо маажин дуугвй болов. Бат идэж байсан аягатай таргаа барин гөлрөв.

The scene that follows shows a very human Sүkhbaatar, who sympathises with Bat’s grief at being separated from both his parents (in the novel, Sүkhbaatar already knows Erdene – Bat’s father), who has himself joined the patriotic army. When Bat admits how much he misses his father, Sүkhbaatar is tempted to tell him about his own, but restrains himself:

“- Come on, let’s forget all this sabre-rattling and shooting... Your father’s fine. He’s crossing swords with the Whites, you can believe that!

Sүkhbaatar looked at the two children with an eye that was both tender and mocking.

- Where is he now?

- He has just entered Khan Shin Van Khüree... Do you miss him?

Bat did not try to hide behind any false pride. He answered in a small voice.

- Very much.

- Of course...

Sүkhbaatar heaved a deep sigh.

By signing up for this war of liberation, Sүkhbaatar had left for the Soviet Union, leaving his father at his worst. Yet they had agreed to suffer the agony of this painful separation. Wasn’t it in the name of the people, the motherland, that he was going to fight? And they both hoped that the father would be able to wait for his son’s return, once his mission was accomplished. But he had left without Sүkhbaatar being able to say a final goodbye to him... His father, his dear father... Hearing Bat talk about his father had brought back cruel memories.

- You have to appreciate the time you spend with your father...

Sүkhbaatar paused, picked up the pewter teapot, poured himself a cup and raised it to his lips. How he would have loved to talk to the two boys about his father... But to risk shattering the hopes of Bat, who only dreamt of finding his own? No! He shouldn’t have done that. The memory of his father had never ceased to haunt Sүkhbaatar. And every time he felt his ghosts invade him, he came to take refuge near the old man who had been the departed close friend”.

– За тэр буудах цавчих ч яамай. Харин аав чинь сайн яваа даа. Ёстой л цагаантай цавчилдаж байгаа гээд Сүхбаатар хоёр хvvxдийг өхөөрдсөн хошин нvдээр харлаа.

– Аав минь одоо хаана байгаа бол?

– Ханд чин вангийн хvрээн дээр саяхан очсон. Чи ааваа санаж байна уу?

– Ааваа их санаж байна гэж Бат нам дуугаар нэрэлхэлгвй vнэнээ хэлэв.

– Аав их санагддаг юм шvв гээд Сүхбаатар гvн санаа алдав. Ард тvмэн эх орноо чөлөөлөх их хэргийг vүсгэн шодож зөвлөлт улсыг зорин явахад нь Сүхбаатарын эцэг хvнд өвчтэй vлдэж билээ. Зорьсон хэргээ бүтээгээд ирэхэд нь амьд хvлээж байна гэж эцэг хvв хоёр итгэж тэр итгэл ба их хэргийн төлөө тэмцлийн зоригоор хагацлын гашууныг эдэлж явсан. Гэтэл

хайрт аав нь хвлээж чадсангвй, хальж оджээ. Бат аавынхаа тухай ярих тусам Сүхбаатарын сэтгэлд аав нь орж тодорно.

– Аавтай байх сайхан юм шvv гээд Сүхбаатар үгээ таслаад хүрэн данх авч цай аягалан уув. Аавынхаа тухай энэ хоёр залууд яримаар санагдаад эхэлсэн боловч үгээ тасалжээ. Учир нь аавтайгаа уулзахыг өдрийн бодол шөнийн зvvд болсон Батын сэтгэл, уулзах итгэлийг эвдэхээс айж билээ.

Нас барсан аавын нь дүр Сүхбаатарын бодлоос салдаггүй бөгөөд аав нь үлэмж бодогдсон вед тvvний үерхдэг байсан энэ өвгөнийд ирж сэтгэлээ зогоодог юм.

I dwelled a little on this scene to show how fiction can suggest to the reader that Sүkhbaatar is **also** a man like any other. I will not cite any other examples from *Tungalag Tamir*, although there are plenty, but to show that this is not a characteristic specific to this novel, I would like to mention the character of Sүkhbaatar as he is portrayed by Dorzh, the author of *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*. Here again, the tone is quite pleasant.

Gombo, the narrator and protagonist of this first-person novel, has just joined the regular army that Sүkhbaatar has started to raise in the region. Gombo is an impulsive, undisciplined character who has often got into trouble in the past and has not only friends in the region he comes from. He is never the last to get into a fight or drink more than he should. On the way, when his new chief asks him what he thinks about Sүkhbaatar, he makes the mistake of replying that he is a “miscreant” (*buruu nomton*). The chief tells him he is wrong and that it will become clear to him once they arrive. But when they arrive, Sүkhbaatar is asleep, are they told. A long scene follows in which Gombo meets his new comrades-in-arms, all waiting for the general to wake up. Among the men is a Buriat called “Dash” whom Gombo has met in the past. Dash seems to have a certain influence over the rest of his comrades and Gombo is proud to be able to boast to them of their old friendship. So he is not too shy when Dash asks him to tell the others how they met. It was in an inn in the town of Khiakta at a time when a price had just been put on Sүkhbaatar’s head, with the Chinese invaders promising a reward to anyone who could deliver him to them, something that Gombo and Dash had commented on in complete confidence, with Gombo hinting at his scepticism about the fugitive. But during the evening, Dash had mysteriously disappeared and the two of them had not seen each other since then. I will not go into further detail, but these points of reference are essential to understanding what follows.

After a while, Sүkhbaatar finally woke up. The soldiers line up. Once again, the author keeps the suspense going by detailing the way the narrator perceives the scene and gradually becomes aware of the trick they have played on him, because the one they all called Dash is none other than the one who arrives at the head of his officers, in other words Sүkhbaatar himself. Gombo was terrified, thinking that his reckless familiarity and loose tongue had once again got him into serious trouble, having criticised the general in his presence, which he now saw as a lack of respect and a serious offence. But instead of taking offence, as he had expected, Sүkhbaatar/Dash declares that he had a good time, adding that he regrets that the soldiers now place him on a pedestal that artificially cuts him off from the rest of the men, whereas he sees himself as just another soldier of modest origins.

“At first I thought I would tell you the truth, but then I decided to have a bit of fun. In front of “Sүkhbaatar”, some people hold back and that can only do harm. That is not

a good thing at all. I am no different from the others, I am a commoner of the people like all of you, and you know that. The son of a poor guard. When I was still very young I carried wood, I worked as a relayman on the mail routes, selling my services to those who wanted to employ me. In truth, we are no different”.

“Түрүүн ч чамд үнэн учраа хэлэх гэтэл хэсэг инээлдмээр санагдаад, тэгээд ч Сүхбаатар гэхлээр зарим хүн үгээ хэлж чадахгүй сүйд болох гээд байдаг юм. Энэ муу хэрэг байгаа юм даа. Би бол бусдаас ялгарах юмгүй энгийн нэгэн хүн гэдгийг чи л сайн мэднэ. Ядуу манаачийн хүү. Мод зомгол зөөж өссөн, хар багаасаа өртөө улаа нэхэж айлд зарагдаж явсан. Бидэнд ялгаа ердөө ч байхгүй”.

The same regrets are echoed in *Ikh Khuvi Zaya* by Magsarzhav, who also tries to convince his men that the hierarchical relationships between “brothers” within the party and the army are contrary to the political line of the new regime:

[...]- Yes my General.

- Bogoo! Give me up these “General, Meneral”. Well, you will have to leave!

[...]Magsarzhav cut up some cold meat and helped himself to airag:

- Go, sit down, come and drink airag, you and I have to parley.

But the men sat down without eating or drinking anything, just listening to what he was going to tell them. Magsarzhav stared at his companions and, as if to test them:

- Are you by any chance chickening out, wanting to go back on what was agreed?

- Of course not, General! How can you think that? We won't betray our oath.

- You and I are equals! Stop calling me "General". Within the party we must all consider ourselves equal.

- Тийм ээ жанжаан.

- Боогоо минь жанжин, манжин ч яахав. Та явна байгаа [...]

Магсаржав хүйтэн мах огтлон айраг уулс:

- Сууцгаа, идээ барь. Айраг ууцгаа. Хэдүүлээ ярилцах юм байна гэхэд нөхөд нь онц идэж уусан ч үгүй Хатанбаатарын хэлэх үгийг сонсохоор тавтай сууж авав.

Магсаржав нөхдийнхөө царайг ширтэн сорих мэт харснаа:

- Та бүхэн зорьсон хэлэлцсэн үйл хэргээсээ ухарч мөхсөн явдал байна уу?

- Хаанаас жанжин минь. Бид тангараг алдаагүй байна.

- Та бид нар эн чацуу улс. Намайг жанжин энэ тэрээ гэх явдалгүй. Намын журамт нөхөд адил үзэх хэрэгтэй.

These words, attributed to the character of Sühbaatar earlier, and to Magsarzhav in this second example, call for vigilance when we think of the “cult of personality” built by Choibalsan around himself and Sühbaatar. The fact that the People’s Party wanted to banish hierarchical relationships within its ranks, as the character of Magsarzhav asserts, seems in theory to be in line with the original ideals of the philosophy behind it. But in reality, it is unlikely that any communist country in the world has succeeded in eradicating differences in status, power and privilege. In any case, researchers all seem to agree on this point, and I will quote Kaplonski, himself referring to Humphrey (for the reference to the dominant/dominated pair) and to hierarchy:

“In the current context, however, we are more interested in the dominated, for even the political leaders in Mongolia were not at the top of the heap. They, too, had ultimately to answer to Moscow. As Caroline Humphrey has put it, “the true, naked interests of both the dominators and dominated ... were known to everyone and found in virtually everyone” (1994: 23). No one, not even the Party bosses, were absolute power-holders in this context”.

Although Kaplonski uses this quotation to show that the dominant/dominated relationship is more complex than it appears, this does not mean that he is simply denying the existence of hierarchies:

In effect, “everyone understands the arbitrariness of any individual’s position in the hierarchy of power, and everyone knows, therefore, that morality rests elsewhere”.³⁶⁵ (6).

There are several possible interpretations of these words, placed in the mouths of the leaders of the first hour within their novel. First of all, there is no doubt a denunciation of the “cult of personality” and, more generally, of the betrayal in practice of the ideal expressed here, the authors having themselves been its victims. But secondly, beyond the possible bitterness that the author would express through the intermediary of a fictional character and directed against the “dominant”, it can also be seen as an analysis of the complexity of the dominant/dominated relationship which always implies, as Maurice Godelier has shown, that the dominated “consent to their domination”. In the passages quoted, it is not the charismatic leader, Sükhbaatar or Magsarzhav, who is held responsible for maintaining this hierarchical relationship, but their men, who are unable in practice to appropriate this ideal to the extent that it is followed through.

I won’t dwell on this point any further. Extraordinary and close to their men at the same time, these characters embody the anthropological and literary figure of the “mediator”. This is the next point I would like to develop.

2. Exemplars and figures of mediation

Boglárka Mácsai’s article focuses on men whose memory is staged for identity purposes, who are also valued for qualities and actions that distinguish them while remaining very close to the social point of view of the target audience. Interestingly, she compares these heroes to the saints of the Christian religion. She writes:

“This kind of representation as well as this interpretation and “use” of the hero’s person parallel the role of saints in Christian religion”.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Humphrey op. cit. 1994, p. 26.

³⁶⁶ Mácsai, op. cit. p. 370.

She then develops this idea and she uses the word “mediator”, associated in her text with that of **model** or “exemplar”, to use Caroline Humphrey’s word:

“The lives of saints provide **models of the correct life-style and behavior for the believers**, and their objects – the relics – have extraordinary effect after the saints’ death. Hero and saint are similar not only in their tools and interpretations, but also in their status and role. Peter Brown writes about the cult of sixth century Christian saints: “the graves of the saints – (...) or the parts of their bodies, or even the objects in physical contact with their bodies – were privileged sites where two opposite poles – **Heaven and Earth – met (...). he two so-far discreet categories suddenly merged in the mind.**” (Brown, 1993: 25.) he author claims that **saints are both human and divine, that is why they can bring the two realms closer: they die a human death but through their deeds and martyrdom they enjoy the closeness of God** (Brown, 1993: 27.). They are **mediators** between the two realms since they set the example to humans with their lives and/ or deaths pleasing God, and intercede for the humans with God after their deaths”.³⁶⁷

The extracts quoted earlier to show how these characters stood out from the ordinary already implied an idea of exemplarity. Let us return to them briefly and then develop them by making the link with the reflections of Caroline Humphrey and Boglárka Mácsai on the two notions of “exemplars” and “mediators”. As Humphrey understands it, the “exemplar” is not a model that imposes itself on others, like the iron that attracts the magnet, but a model that the individual chooses consciously and with motivation as part of a quest for identity and personal development. Here is a passage from *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*:

“To arrive at the *уя* (pole) of a camp with the dogs barking, there was nothing more pleasant in my mind at the time. But I was mistaken. As for Sүkhbaatar, when he descended on an *уя*, he did so discreetly. When I arrive at Badamdorzh Guai, I will go down just as Sүkhbaatar would have done. Dogs don’t do me any favours. Having been here twice when I was drunk, they’re wary. Demberel knows when it’s me. She doesn’t pay any attention to anyone else. At the time, I was convinced that it was something to boast about to arrive drunk and make a fuss. To arrive bawling on a good horse, that’s what I thought was amazing. Stumbling in, having already had too much to drink and opening the door wide, that’s what I thought would be fun after a drink. But I was wrong. What is right is to behave like Sүkhbaatar”.

Айлын уян дээр нохой шуугиулаад буучихыг аятайхан юм шиг санаж явсан. Тиймгүй юм байна Сүхбаатар уян дээр ирэхдээ намуухан ирээд буудаг. Бадамдориг гуайн уян дээр Сүхбаатар шиг бууна даа. Нохой нь надад ширүүн шүү. Хоёр удаа согтуу ирээд жигшээчихсэн юм. Дэмбэрэл тулдаа намайг гэж суудаг байх.Өөр хүн бол ч өдийд шилээрээ ч харахгүй. Шал дэмий сагсуурч согтож явахыг сайхан гэж бодож явсан байна. Олигтойхон морьтой уян дээр пичигнүүлэн буучих сайхан юм шиг санагдадаг байв. Архи уучихаад гуйвж дайваад айлын хаалга алд дэлэм татаад орохыг сайхан гэж явсан байгаа юм. Сайхан хүн гэдэг Сүхбаатар шиг хүнийг хэлдэг юм байна.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem.

Dorzh's novel is interesting in the light of Humphrey's article in that it tells us how Gombo, an impetuous young man who had not found his way at first, is transformed by contact with Sükhbaatar to espouse the cause of the country and the revolution. In accordance with the party's watchword, the young Mongol "fulfilled himself" by becoming the "new man" whose ideal was outlined by the propaganda, the good disciplined patriot who modelled his attitude on that of his role models, Sükhbaatar foremost among them.

If we are to continue to reflect on the relationship of mediation as it appears in the Mongolian socialist novel, however, we will have to extend the concept of model, hero or "exemplar" to characters who are not necessarily historical figures, national heroes such as Sükhbaatar and Magsazhav.

In *Tungalag Tamir*, the idea of an initiatory journey that we have just suggested through this observation about *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga's* hero is present in many of the characters. The parallel stories of the two brothers, Erdene and Tömör, present two variants. Like Gombo, Erdene and Tömör are originally characters who lack a plan at the beginning of the story. This is quite clear in the case of the eldest, Erdene, who has had no choice in life but to allow himself to be exploited by others, and thus to be governed by the course of life rather than steering his own boat (to use a river image that is frequently used by the author).

"That same evening, Erdene pitched his miserable tent to the north-west of the camp. And so it was that the merciless law of existence had, in these foreign lands, sent him, his wife and his boy back to their condition as serfs".

Тэр орой Эрдэнийн муу майхан Итгэлтийн хотын баруун хойно босож амьдралын хатуу хууль Эрдэнийг эхнэр хүүхдийн нь хамт хүний нутагт айлын зарц болгожээ.

To recall Erdene's story very briefly: forced to leave his original *khoshuu* (banner) to escape the vengeance of the Zasagt Khan, he thought of going to Khüree to pay homage to the Bogd, crowned shortly before, but his horse was stolen in the Tamir region and he had to sell his services to the rich breeder Itgelt to support his family. After a quarrel with Itgelt, who is wanted by the authorities, he flees to Khüree, where he is hidden by Gerel, a nobleman's wife who has fallen in love with him. When autonomy is abrogated and the *Gemin* invade the country, he narrowly escapes, "rescued" by nobles who buy him to Chinese invaders after he has just been captured. He was then given the task of making contact for them with an emissary of the Tsarist soldiers and joined Baron von Ungern-Sternberg's troops. But when the latter captured Khüree and went on a killing spree, he was disgusted and deserted. He is wandering aimlessly when he crosses paths with Darzhaa Baatar, whom he had met earlier, and who is on his way to meet Sükhbaatar, who is in the process of raising an army of patriots. It is only then, at the end of book two, that he embraces the cause of the People's Party and becomes fully involved in the fight for freedom and revolution.

While Erdene is a character typical of the socialist realist novel, Tömör carries with him the heritage of Mongolian oral literature, and in particular the figure of the "Shiliin Sain Er" that he is charged with embodying. The existence of these Mongolian "Robins

des Bois” is documented in historical sources, but the account of their adventures is generally clothed in legends and epics (swearing oaths, extraordinary strength and courage, etc.). Much more than Erdene, Tömör seems to know what he wants from the start of the novel. And yet, although he “robs from the rich to give to the poor”, Tömör remains an individualist who cannot be said to be acting for the common good. As no one has ever dared to reproach him or oppose him head-on, Khuyag’s speech to him (mentioned several times in this study) acts as an eye-opener. Instead of continuing to wander off on his own, he joins the Khatanbaatar Magsarzhav army. To quote a passage from book three (chapter 4):

“Tömör was naturally confident, but since he joined the army, he had been more so than ever. Whereas he used to think: “Nothing to fear from that one”, or “Poor devil broken by life”, he now thought: “This one speaks the truth” or “What intelligence!” To confidence was now added respect.

He had never ceased to belittle the exorbitant pretensions of the rich and noble. He took pride and flattered himself that he could never find a man to match his courage or wit. He had nothing but contempt for the life of ordinary mortals, when he had made horses flying like the wind, high mountains and desert steppes his most faithful companions. Except that, now that he had joined the Khatanbaatar, he had put a stop to this way of looking down on the world from the lofty heights of his arrogance: for the first time, admiration for others, confidence in their intelligence and strength, were beginning to blossom in him”.

Уулаас итгэмтгий Төмөр Хатанбаатарын цэрэгт орсноос хойш улам ч итгэмтгий болжээ. Гэхдээ урьд «энэ над гэм хийж чадахгүй» гэх буюу «энэ бол ядарсан амьтан» гэж итгэдэг байсан бол одоо «энэ ч зөв юм хэлж байна» гэх буюу «энэ ч ухаантай хүн юм даа» гэж бодоод бишрэн итгэдэг болжээ.

Төмөр ноёд, баядын хэмжээлшгүй эрх мэдлийг эр зоригоор доромжлон явж билээ. Чингэж явахдаа өөрөөс нь чадал зориг ухаантай эргүй гэж бодож явсан. Энэ ч учраас хорвоогийн хар амьдралыг жигшиж, хурдан морины нуруу, эзгүй хээр өндөр уулаар нөхөр хийж явлаа. Гэтэл Хатанбаатарын цэрэгт орсноос хойш Төмөрийн бүгдийг дээрээс хардаг бардам сэтгэл алгуураар дарагдан бусдын ухаан санаа, эр чадалд итгэх сэтгэл бадран байлаа.

Өөрийг нь хос морьтой нисэж явахад гахай явганаар барахгүй гуйлгачин байсан бөгөөд өөрийн нь сайн сэтгэлийн тусламжаар хөл залгаж нутагтаа харьж байсан Хуяг одоо Хатанбаатарын баруун гарын хүн болоод тулалдаанд ялж явааг харахад эрийг хэзээ ч басаж болохгүй ажээ. Ингэж явахад Хуяг өөрийн нь бодож яваагүйг бодож, мэдээгүй зүйлийг мэддэгийг Төмөр ойлгов.

Sükhbaatar/Gombo, Sükhbaatar/Erdene, Magsarzhav/Tömör - these are three examples of the “*bagsh/shavi*” (guide/disciple) pairing so dear to Mongolian culture, involving a historical figure or at least his literary double. Yet these are far from the only couples of this type, based on respect and admiration, which lead a character to want to follow in the footsteps of a model he has chosen for himself.

Tömör/ Khongor (Tungalag Tamir)

Let’s take the example of *Tungalag Tamir*, where this relationship is very clear for many of the protagonists. From the very beginning of the novel, little Khongor (who will

become a young adult in the course of the story) is fascinated by the character of Tömör, a living legend, and from that moment on vows to be like him. This is explicitly revealed by the author when Khongor opens up to Tömör in the third book, just as the hero has decided to draw a line under his bohemian life to obey the party line.

The excerpt I am about to quote ends a chapter in which the young man is rescued from a very bad situation by his hero: he had been arrested for having stolen precious objects to the lamasery:

“When evening came, Tömör gently told him:

- In future, it would be better not to embark on this kind of adventure.

- I risk being tempted again. I’ve been dreaming of becoming a Brave since the very day I discovered you in that ravine.

- Times have changed. I once swore an oath before the Shiliin Bogd. But that was before. I swore to the Khatanbaatar that this was past. I wanted to shake the nobles in their arrogance. I didn’t care about their laws, their prisons and their beatings, I just wanted to fight. That’s no longer the case.

- How do you take an oath before the Shiliin Bogd?

- The Shiliin Bogd is a mountain in the Dariganga region. You have to climb to the top, invoke the names of the Braves of the Khalkh country and take the oath. And whoever sees the first light of dawn appear from the top of his horse becomes a Brave.

- Have you been there? Did you take the oath there?

- Yes. But listen to what your old akh tells you, don’t embark on this kind of adventure. Khongor did not answer. All he had retained from Tömör’s words was the story of the Shiliin Bogd. He had paid no attention to the rest. At the time, how could he have guessed the terrible journeys this story would lead him to?”

— Дүү минь одоо ийм ажил хийсний хэрэггүй гэж орой Хонгорт Төмөр хачин зөөлхөн дуугаар хэлэв.

— Хиймээр санагдаад байх юм. Тантай жалганд учирснаас хойш сайн эр болохсон гэж бодсон.

— Цаг өөр болсон. Ах чинь шилийн богд дээр тангараг тавьсан хүн. Гэвч одоо дахиад тийм ажил хийхгүй гэж Хатанбаатарт тангараг өгсөн. Би ноёдтой хүчээ сорьё гэж бодсон хүн. Тэдэнд хэдийгээр засаг, шорон банз байвч надад эр чадал байгаа болохоор үзэлцье гэж бодсон. Одоо бол тийм биш.

— Шилийн богд дээр яаж тангараг тавьсан юм бэ?

— Шилийн богд гэж Даригангын нутагт байдаг уул. Орой дээр нь гарч халхын сайн эрсийн нэрийг дуудан тангараг тавиад үүрийн цагаан гэгээ тусахыг морин дээрээс харсан хүн сайн эр болдог гэдэг юм.

— Та тэнд тангараг тавьсан юм уу?

— Тавьсан. Миний дүү ахынхаа үгэнд орж битгий ийм ажил хий.

Хонгор хариу дуугарсангүй. Төмөрийн ярианаас гагцхүү шилийн богдын тухайг үлдээж аваад бусдыг нь анхаарсангүй. Гэвч энэ бодол түүнийг ямар гашуун эмгэнэлт явдалд хүрэхийг Хонгор одоо хэрхэн бодож чадах билээ.

If there is one major difference with what Caroline Humphrey describes, it is that the disciple does not listen to his mentor; what he imitates are the representations he makes of

him. The scene in the ravine alluded to is one of the very first pages of the novel, in the second chapter:

“Little Khongor was trotting along the edge of a ravine when a sound came from below. He stopped.

- This way, boy, quickly!

From below, a big voice called to him. He glanced up. Was it a man? It was hard to tell. In any case, something was stirring. [...]

- A brave man shouldn't be afraid of another brave man," said the man with a smile.

- I'm not afraid!

He stepped forward, ready to bolt at the slightest suspicious movement. The man, whose head alone protruded from a withered beast skin, stared unblinkingly into the immaculate blue.

- Get up, akhaa!

- Impossible.

- Why not?

The man remained silent for a moment, staring at the boy out of the corner of his eye:

- This animal skin won't let me move. I've slipped through the fingers of the Luu Gün authorities and, if anyone finds out, I'm dead. But the males stand by one another, don't they? My young friend will surely agree to help me...

The phrase “males reach out” went straight to Khongor's heart. Proudly, he cleared his throat to ask, trying to put on a big voice:

- And how can I help you?

- Bring me a sharp knife and, if you can, a *deel*, a bit and something to eat. But don't say anything about me to anyone”, said the man with a smile, winking at him.

- I am a man! You are a man! I won't talk even if one beats me. I will bring everything back”.

Хонгор хүү гүйсээр гүн жалганы эхээр гарах гэтэл ёроолд ямар нэгэн дуу гарахад зог тусан зогсож харлаа.

- Дүү минь гүйгээд ир гэж тэртээ дороос бүдүүн дуутай хүн дуугарав.

Ажиглавал тэр дор хүн гэхэд ч бэрх биш ч гэхэд бэрх нэг юм хөдөлж байв. [...]

- Эр хүн, эр хүнээсээ айх хэрэггүй гээд тэр хүн инээмсэглэв.

- Би айгаагүй гээд хүү эвгүй юм гарвал буцаад зугтахад бэлхэн алгуурхан ойртов.

Хатсан ширэн хөнжил дотор зөвхөн толгойгоо гаргаад хэвтэж байгаа тэр хүний нүд гялалзан, цэлмэг хөх тэнгэр өөд цавчилгүй ширтэж байв.

- Ах аа, та бос л доо

- Ах нь босож чадахгүй

- Яагаад босож чадахгүй байгаа юм бэ?

Тэр хүн хэсэг дуугүй болж, нүднийхээ булангаар Хонгорыг ширтэв.

- Ах нь ширлэгдсэн хүн. Луу гүний тамган дээрээс оргоод энд ирлээ. Хүн мэдвэл намайг барьж аваад ална. Гэвч эрх хүн эр хүндээ хайртай байдаг болохоор ахдаа тус болох байх гэж итгэж байна гэлээ. «Эр хүн эр хүндээ хайртай» гэдэг үг Хонгорын сэтгэлд харван орж, баяртай инээмсэглэн, ихэмсгээр хоолойгоо түрж засаад:

- Би танд яаж тус болох вэ? гэж хиймэл бүдүүн дуугаар асуугаад хажууд нь тулж очив.

- Дүү минь хурц хутга, чадвал дээл хувцас, хазаар, идэх юм авчир. Харин ахыгаа хэнд ч хэлж болохгүй гээд тэр хүн инээмсэглэж том хар нүдээ ирмэлээ.

- Би ч эр хүн. Та ч эр хүн. Зодсон ч хэлэхгүй. Бүгдийг аваад ирнэ [...]

Let us just note right now that when he uses the word “brave”, the man trapped in the ravine includes both of them under the expression. The reader is soon told the identity of the fugitive, as is the boy when he returns with what has been asked of him:

“As he watched this man who, despite his cangue, had managed to travel all this way, Khongor felt himself becoming more and more excited. All the stories he had heard so many times in his short life about these Braves of the heights “without fire or god” were running through his head. He couldn’t stand it any longer, so he asked:

- Are you a Brave of the Heights?

Tömör opened his eyes and looked at him for a long moment.

- Have you heard of Tsakhiur Tömör of the Zasagt Khan?" he replied at last, smiling. Khongor had overheard conversations about this Tsakhiur Tömör of Zasagt Khan, famous throughout the Khalkh country and who, it was said, had been captured the previous year and interrogated by the prison takhar. (policeman)

- Like everyone else, akhaa... Are you Tsakhiur Tömör?

- In person! I am Tsakhiur Tömör.

Khongor was overjoyed at the idea of meeting such a legend, talking to him and even helping him. He stared at him with eyes as round as marbles.

- And what is my young friend’s name?

- Khongor, son of the wealthy Itgelt of Luu Gün, the boy replied quickly in his cheerful voice.

Tömör soon stood up and took off his clothes. He buried some of them in the ground, shook off the others and put the coat back on his back. The smallest gesture by the fabulous character seemed extraordinary to the boy. And when he saw him swallow the contents of a full gallon of butter in a few mouthfuls, before throwing the empty belly away, his amazement was complete. Was there any other man in the world capable of such a prodigy?

- Long live my boy! Akhaa will never forget the hand held out by a brave man. The road is long, the elephant’s neck is short: we will meet again. Go home now.

Khongor picked up the knife, mounted his horse and headed for the camp, repeating over and over again: “The males stand by one another”.

Биеэ ийм хатуу ширэнд боолгож үдүүлсэн боловч өдий хол газар явж ирсэн энэ хүнийг харах тусам Хонгорын сэтгэл хөөрөн богино амьдралдаа олонтой сонссон «гэрт орж, гэгээнд мөргөдөггүй» сайн эрийн тухай ярианууд сэтгэлд ургаж байлаа.

- Та шилийн сайн эр үү? гэж Хонгор тэвчилгүй асуув. Төмөр нүдээ алгуур нээж, хүүг удтал ширтэж байснаа инээмсэглэх мэт болов.

- Чи Засагт ханы цахиур Төмөр гэж сонссон уу.

Өнгөрсөн жил тамгын жасаан дээр халх даяар цууд гарсан Засагт ханы цахиур Төмөр гэгч сайн эр баригдаад байцагдаж байна гэсэн яриаг сонсож билээ.

- Сонссон ах аа. Та цахиур Төмөр үү?

- Тийм. Би цахиур Төмөр.

Түмэнд алдаршсан мундаг эрд тус болоод зэрэгцэн ярьж байгаадаа баярлан, нүдээ дүрлийлгэн марсайн инээв.

- Дүүгийн нэр хэн билээ?

- Хонгор. Луу гүний баян Итгэлтийн хүү гэж нарийхан дуугаар цовоо гэгч нь хариулав.

Удалгүй Төмөр босож дээл хувцсаа тайлан, заримы нь газар булж, зарим нь гүвж сэгсрэн өмсөв. Гадуур нь Хонгорын авчирсан одончүү цувьг өмсөөд бүслэв. Энэ гайхамшигт эрийн хөдөлгөөн бүхэн хүүд ер бусын юм шиг санагдаж байв. Ялангуяа гүзээний булан тосыг хэдхэн үмхээд алга болгож, ханцуйгаараа амаа шудран арчаад хоосон гүзээгий нь тэр хол шидэж орхих нь хэн ч хийж чадахгүй гайхамшигт юм мэт бодогдов.

- За дүү минь урт насалж удаан жаргаарай. Ах нь эр хүний ачийг хариулж чадна. Замын хүзүү урт, зааны хүзүү богино болохоор уулзана даа. Одоо дүү минь харь гэж Төмөр хэлэв. Хонгор хутгаа авч мордоод гэрийн зүг сажлан явж байхдаа «эр хүн эр хүндээ хайртай» гэж давтан дахин дахин [бодоод явсан].

Girard's theory of mimetic desire provides us with some interesting keys to analysis. When he speaks of the "seminal function" of literature, the anthropologist means the capacity that readings - and this would also be true of tales and legends - have to provide individuals with ideals towards which to strive in their own existence, and takes the example of Emma Bovary, Flaubert's heroine:

"We find desire according to the Other and the "**seminal**" function of literature in Flaubert's novels. Emma Bovary desires through the romantic heroines whose imaginations she is full of. [...] Gaultier observes [...] that, in order to achieve their goal of "conceiving themselves to be other than they are", Flaubert's heroes choose a "model" and "imitate from the character they have resolved to be everything that is possible to imitate, the whole exterior, the whole appearance, the gesture, the intonation, the dress".³⁶⁸

For Girard, Emma Bovary's relationship with her "models" is a typical example of what he calls external mediation:

We will speak of external mediation when the distance is sufficient for the two spheres of possibilities, each of which is occupied by the mediator and the subject, not to be in contact [...] the distance between the mediator and the subject is first and foremost spiritual". They may be "physically close to each other, but the social and intellectual distance that separates them remains unbridgeable. [...] No rivalry with the mediator is possible. Harmony is never seriously disturbed between the two companions".³⁶⁹

For Girard, there is one decisive factor that gives rise to rivalry, and that is when the model refuses his admirer:

"The impulse towards the object is basically **an impulse towards the mediator**; in "internal mediation", this impulse is **broken** by the mediator himself since this mediator desires, or perhaps possesses, this object. The disciple, fascinated by his model, inevitably sees in the **mechanical obstacle** that the latter puts in his way proof of a perverse will towards him. The subject is convinced that his model considers himself too superior to accept him as a disciple. The subject therefore has a heart-

³⁶⁸ Girard, op. cit, pdf version p. 9.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 11.

rending feeling for this model, formed by the union of these two opposites [...] the most submissive veneration and the most intense resentment. **This is the feeling we call hatred. Only the being who prevents us from satisfying a desire that he himself has suggested to us is truly the object of hatred**". (my emphasis)³⁷⁰

It is worth noting that the author of *Tungalag Tamir* would probably have agreed with Girard on this point. The same chapter also features another character who has a certain admiration for Tömör, the *takhar* Badarch, the man who managed to capture him before Tömör managed to escape. Badarch is one of *Tungalag Tamir* novel's "negative" heroes, present through most of the story. Lodoidamba writes:

"The previous year, it was Badarch who captured Tömör when he was on the verge of drowning. He took care of the punishment himself, the caning and the leather vice, as well as the prison. Since he had taken up his post, many men had been subjected to his abuse. Not a single one had escaped. Tsakhiur Tömör had escaped. Just thinking about it enraged him.

But Badarch could only whistle with **admiration** at the courage with which Tömör had endured the blows. Some men like to **redouble their violence when a wolf resists them**. Badarch was one of those men".

Бадарч өнгөрсөн жил Төмөрийг усанд хөвж явахад нь бариад тамган дээр аваачиж өөрөө банздан, ширлэжээ. Тахар хийсэн үедээ олон хүнийг ширлэсэн бөгөөд тэд нараас оргож байсан хүнгүй. Гэтэл цахиур Төмөр оргожээ. Үүнийг бодох тутам хорсож байв. Өнгөрсөн жил Төмөрийг банздаж байхдаа түүний ган зориг тэсвэрт нь **бахархаж** байсан. Чоныг барьж авсан хүн эр **чадалд** нь **бахархаж байгаад зовоох удаа байдаг**. Төмөрийг банздаж байхад Бадарч яг л тийм байсан.

We find the same idea later in the novel, expressed by the narrator in relation to a couple who once again involve Tömör, this time no longer as a model but as an admirer. Tömör is not, however, a victim of the girardian "mimetic rivalry" that gives rise to hatred and resentment. In the following passage, the author develops a major transformation in the character of Tömör. I will quote it in full:

"He had never ceased to belittle the exorbitant pretensions of the nobles and the wealthy. He took glory and flattered himself, thinking that he would never be able to find a man to match his courage or wit. He had nothing but contempt for the life of ordinary mortals, when he had made horses flying like the wind, high mountains and desert steppes his most faithful companions. Except that, now that he had joined the Khatanbaatar, his way of looking down on the world from the lofty heights of his arrogance had changed: for the first time, **admiration for others**, confidence in their intelligence and strength, were beginning to blossom within him.

At a time when he rode like the wind across the steppes on not one but two horses, he had crossed paths with Khuyag, when the latter had only his feet to walk on, like a common pig. Worse: he had even been reduced to begging. And it was only thanks to

³⁷⁰ I quoted this passage earlier but I would like to insist.

Tömör's generosity and the horse he provided him with that Khuyag was able to return home. But now Khuyag had become the Khatanbaatar's right-hand man and was racking up victories in battle. No one would have questioned his bravery. Tömör realised that Khuyag was thinking about things himself couldn't think about, knowing things he didn't know.

Seeing men whom you thought superior to you **rise above you can make you jealous**. It is not uncommon then to start **treating as enemies those you once protected**. That is where envy and resentment come from in this world.

Tömör didn't react like that. In fact, the opposite was happening: every day, his respect and esteem for Khuyag grew stronger”.

Төмөр ноёд, баядын хэмжээлшгүй эрх мэдлийг эр зоригоор доромжлон явж билээ. Чингэж явахдаа өөрөөс нь чадал зориг ухаантай эргүй гэж бодож явсан. Энэ ч учраас хорвоогийн хар амьдралыг жигшиж, хурдан морины нуруу, эзгүй хээр өндөр уулаар нөхөр хийж явлаа. Гэтэл Хатанбаатарын цэрэгт орсноос хойш Төмөрийн бүгдийг дээрээс хардаг бардам сэтгэл алгуураар дарагдан бусдын ухаан санаа, эр чадалд итгэх сэтгэл бадран байлаа.

Өөрийг нь хос морьтой нисэж явахад гахай явганаар барахгүй гуйлгачин байсан бөгөөд өөрийн нь сайн сэтгэлийн тусламжаар хөл залгаж нутагтаа харьж байсан Хуяг одоо Хатанбаатарын баруун гарын хүн болоод тулалдаанд ялж явааг харахад эрийг хэзээ ч басаж болохгүй ажээ. Ингэж явахад Хуяг өөрийн нь бодож яваагүйг бодож, мэдээгүй зүйлийг мэддэгийг Төмөр ойлгов.

Өөрөөсөө дор гэж үзэж явсан хүн дээр болоход зарим хүнд атаархах сэтгэл үүсэн гарч хайрлан үзэж байснаа дайсагнан үздэг удаа бишгүй байдаг. Ер нь ч хорвоогийн атаа жөтөө үүнээс үүсдэг билээ.

Харин Төмөр бол Хуягтай атаархах сэтгэл огт байсангүй. Өдөр хоног өнгөрөх тутамд түүнд итгэн бишрэх сэтгэл нь хөгжиж байлаа.

As in the previous passage, Lodoidamba is analysing the workings of social relations, and his entire literary oeuvre bears witness to what we would call an ethnological sensibility. The Mongolian writer does not deny what Girard calls “external mediation”, but does not make a victim of it of a hero he wanted to be “positive”.

Coming back to Khongor's admiration for this model, here too, Khongor immediately neutralises the devastating effect that “mimetic rivalry” could have had on their relationship: Tömör does not “oppose an obstacle” to his “admirer”, perhaps out of interest but without any secret motivation, he accepts to recognise an equal in the little boy. A simple phrase that the boy repeats to himself unites the two characters for the whole of the novel in a bond of love and not of hatred. The author insists on this little phrase several times in the chapter: when Khongor comes across Dulmaa, the sheep herder employed by his father:

“Khongor bit his lip. With his riding crop, he beckoned her to be quiet before moving closer:

- The males stand by one another !

- The males are reaching out? What do you mean by that?

Dulmaa burst out laughing”.

“[...] хүү хөмхийгөө зуун, ташуураар чимээгүй гэж дохио өгөөд ойртон очив.

- Эр хүн эр хүндээ хайртай

- Юу, эр хүн, эр хүндээ хайртай гэнээ гээд Дулмаа тачигнатал инээх [...]"

And then, after helping his hero:

"Khongor picked up the knife, mounted his horse and set off towards the camp, repeating over and over again: "The males stand by one another"".

Хонгор хутгаа авч мордоод гэрийн зүг сажлан явж байхдаа «эр хүн эр хүндээ хайртай» гэж давтан дахин дахин [эрэж бодож явсан]

In the *ger*, when he heard the adults talking about Tömör, he once again took pride in the fact that Tömör had spoken of him as a "Brave":

"The more Khongor heard about Tömör, the prouder he felt. "Tömör Guai said I was a true Brave!" He trembled with emotion".

Төмөрийн тухай яриаг сонсох тусам Хонгорын сэтгэл хэмжээлшгүй бахархал оволзон хөөрч «Төмөр гуай намайг эр хүн гэсэн шүү дээ» гэж бодогдож байжээ.

Much later in the story, after the little boy becomes a young man and commits his first horse theft, we understand that he has never forgotten that first meeting or the famous phrase that has become a slogan for him. While gripped by the fear of being unmasked, he crosses paths with a little boy (not important for our purposes, but the boy is Khürel, Khuyag's son):

"The young man sat cross-legged on the grass and looked at Khürel with a smile. There was arrogance in his voice and in his gestures. He may have looked like a mature man, but in truth he was only 16 or 17. He was wearing a dark blue serge *deel* with a green crepe belt loosely wrapped around his hips, and old, thick-soled, black leather summer boots.

Khürel stood in awe of the ornate saddle, the horses, the heavy riding crop and the pipe with its white mouthpiece as long as half a hand. In his eyes, the man was already an adult, a distinguished adult at that! And when this adult heard him call him "akhaa", he had assumed an air of dignity and superiority. Until then, he had ostentatiously glared at the boy, but it wasn't long before his gaze softened. An old memory had lit up his face with a tender glow.

- **The males stand by one another...** Come on, my boy, sit down over here. Would you like some meat?

Залуу ногоон дээр тавтай завилан суугаад, Хүрэл рүү харж, инээмсэглэв. Хэдийгээр энэ залуугийн дуу хөдөлгөөн нь ихэмсэг бөгөөд нилээд настай эр хүний шинжийг зориуд дууриах боловч үнэн хэрэг дээрээ арван зургаа, долоон насны хүн байлаа. Хөх даалимбуу дээл дээр ногоон дурдан бүс сулхан ороож, хуучин хар луучин гутал өмсчээ. Эдэлсэн эмээл, уясан морь, мухар сөөм хиртэй цагаан соруултай гаанс, бүдүүн бөгөөд урт тэнзэн ташуур бүхнийг нь гайхан ширтсэн Хүрэл хүүгийн нүдэнд энэ хүн бол нас бие гүйцсэн дэгжин сайхан залуу эр харагдах ажээ. Өмнө нь зогсож байгаа хүүхэд «Ах та» гэхийг сонссон залуугийн байдал улам ч ихэмсэг бөгөөд намбатай болно.

Хүүг залуу эр ярвайн ширтэж байснаа нүд нь зөөлрөн эрт тэртээ цагт болсон дурсгалт бодлын яруу туяа нүүрэнд нь тодорлоо.

— Эр хүн, эр хүндээ хайртай байдаг юм даа хөө... за дүү минь энд суу. Хоёулаан хүйтэн мах идье

We could go on and on about the relationship between Khongor and Tömör, the man he has chosen as his ‘exemplar’, but that’s not the purpose of this article. What I find interesting here is that Lodoidamba’s analysis of how social relationships work is in line with Girard’s theory of the ambiguity intrinsic to admiration. Although this analysis has a general, ‘anthropological’ scope, the theory seems to apply in a Mongolian context too, or at least Mongolian observers - and here the ethnologist speaks in Lodoidamba as much as the novelist - have observed the phenomenon it describes. Girard thus complements Humphrey’s analysis, this later focusing more on the irenic dimension of the Bagsh/Shavi relationship.

Bat/Erdene – Erenchin – Sükhbaatar (Pyotr)

In *Tungalag Tamir* there is no shortage of examples of this *Bagsh/Shavi* relationship. Tömör’s and Erdene’s destinies can be seen to progress in parallel, in directions that match the way in which the two characters are constructed. Similarly, the destinies of Khongor and Bat follow different paths, but each follows in the footsteps of their models, Tömör for Khongor, Erdene for Bat,³⁷¹ even if the latter’s natural father is not the only spiritual father he chooses for himself in the course of the novel.

The mimetic relationship between Bat and his father is expressed by the author in the third book, when the boy is reunited with his father after being separated from him for a long time:

“One winter day Pyotr returned with Erdene. When he saw his father arriving, in his old midnight-blue tussore silk *deel*, white lambskin cap, long sabre at his belt and wooden revolver, Bat stood for a moment speechless, unsure of how to welcome him. Erdene kissed him on both cheeks and let a few tears fall, which he wiped away with the palm of his hand.

Erdene had always thought of Bat as a young novice. Now he was looking at a sturdy man. He hesitated between an impression of deep familiarity and that of being face to face with someone he had only glimpsed in the past.

Bat hesitated too. It wasn’t the man he once remembered as the most important person in the world: his role model, **the man on whom he modelled his actions**. And yet, although intimidated, the more he looked at him, the clearer it became that this was indeed the father who had haunted his dreams for so many years”.

Өвлийн нэг өдөр Эрдэнэ, Петртэй хамт ирлээ. Хуучин хөх чисчүү дээл, цагаан хурган хувин малгай өмсөж модон хуйтай буу, урт хар хуйтай сэлэм зүүсэн эцгээ хараад Бат яах учраа

³⁷¹ It is perhaps not insignificant that the first two survive when the other two die. Bat and Erdene have fulfilled themselves within the party and the national cause, they represent the new socialist man, Bat and Tömör remain linked to the folk heritage that is no longer appropriate in the new society.

олохгүй гайхан зогсож билээ. Эрдэнэ хүүгийнхээ хоёр хацар дээрээс үнссэнээ нүднээсээ гарсан нулимсыг алгаараа арчив.

Эрдэнэ, Батыг бодохдоо урьдын бага бандиар нь дүрсэлдэг байсан. Гэтэл одоо түүний өмнө том биетэй ханхар хар хүү зогсож байсан тул нэг бодоход үлэмжийн дотны хүн шиг, нэг бодоход аль нэг газар хальт харсан таних, танихгүйн хоорондох хүн шиг байлаа.

Бат аавыгаа хараад бас л хоёрдмол сэтгэл төрнө. Өмнө нь зогсож байгаа хүн бол хэдэн жилийн өмнө хорвоо дээр хамгийн дотно бөгөөд **юм бүхэнд дуурайл болж** байсан аав биш мэт учраас бишүүрхэх сэтгэл буй болно. Гэвч харах тусам олон жилийн турш зүүдлэн бодож, хүсэл мөрөөдлийг эзэлсэн ааваас нь өөр хэн ч байж боломгүй ажээ.

In the course of his wanderings, Bat crossed paths with several “spiritual fathers” who added to this initial model without quite replacing it. First there was Erenchin, the lama who had become disillusioned with the Faith, scandalised by the attitude of a Bogd whom he considered responsible for the stagnation into which the country was plunged, and who ended up being murdered on the Bogd’s orders. After instilling study in him (which was first and foremost religious education), Erenchin advised Bat, at the time of his death, not to follow the path he himself had taken. Bat was not going to follow in his model’s footsteps, but by obeying his “last wishes” he is linked to him by a relationship of guide and disciple.

Initially, it was the Buddha’s teaching that Bat discovered thanks to Erenchin:

“Erenchin had left the Nar Vanchin lamasery at a very young age to walk to Gandan. From the rank of yulzhin to the finish line, he had worked his way up to the highest possible level of erudition. And so, having mastered the esoteric art of incantations, he had passed his rhetoric exam a few years earlier.

His name was Erenchin. From morning to night, crowds of people came to consult him and follow his teachings, from simple disciples to great scholars. His many disciples took turns with the daily chores, so Bat was almost always free.

In Zaya, Bat had studied the teachings of the Bogd. But that of Günchin Lama was just as profound, said Erenchin. The teaching was what matter, not the Book. So he introduced Bat to the Dashchoimbol College.

His new lama master didn’t beat Bat; on the contrary, he pushed him to study more and more”.

Тэр лам урьд залуудаа Нар Ванчины хүрээнээс явган явж гандан дээр ирж суугаад юлжингээс эхлэн зиндааны анги болж хэдэн жилийн өмнө аграмбын дамжаа барьсан хүн байлаа.

Энэ хүний Эрэнчин гэдэг бөгөөд өглөөнөөс орой хүртэл зиндаа бүхий бөөн бөөн хүн ирж ном заалгадаг байжээ. Шавь нар нь ээлжээ хүлээж байхдаа хамаг ажлыг нь хийдэг болохоор Батад хийх ажил бараг байсангүй.

Бат Заяын хүрээнд сууж байхдаа Богд ламын Игчаа үзэж байж билээ. Гэтэл Эрэнчин «Бурхны номд ялгаа байхгүй гэхдээ Гүнчин ламын игчаа гүн бодолтой юм шүү» гэж хэлээд Дашчоймбол дацанд оруулжээ. Шинэ багш нь Батыг зоддоггүй боловч за чөлөөгүй ном үзүүлэн суулгадаг байв.

Bat’s admiration for Erenchin is not blind, as is Khongor’s for Tömör (Khongor wants to become a “Brave” but doesn’t really understand what that means):

“For two days, the two lamas engaged in a fierce contest of rhetoric. Bat was ecstatic. Even Erenchin’s voice sounded different, stronger. It was as if he had grown younger. His forehead was dripping with sweat and his eyes sparkled. From time to time, his face flushed. The temple was packed and everyone was in awe. Swelling with pride, Bat wanted to shout: “He is my Teacher!”

Ингээд тэр хүнтэй хоёр өдөр ном хаялцаж байхыг Бат харж үнэхээр бишрэв. Эрэнчиний дуу нь улам чангаран, залуу болсон юм шиг харагдаж байсан бөгөөд хөлс нь дааварлан, нүд нь гялалзаж, заримдаа царай нь ухаа ягаан болон ном хаяж байхад нь дуган дүүрэн хүмүүс шагшин гайхаж байв. Энэ үед «энэ чинь миний багш» гэж хашгирмаар Батад санагдаж байжээ.

This is an “exemplar” in Humphrey’s sense. That is, let us recall it:

“A person with no teacher is ‘no-body’, Mongols said to me. Teachers are often Buddhist lamas, but they can also be inspired women, scholars, statesmen, or indeed anyone who is held to have perfected an admired quality. **The teacher is someone who advanced and improved him-** or herself in relation to some moral principle, such as ‘bravery’, ‘purity of thought’ or ‘compassion’. In the case of religious people, behind the teacher there may lie a saint or god, to whose qualities the teacher also aspires”.³⁷²

The fact that Erenchin is a lama sets the novel in the Mongolian culture so dear to the author. It should be noted that although the novel does not exonerate the Faith and the Bogd - the censors were watching - it is not Buddhist culture that is called into question but its misappropriation. Bat’s admiration for Erenchin, which is motivated by the conviction that his life fulfils an ideal, takes shape in the young man’s progress in his personal quest:

“Bat soon obtained his yulzhin, ranking among the ten most brilliant students and even close to third place. When he told him so, Erenchin was perhaps even more delighted than he was:

- Come on, gevshee, from now on you must learn, learn, learn. Spend the night studying the teachings of Günchin Lama and don’t put your book away in its case until the first birds sing”.

Бат Юлжингийн зиндаанд орсноор барахгүй арван толгойд орж дөрөв дээр босох болоод баяртай ирж хэлэхэд багш нь их баярлаж:

- За гэвш минь одоо үүрийн шувуу жиргэтэл суугаад гүнчин ламын игчааг цээжиндээ баринтаглана даа гэж хэлжээ.

It is worth noting that the model does not “oppose an obstacle” to his admirer, preventing the admiration from turning into hateful rivalry. When Erenchin dies, he gives Bat a piece of advice that will turn his life around. I've also included the brief dialogue preceding the sentence that interests me in particular:

³⁷² Humphrey, 1997, p. 35.

“That evening he sent them all away, keeping only Bat close to him.
- Who hit me?
- Thieves.
- What did they take from me?
- They did not take anything...
- If they did not take anything, they were not thieves. Could it be the Bogd’ blow then?
- How come ? Why the hell would the Bogd come after you?
- In any case, they were certainly not thieves. You, obviously, you do not know who murdered the Chin van Khanddorzh. And the Da lam Tserenchimed. The Bogd has a long reach. My son, get out of this bottomless pit while you still can.

He fell silent.

The yurt fell silent, the light from the large oil lamps fading. Erenchin breathed intermittently.

- Gevshee, you are an intelligent person. You have to find your own way. Don't follow my path. Don't take the risk of finding yourself in the twilight of your life, moping when you look back, with the terrible feeling that you have lost your illusions. Where I die, life must be reborn. At first, the road ahead seemed as wide as an avenue. Today, it is not even a path. My son, find yourself a narrow path at the start, but one that widens as you go along. It may be that this path is the simple life of the honest man, the layman...

Орой бусад шавь нараа явуулаад ганц Батыг дэргэдээ үлдээжээ.

- Намайг хэн цохисон бэ?

- Дээрэмчин цохисон.

- Юугий минь авсан бэ?

- Юу ч аваагүй

- Юу ч аваагүй болохоор дээрэмчид биш бололтой. Богд цохиогүй байгаа?

- Хаанаас даа. Багш минь Богд гэгээн юу гэж таныг цохих вэ?

- Юу ч л гэсэн дээрэмчин биш. Чин ван Ханддорж, Чин сүжигт чин ван да лам Цэрэнчимидийг хэн алсныг чи мэдэхгүй биз дээ. Богдын гар нь урт юм шүү дээ. Дүү минь энэ харанхуй нүхнээс зайлж үз гээд дуугүй болов.

Гэрийн дотор нам гүм бөгөөд том тосон дэнгийн гэрэл их бага болон асаж Эрэнчин удаан бөгөөд тасалдан амьсгалж байв.

- Гэвш ээ чи ухаантай хүн. Өөрийн замыг бодох хэрэгтэй байна. Над шиг өнгөрүүлсэн амьдралаа эргэж харж үр ашиггүй гаслах, үзсэн бүх юмандаа итгэл алдах гунигт битгий хүрээрэй. Миний амьдрал дууссан газраас амьдралаа эхлэх хэрэгтэй. Эхлээд явахад өргөн дэлгэр зам шиг санагдаж байсан. Гэтэл одоо миний өмнө жим ч үгүй болов. Хүү минь чи эхлээд нарийн боловч явах тутам өргөн болдог замыг олж ав. **Тэр бол энгийн хар амьдралын зам бололтой...**

Bat returns to this moment later in the book, when he stumbles across Baldan, the caravanner who led him to Khüree, and Erenchin’s childhood friend:

“- It was when your teacher passed away that you decided to return to secular life?

- Yes, I listened to his last words.

- And you became a schoolmaster, didn't you?

- Assistant, since I finished my studies at the university”.

- Хүү минь чи багшийгаа таалал төгсөхөд хар болсон хэрэг үү?
- Тийм ээ. Багш минь намайг хар бол гэсэн.
- Тэгээд танхимын багш болсон хэрэг үү?
- Сургуульд орж төгсөөд танхимын дагуур сургагч багш.

This exchange allows us to make the transition to a new guide among those who determine the course of Bat’s life: Sükhbaatar, who joins forces in this role with the Bolshevik Pyotr, Erdene’s friend. While it is Erenchin who urges Bat to return to the “profane” life, it is Sükhbaatar and Pyotr who enrol him in school.

I have already mentioned the scene where Bat and Zhargal meet Sükhbaatar. The end is also important because it is the moment when that the hero of independence tells them that he wants them to join the teacher training school that he plans to create:

“This is the moment Zhargal chooses to ask:

- Akhaa, would you take us into your army?

Sükhbaatar laughed heartily:

- So that you can chop off heads?

His face suddenly changed expression and, after a silence, he said:

- Right now, there is somethin which does matter more than guns and sabres: education.

I am planning to open a school soon to train future teachers whose mission it will be to pass on knowledge to the children of the people. Enrol in this school! Commissar Pyotr is of the same opinion”.

– Ах аа бид хоёрыг цэрэгтээ авахгүй юү? гэж Жаргал хэлэв.

– Цэрэгт ороод цавчиж гарах уу? гээд хөгжилтэй инээснээ царай нь гэнэт хувирч төв болоод хэсэг дуугүй болсноо:

– Дүү нар минь одоо манайд цавчих буудахаас илүү хэрэгтэй юм байна. Тэр бол эрдэм. Та хоёр эрдэмтэй хүн бол, Удахгүй ардын хүүхдэд ном эрдэм заах оюутан багш нарыг сургах танхимд байгуулах гэж байгаа. Та хоёр тэнд ороорой. Петр комиссар ч надад ярьсан юм даг гэлээ.

Bat’s fate was then “sealed”, so to speak, when Pyotr died. The students of the school wrote a letter to the General:

“General Sükhbatar, Commander-in-Chief of the People’s Army,

We ask you to take note of the following request:

We, the students of the University, are eager to enlist in the Army of the People to fight the enemy until he is reduced to ashes. In this way we will avenge the death of Pyotr, who gave his precious life defending the cause of our Motherland.

We wish to thank you for your attention to our request, and hope that you will grant it.

They all affixed their signatures to the bottom of their letter and designated two of them to carry it.

Sükhbaatar received them:

- Commissar Pyotr fought for the good of our people. The best way for you to avenge his death is to study hard and become worthy teachers. You should also set up a youth cell within your school. You could call it the “Comrades of Pyotr”, don't you think? And a few days later, the “Comrades of Pyotr” cell was inaugurated at the university”.

Ардын цэргийг ерөнхийлөн захирах жанжин Сүхбаатар танаа өргөн гуйх нь:

Оюутны сургуулийн шавь нар бид, улс төрийг минь хамгаалж яваад алтан амиа алдсан Петр ахын өшөөг авахын учир ардын улаан цэрэгт орж хувьсгалын муусайн дайсан нарыг үнсэн товрог болгох хүсэл оргилон байна. Анхааран үзэж бидний хүслийг тогтоон соёрхоно уу?» гэж шавь нар өргөдөл бичээд бүгд гарын үсэг зурж, хоёр хүн томилуулан явуулсныг Сүхбаатар хүлээж аваад «Петр комиссар бол манай монголын ард олны сайн, сайхны төлөө тэмцэж явсан хүн. Та нар ном эрдмээ хичээнгүйлэн сурч, сайн багш нар болох нь дайснаас өшөө авч байгаа хэрэг. Бас цөм залуучуудын эвлэлийн гишүүн болж сургууль дээрээ үүр байгуулж түүнээ «Петр» гэж нэрлэвэл зүгээр» гэж зөвлөв.

Хэдэн өдрийн дараа оюутны сургууль дээр залуучуудын эвлэлийн үүр байгуулагдаж түүндээ Петрчүүд гэдэг нэр өгчээ.

Bat invests himself fully in his mission, and represents in the novel the model of the teacher from the people who passes on knowledge to the younger generations of “new men” trained in socialism, a role taken on by Nasanbat in *Üüriin Туяа*.

It is not insignificant that three of Bat’s models (Erenchin, Sükhbaatar, Pyotr) die in the course of the story, definitively preventing admiration from turning into rivalry, the model is definitively at a distance, in a sphere that does not allow “internal mediation” to take over, to use Girard’s terms. And I would add that, to take a step back from our literary sources, Sükhbaatar's premature death made his 'heroisation' possible, and did not prevent Choibalsan from forging his own cult of personality. Here we come back to Mácsai’s article, which explicitly links the construction of the hero with heroic death in the name of an ideal, in her case as in ours, that of the nation. She notes that death in battle transfigures the hero, making him immortal and giving him a status and role comparable to that of the saints in Christianity (we are, of course, still talking about representations).

“This kind of representation as well as this interpretation and “use” of the hero’s person parallel the role of saints in Christian religion. The lives of saints provide models of the correct life-style and behavior for the believers, and their objects – the relics – have extraordinary effect after the saints’ death. Hero and saint are similar not only in their tools and interpretations, but also in their status and role”.³⁷³

This idea of sanctity conferred on the example, model or exemplar is present in Macsai, in Humphrey - albeit only implicitly in his case - and in Girard, who entitles an entire chapter of his research “men will be gods to each other”, so it is not surprising to find it in our novels. Let us look at this passage:

Danzan sat down next to him, smiling :

- Well, let’s not talk about debt repayment any more. Perhaps you are right. We must lead the Revolution with courage and determination, **our late comrade liked to say.**

³⁷³ I already quoted this passage from Mácsai, p. cit. p. 370.

He sighed and said calmly:

- At the Third Great Party Congress, the development of Mongolia will probably be discussed. What do you think? It is a major issue, isn't it?

Erdene's eyes sparkled at this question. His face lit up:

- In the fourth year of Olnoo Örgögdön, in Luu Gün, I met a Russian who was a member of the Bolshevik Party. Later, in 1921, he came to help us. He was the commissar of a Red Army unit. His name was Pyotr and he was with us in the eastern provinces during the offensive against the Whites. He fell under their bullets.

His eyes clouded over, he heaved a deep sigh and continued:

- "You have to find a new way, a way other than the exploitation of man by man. And we will help you": that is what he used to say. I think this is the way forward. The only right one. What is important is that people work honestly, and focus on giving this country a solid level of education and a solid economy, that is my opinion.

And Erdene goes on to explain his point of view".

Данзан зэрэгцэн суугаад мишээх мэт болсноо «Хятадын өрийг ч төлөхөө больё. Магадгүй таны хэлдэг зөв ч байж болно. Ер нь хувьсгалын хэрэгт ган зоригтой байх нь дээр гэж **талиигаач хэлдэгсэн**» гээд санаа алдаад нам дуугаар

— Манай намын гуравдугаар их хурал монгол улсын хөгжлийн тухай асуудлыг ярих байх. Түүнийг та юу гэж үзэж байна. энэ бол тун чухал зүйл биз дээ? гэж асуув.

Энэ асуудлыг сонссон Эрдэнэ нүд сэргэж нүүр дүүрэн мишээснээ «Би олноо өргөгдсөний дөтгөөр онд Луу гүний нутагт нэгэн оростой танилцсан. Тэр бол Большевик намын гишүүн байсан хожим арван нэгэн онд манайд туслах гэж ирсэн. Зөвлөлтийн улаан цэргийн нэг ангийн комиссар байсан. Та таних ч байх. Петр гэдэг. **Тэгээд зүүн аймагт бидэнтэй хамт цагаантны эсрэг дайтаж яваад осолдсон юмсан** гээд нүд нь гөлрөн гүн гэгчийн санаа алдсанаа тэр хүн танай монголд хүн хүнээ дарлан мөлжихгүй шинэ зам хэрэгтэй. Түүнд чинь бид тусална гэж хэлсэн. Би түүнийг ёстой бидний ганц зөв зам гэж боддог. Хүн бүр ариун шударгаар ажил хийж, улс орноо эрдэм боловсрол, эдийн засаг өндөртэй болгох нь юу юунаас чухал хэрэгтэй хэмээн боддог» гэж хэлээд Эрдэнэ монгол орны хөгжлийн тухай бодож явдаг зүйлээ ярилаа.

The word "*taliigaach*" in Mongolian means "dead", "deceased", "departed", but the dictionary specifies that it is a term used out of respect. The author does not explicitly specify to whom it refers, but the reader understands that it is Sükhbaatar. The words of the hero of the revolution who died a few chapters earlier are crystallised by his death; here it is the character of Danzan who refers to him as the path to follow.

In the next paragraph, Erdene refers to Pyotr, who also died in battle (*zүүн аймагт бидэнтэй хамт tsagaan᠋᠋᠋ny esreg daitazh yavaad osoldson yumsan*). Here too, it is Pyotr's words that are recalled as an indication of the goal to aim for ("*... gezh khelsen. Bi tüüniig yostoi bidnii gantz zöv zam gezh boddog*"). This passage is a good illustration of Humphrey's analysis of the "exemplar", which she links to the Mongolian notion of "*surgaal*". She writes:

"The *üliger* is thus the combination of the ideal represented by the teacher and his/her words or deeds, or more exactly those crystalline moments of the teacher's actions that have been 'listened to' by the disciple and made to be exemplary in the context of some particular ethical decision. From the teacher's point of view, these are his or her

surgaal, the items of all his or her myriad sayings and doings that are the ones to be learnt. But although purposive teachings are not unknown in Mongolia, particularly in the context of Buddhist teacher-disciple relations, very often the teacher does not know which really are his surgaal, as they appear almost as a by-product of his enlightened or spiritually gifted passage through life. And so, although the surgaal or *üliger* appear from the teacher, it is the disciple, by actively paying attention, who provides the agency that transforms the words/act from merely having happened to something that is an exemplar”.³⁷⁴

We can see that for Erdene, as for Bat, Sükhbaatar and Pyotr are both guides, models to be imitated, but not blindly. Here, the desired object is the object of a conscious and reasoned appropriation on the part of the disciple, and is not suppressed as in Girard’s model:

“The object is only a means of reaching the mediator. It is the being of this mediator that the desire aims at [...] In Proust, this desire to absorb the being of the mediator frequently takes the form of a desire for initiation into a new life: the life of sports, the rustic life, the “unbridled” life. The sudden prestige of a mode of existence unknown to the narrator is always linked to the encounter with a being who awakens the desire. [The Dostoyevskian hero, like the Proustian hero, dreams of absorbing and assimilating the being of the mediator. He achieves a perfect synthesis between the mediator’s strength and his own ‘intelligence’. He wants to become the Other without ceasing to be himself].

Even in Girard’s analysis, not all the novels reveal the rivalry that often lurks behind admiration and leads to a complete loss of sight of what is initially considered desirable (for us, the sovereignty of Mongolia, the path indicated by Lenin, etc.). While Erdene and Bat’s struggle, though determined by the word of the guides, seems to have been reasoned out, the same is not true of all the characters in the novel. Through the characters of Zhambal and Dorzh in particular, the author suggests to the reader how rigidly and ambitiously following dogma leads to excess.

Zhambal

Initially a lama, Zhambal later serves in the White Army, then joins the Reds after handing over a so-called companion (Pavlov,³⁷⁵ a white Russian) and finally auto-proclaimed a “great incarnation” at the very end of the novel (just before he dies). The author makes no secret of the fact that his commitment to the People’s Party is purely opportunistic:

³⁷⁴ Humphrey, 1997, p. 37.

³⁷⁵ I don’t talk much about Pavlov, but a note here is in order. Pavlov is the friend and partner of the wealthy Itgelt, a Russian of Buryat origin who trades in beef in Mongolia and has settled his family there. He employs Pyotr as a servant, who is a Bolshevik deported to Siberia in 1905 following the failed coup against the Tsar. The civil war marks the end of their relationship. In the novel, it can be said that they each embody one of the two camps, allowing the author to integrate Russian history into the narrative to show its impact on Mongolian history at an individual level.

“In the narrow, winding avenue known as “Tsetsen Khan Khoroo” - which still exists in the east of Khüree - a man on a plump dark brown horse in an army saddle was pushing his mount, bellowing at the top of his voice. Wearing a pointed hat made of white lamb’s skin and dressed in uniform, with a long cavalry sabre at his hip and an automatic sheathed in wood at his belt, his face feverish with excess alcohol, he had all the hallmarks of a self-satisfied man to whom everything smiles.

It was Zhambal. After handing over Pavlov, he had joined the regular army and, because he could write, had been put in charge of supplies. One thing led to another, and although these administrative tasks were not a lot of work, he quickly climbed the steps of power, until he became one of the most prominent leaders of the time. With the prestige of an officer in a victorious army, he let himself be intoxicated by the pleasures of this world, attracting the favours of many pretty young women. In other words, he posed no threat whatsoever to the People’s Government. By playing it smart, he hoped to climb to the highest echelons of the State. Then he would live like a pig in clover.

Цэцэн ханы хороо гэдэг одоодоо хадгалж байгаа Зүүн хүрээний нарийхан бөгөөд махир гудамжаар цагаан хурган үстэй цэрэг шовгор малгайтай шинельтэй хүн, цэрэг эмээлтэй тарган хүрэн морь унаж амандаа дуу аялан алхуулна. Нэг ташаанд нь модон хуйтай сэлээдий, нөгөөд нь морин цэргийн урт сэлэм харагдана. Нилээд согтсоноос улаан зээрд болсон царайд нь бардам бөгөөд амьдралдаа ханасан сэтгэл тодорно.

Энэ бол Жамбал байлаа. Павловыг барьж өгч, ардын журамт цэрэгт ороод бичиг мэдлэгийн ачаар бэлтгэлийн бичээч хийж эхлээд яван явсаар цэргийн бэлтгэлд том нь биш боловч овоо мэдлэгтэй дарга болжээ. Ялсан цэргийн дарга нараар нүүр хийж хот газрын хөгжилтэй амьдралд умбан хэд хэдэн овоо бүсгүйчүүдтэй нууц амрагийн холбоо тогтоожээ. Энэ бүхнээс Жамбалд ардын засгийг занах учир байсангүй эвийг нь олж зүтгээд байвал нэгэн цагт төрийн том хүн болж, хул дүүрэн шуугиж байгаа айраг шиг амьдарч болох мэт санагдана.

His childhood friend, Tsamba, who remained a lama, was not mistaken. As the conspiracy against the People’s Government gathered momentum (we were approaching 1932, the year of the counter-revolutionary uprising in the western provinces), Tsamba explained how this opportunism could be useful to them:

“- You all know Zhambal, he is a childhood friend of mine, you know that too. He is now a military officer. At the moment, he is around Khovd, in charge of the border forces. A senior officer. To get to his post, he came through here, and for a fortnight we lived the good life. But since he has been promoted, he has had ideas of grandeur and thinks that if he does it right, he could go even higher. He already sees himself as almost a general: “The People’s Government has got me good. I’d be a fool not to take up the State’s cause”: that was the first thing he said to me when we met up. And when I blurted out a few scathing remarks about this bloody People’s Government, he immediately got on his high horse: “How dare you say such things next to a military officer!” A real scream!

- Do you think he’d give us any trouble? asked the gevshee.

- No. He got into serious debt when he came through here. He had no choice but to buy stolen horses at bargain prices. He got into it. And to make matters worse - at least for him - he sold three Russian Lanzhuu together with almost a thousand bullets. I even arranged the deal. As a result, the weapons are now in our hands... He is at my mercy. He can't harm us in any way. And one day or another he will even be useful to us”.

- Жамбалыг та бүхэн цөм мэднэ. Бид хоёр багаасаа үерхсэнийг ч мэднэ. Одоо тэр цэргийн дарга болоод Ховдын хязгаарын цэргийн аж ахуйн даргын алба хааж байгаа. Үүгээр дайрч өнгөрөхөд нь би хагас сар хамт наргилаа. Дарга болсондоо сэтгэл нь ханаад, ингээд зүтгээд байвал жанжин ч болж магад гэж боддог бололтой. <Өвгөн чинь ардын засгийн нүүрэн дээр муугүй амьдарч, төрийн төлөө зүтгэж явна> гэж уулзмагц надад хэлсэн. Надаас ардын засгийг муу хэлсэн үг цухуйхын хамт <цэргийн даргын дэргэд ийм юм ярьж болохгүй> гээд огт халгаагаагүй.

- Золиг чинь бидэнд гай тарих юм биш биз? гэж гэвш асуув.

- Чадахгүй. Энд өр алдаж аргагүй болоод хулгайн морь хямд үнээр авч баларсан. Бас мянга гаруй сумтай гурван орос ланжуу надаар дамжуулж зарсан. Тэр ланжуу бидэнд буй. Ингээд миний гарт орсон болохоор гай тарьж чадахгүй. Харин ч нэгэн цагт тус болно.

And indeed, Tsamba's prediction was not long in coming. As soon as Zhambal loses the confidence of the People's Government, his support turns to hate:

“Whether it's the People's Government or us, from now on there can only be one under the sun. As you rightly said, khamba, the time has come for us to engage in struggle. And it will be a fight to the death. We need weapons. As far as I'm concerned, I can equip ten men with machine pistols. Russian Lanzhuu, not just anything! As for ammunition, I've got two boxes. (Zhambal smiled icily.) And yes, the People's Government has Russian weapons at its disposal. From the moment he had been sacked, Zhambal's resentment had begun to fester. He got his hands on a dozen Vintovs, two automatic pistols and the same number of boxes of bullets, plus a few grenades. “Is that the way it is? But you'll see who you're dealing with, with Zhambal!” Gritting his teeth at the news of his dismissal, he was already plotting his revenge”.

- Ардын засаг бид хоёр нэг нарны дор байж чадахгүй болсон. Ингэхлээр хамба таны хэлснээр үхэх, сэхэхээ үзэх цаг болжээ. Хөдлөхөд бидэнд зэвсэг л хэрэгтэй. Би хувьдаа арваад л хүнийг хурдан буугаар зэвсэглэж чадна. Орос ланжуу шүү дээ. Сум гэвэл хоёр хайрцагтай гэж Жамбал хэлээд хүйтэн инээмсэглэснээ ороот байгаа зэвсэг бүхэн ардын засагт буй шүү дээ гэлээ.

Жамбал баруун хязгаарын цэргийн хүнсний мөнгө үрэгдүүлснээс болж халагдсанаас эхлэн ардын засгийг занаж, арав гаруй винтов, хоёр сэлээдий, хоёр хайрцаг сум, хэдэн гар бөмбөг хулгайлж авсан юмсанжээ. Халагдсан тушаалаа аваад гарахдаа <гайгүй дээ. Жамбал хэн болохыг та нарт үзүүлээд өгнө> гэж дотроо бодон шүдээ хяхнуулан хавирч явсан билээ.

At the very end of the novel, he finds himself on the side of the conspirators, but still driven by a thirst for power and prestige. He proclaims himself Khutagt Khuvilgaan (Great Incarnation) at the same time as Tsamba and Tügzhil (another secondary character in the novel), inspiring Tömör to make this remark just before killing him:

“- So you have found the Khutagt way to immortality? You didn’t say that when you were a member of the People’s Government!

He threw him forcefully onto the stone slabs. “Khek!” There was a nasty thud. Blood spurted out of his mouth and nose. The next moment, life was gone”.

Төмөр ухасхийн Жамбалыг барьж аваад толгой дээрээ өргөж <Чи үхдэггүй мөнхийн хутаг олсон хүн билүү? Чамайг ардын засаг хүн гэж байхад чи ингэж яваа гэнээ> гээд үлэмж их хүчээр чулуун шалан дээр хаясанд « хэг » гэсэн битүү дуу гараад хамар амнаас нь цус оргилон эгшин зуур амь нь гарлаа.

Before commenting, I would like to introduce another character, Dorzh, so that I can compare the two and reinforce my point.

Dorzh

We have already met Dorzh, who was said to have been a soldier in the Bogd army at the time of the Autonomy and to have taken part in the liberation of Khovd and the western borders by troops commanded by Magsarzhav. We have also seen that he became involved with Sühbaatar at a very early stage, when, according to the official version, Sühbaatar began to form the patriotic army that would later become that of the People’s Government.

However, through discreet allusions, the author suggests from the outset that Dorzh’s commitment is motivated less by the conviction that the cause is noble (which characterises the “hero”) than by a rather selfish interest. A short sentence at the very beginning of the novel, which may go unnoticed, already reveals the character’s ambivalence:

“Dorzh was from Luu Gün, the region next to his, and enlisted just like him. That’s what brought them together. They had become good friends. The ammunition that Khuyag had taken from the enemy at the time had not been lost on anyone. At least not for Dorzh...”

Ирсэн хүнийг Дорж гэдэг. Луу Гүнийхээс цэрэгт дайчлагдан ирээд ойр зэрэглээ хошууны улс гэж Хуягтай дотно танилцсан бөгөөд Хуягийн олзолсон сумнаас нэлээдийг хүртсэн билээ.

The author does not elaborate, but we understand that when one of them, wounded, became a beggar after narrowly escaping conviction for desertion, the other collected his “spoils of war” without necessarily feeling too sorry about what had happened to his “good friend” (whom he thought was dead). Lodoidamba does not dwell as much as Rinchen on the question of the “spoils of war” that were customary in the Mongolian army at least until 1911-1915. There is, however, a single scene in which he bears witness to this, through the medium of fiction. And Dorzh is in the foreground, but not in a way that valorises him. The action takes place at the time of the capture of Khiakta

“It was at this moment that the partisans chose to launch their assault. By evening, they had taken Kiakhta. Dorzh and his fifty men entered a courtyard where counters had been set up. All they found was a stunted old Chinese man. Dorzh pointed his gun at him:

- Your cloths, your Nanking plums, your silks! Where did you put them? Tell me! Or else: Poof! I'm sending you home a ghost!

The Chinese man fell to his knees in terror. Dorzh snapped:

- What a suck-up! Hurry up and give us what we want!

Then, as the old man opened the doors of all the buildings:

- Come on, we'll take what we can get. It belongs to us anyway. Ah, ah, the spoils of victory! he exclaimed arrogantly, proud of his triumph.

Гамингууд эргэлтгүй сандран эхлэхэд партизан цэргийн довтолгоо эхэлж орой болоход Хиагтыг эзлэв.

Дорж тавин цэргийнхээ хамт хэдэн пүүсний хашаанд орвол эрүү өвдөг нь нийлэх шахсан хөгшин луухаанаас өөр хүн байсангүй. Дорж түүнд буу тулгаж байгаад «Торго дурдан, нанжин чавга, нар хамба чинь хаа байна. Хэлэхгүй бол пүн гээд чи чөтгөр болж нутаг буцна гэтэл хятад сандран мөлхөв.

-- Ямар зусарч золиг вэ. Тэр хэлсэн юм бушуу гаргаж өг! гэж Дорж зандрав.

Хятад бүх байшингаа нээж өгөхөд«чадах чинээгээрээ авцгаа. Үнэндээ бидний хөрөнгө. Дийлсэн цэргийн сүр» гэж Дорж ихэмсэг бөгөөд бардам дуугаар хэлэв.

The contrast with Erdene's attitude, fighting under his command is obvious:

“It was Dolgor that Erdene thought of at that moment. If he survived, he would see her again sooner or later. He had a hunch. “Have I really been too harsh? She was my companion in misfortune... The misery of life blinds even the purest of hearts. My poor friend who has never had silk on her shoulders in her life.

He unfurled a royal blue cloth decorated with floral motifs.

- How many measures of silk for a *deel*? he asked Dorzh, who was weighing out a roll. Dorzh laughed happily:

- For a soldier who has just won a victory, a whole roll. For the others, a dozen measures should be enough.

Erdene cut twelve measures from the silk with a knife before folding it and wrapping it in an old crumpled piece of paper. He stuffed it into his *deel*. He was about to leave but Dorzh stopped him:

- Are you kidding? In front of all this wealth, you take a piece of cloth the size of the palm of your hand! Take the whole roll

- That's enough for me”.

Эрдэнийн сэтгэлд Долгор бодогдов. Амьд мэнд явбал хэзээ нэгэн цагт түүнтэй уулзах мэт санагдав. Би дэндүү ширүүн зан гаргасан болов уу? Тэр минь намайг дагаж зовлон үзсэн хүн дээ. Хатуу амьдрал үнэнч сэтгэлийг нь сохолсон ч байж болох юм даа. Хөөрхий минь бүх насандаа мөрөндөө торго углаж үзээгүй юмсан» гэж бодоод цэцгэн хээтэй цэнхэр торго авч задалснаа «Дээл хийхэд хэдэн ам торго ордог юм бэ? гэж хажууд нь толгой торго бариад үзэж байсан Доржоос асуув.

-- Ялсан цэргийн дээлд толгой ордог юм. Энгийн хүнд бол арван хоёр ам болно гээд Дорж бүдүүн дуугаар ха ха гэж хангалуун инээв.

Эрдэнэ цэнхэр торгоноос арван хоёр амлаж хутгаараа огтлон аваад муутуу цаасанд эвтэйхэн боож өвөртлөөд эргэхэд нь «Ийм юманд ороод алгын чинээ юмаар яах вэ? Ядахдаа нэг толгойг аваач» гэж Дорж хэлжээ.

-- Зүгээр. Надад энэ болно гэж Эрдэнэ явдал дундаа эргэж хэлэв.

And Sükhbaatar’s reaction confirms that the plundering of the defeated clashes with the ideal they are pursuing:

“- You are the Regular Army, the People’s Army, not a bunch of looters! Come on, bring me what you took yesterday! The soldiers remained silent, motionless. Sükhbaatar continued in a powerful voice:

- I’m relieving Dorzh of his command. And he will receive ten strokes of the rifle butt. Darzhaa will take his place. Take it from me: steal even the smallest needle from the common people and you will be severely punished.

Then a voice was raised among the men:

- But General! Beatings are the barbaric methods of the old regime! Wasn’t it said that, from now on, our People’s Government would do away with beatings? Sükhbaatar smiled icily:

- And the looting? Isn’t that a barbaric act worthy of the old regime? The punishment will be adjusted accordingly”.

«Та нар бол ардын журамт цэрэг болохоос биш, бүлэг дээрэмчид биш. Өчигдөр орой пүүснээс дээрэмдсэн юмаа одоо энд авчирч тавь» гэлээ.

Цэргүүд дуу ч гарсангүй, хөдөлсөн ч үгүй.

-- Доржийг тавьтын даргаас огцруулж арав банздана. Танай тавьтын даргаар Даржааг томилов. Энгийн номхон ардаас сэтэрхий зүү, сиймхий самбаа авсан хүнийг хамгийн хатуу цээрлүүлнэ гэж Сүхбаатар өндөр дуугаар хэлэв.

-- Жанжин аа! Банздах гэдэг чинь харгис засгийн шүүлт биш үү. Манай ардын засгийн үед ард биднийг эрүүдэн шүүх явдалгүй болно гэж хэлсэн бус уу? гэж олон дундаас нэг хүн хэлэв.

Сүхбаатар хүйтэн инээмсэглэснээ «Дээрэм бол харгис засгийн юм болохоор шийтгэл тохирсон байх нь зүйн хэрэг» гэлээ.

There are too many examples to mention. The rest of the story sees Dorzh and Erdene in frequent conflict, one always appearing to be in search of justice and truth, the other following a hard line in a way that is often laughable and grotesque, but which is a little less so when you consider that it corresponds to a historical reality that the author denounces quite clearly through this character. I will take just one last example, which is particularly blatant. This time the scene takes place at the very beginning of collectivisation:

“Nature had been generous that summer. It was a calm day. A *ger* had been set up on the vast meadow to the south-west of the former capital of the Luu Gün banner, now renamed the Batsengel sum. At his door, behind a red-topped desk, Dorzh spoke in a loud voice, throwing his head back to brush away the locks of hair that fell over his eyes. People now only called him the “Red Revolutionary”.

Дэлгэрхэн зуны тавиун өдөр Батцэнгэлийн хүрээ гэж нэрлэх болсон Луу гүний хошуу хүрээний баруун өмнөх өргөн зүлгэн дээр барьсан том гэрийн үүдэнд улаан одончүү бүтээлэгтэй ширээний ард “улаан хувьсгалч” гэж олонд нэршсэн Дорж зогсоод толгойгоо гэдрэг байн байн хаялан, магнай руугаа унасан урт үсээ хойш болгон өндөр дуугаар ярина.

It is easy to see that this nickname has a mocking or ironic meaning. This is confirmed in the following paragraph:

“Above the entrance, stretched between the two masts wedged in the *ger* belt, the red cloth banner, shaken by the wind, looked brilliant in the harsh sunlight. It bore the slogan, written in white chalk by a diligent hand: “Eliminate all feudal lords, yellow and black alike, and bring the class struggle of the poor and dispossessed to its climax.” Most of the people sitting on the grass were men, but there were also a few women. And they all exchanged news of their families, of the country near and far, of the vast world - as far as they knew -, leaving Dorzh to his speech. Seeing him constantly brandishing his fist and then insulting feudal lords and nudargan (koulaks) in the worst possible way, some thought: “There is no doubt about it, he is a true red revolutionary! Others yawned: “Old Buyan’s son is mad. He is losing his mind”.

Гэрийн бүсэнд хавчуулсан унийн үзүүрээс үүдний дээгүүр татсан улаан даавуун дээр “Хар шар феодалуудыг сөнөөж үгээгүй ядуу ард түмний ангийн хувьсгалыг өрнүүлэе” гэж цагаан шохойгоор хичээнгүйлэн чадамгай бичсэн лоозон зөөлөн салхинд үл мэдэг хөдлөн нарны хурц гэрэлд гялалзана.

Ногоон дээр суусан олон хүний ихэнх нь эрэгтэйчүүд бөгөөд цөөвтөр эмэгтэйчүүд энд тэнд бөөгнөрөн Доржийн ярианы хажуугаар амин хувийн явдал, сум оронд болсон сонин, сонсож мэдсэн ховоо солилцон ярилцана.

Гараа зогсоо жолоогүй даллан феодалууд ба нударган нарыг аль муухай үгээр зүхэж байгаа Доржийг харсан хүмүүсийн зарим нь <аргагүй л улаан хувьсгалч хүн юм даа> гэлцэнэ. Зарим нь <Буян чавганцын энэ хархүү мөн галзуурч байна даа> гэж бодоод эвшээлгэнэ.

The reason he had the people gather, he explains, was to “make them listen to the distribution of the livestock confiscated from the feudalists and *nudargan*, to be redistributed to poor proletarians”. And old Nyam, Itgelt’s sheep herder, who had spent his life serving the rich breeder, was entrusted with some of the animals:

“- Nyam, son of Gombo, originally from this district and of proletarian descent, who had long been exploited by the wealthy Nudargan Itgelt, was given six suckler cows and three riding horses”.

“тус сумын Гомбо овогтой Ням бол ядуу харц гаралтай бөгөөд нударган Итгэлтийнд зарагдаж мөлжигдөн байсан учир феодал болон нударган нараас хураасан хөрөнгөнөөс тугалтай үнээ зургаа, унах морь гурвыг хувьд нь олгосугай”

But instead of rejoicing, the old man, for whom this “gift” upsets all his conceptions of social relations, becomes afraid and tries to refuse:

“- In this world, the lot of some cannot be passed on to others. I cannot accept the benefits you wish to bestow on me. “Dogs can’t digest fatty butter”: that is what my father said when he left to join the Buddha. Don't give me these animals. His eyes were streaming with tears. He was torn between fear and joy. He was tempted to rejoice that he was being treated like a man and given all these possessions. But the

idea that one could, without paying or working, enjoy the grace that has touched another, did not enter his head. It wasn't food he would get from it, but poison. At least that was his impression”.

Олны дундаас Ням босож « хүний буян хүнд шингэдэггүй болохоор өчүүхэн муу өвгөн ах нь та бүхний энэ хишгийг авч чадахгүй. Нохойн гэдсэнд шар тос тогтдоггүй гэж бурхан болооч аав минь үргэлж хэлдэг сэн. Надад битгий өгч үз » гээд нүднээсээ нулимс дуслуулав. Нямын сэтгэлд баярлах, айх, холилдон байлаа. Хүн гэж үзээд ийм их хөрөнгө өгч байгааг бодоход баярламаар боловч хүний буянг ямар ч үнэ хөлсгүй авна гэдэг нэг л ухаанд нь багтахгүй бөгөөд хоол болохгүй хор болох юм шиг бодогдоно.

Although the scene is told in a pleasant way that makes the reader smile, what it highlights is the forced collectivisation that was put in place when the people, who had in fact remained on the fringes of the revolutionary movement, were completely unprepared for it. In the face of Nyam's resistance, Dorzh was intractable:

- But if the government didn't give me any animals, I would not blame them! I am not one of those people who holds grudges.

He was watching Dorzh: you could see the panic in his eyes.

- Comrade Nyam! You profess rearguard ideologies. You are on the brink of siding with the nudargan and the feudalists, of becoming an enemy of the Revolution. If you don't take what you are given, the judgement will be implacable, take it for granted! His words silenced the clamour. Nyam had no choice but to return with the animals.

- Над мал өгсөнгүй гэж би засагтаа огт гомдохгүй. Би тэгж гомддог хүн биш гээд Ням, Дорж руу харахад нүдэнд нь аль ч учраа алдаж айсан шинж тод байлаа.

- Нөхөр Ням та бол балрын суртлыг баримталж феодал болоод нударган нарын талд орж ангийн хувьсгалын дайсан болоход хуруу дутуу болоод байна. Үүнийг авахгүй бол хатуу ярина гэж мэдээрэй хэмээн Доржийн зандран хэлсэн үг олны шуугианыг нэг мөсөн дарлаа. Аргагүй болсон Ням өгсөн малыг тууж буцсан билээ.

To use a literary reference, replace Dorzh with a pig and Nyam with a donkey in this scene and the comparison with George Orwell's *Animal Farm* comes to mind.

3. Triangular desire and mimetic rivalry in Lodoidamba

We can see that Dorzh's or Zhambal's commitment to the revolutionary party and then to the People's Government is not motivated by the pursuit of an ideal like Bat's - sovereignty, justice, freedom - but much more by desire, desire for power, prestige, enjoyment. In this sense, Zhambal and Dorzh are “ambitieux” (ambitious) , a term often used by Girard in his theory of mimetic desire. For Lodoidamba's novel to be amenable to an analysis of the kind proposed by the anthropologist in his essay, the figure of the mediator, both model and rival, has to be clearly exposed. While we can detect this through Sükhbaatar or Erdene in the case of Dorzh, it is not sufficiently clear to provide a basis for our reasoning. In contrast, the complex relationship established between Itgelt and

Erdene in this story could stand comparison with the one Girard highlights in Proust, Stendhal or Dostoyevsky.

The character of Itgelt has aroused and continues to arouse the interest of Mongolian critics, who see him as the most accomplished character in *Lodoidamba*. Not to take the time to observe how this character is constructed, particularly in the relationship he has with the protagonist, Erdene, would be to run the risk of missing points that are essential to understanding the meaning of the novel and, beyond the novel itself, of what it tells us about Mongolian society and the political and social history of Mongolia in the twentieth century.

Itgelt is ambitious, but he is also envious. This is obvious from the very beginning of the story. Of popular extraction, he envies the *taizh* and all those who enjoy hereditary prerogatives. We read this in chapter twelve, on the occasion of a Naadam, when the local lord has cheated in the race, robbing him of victory:

“Itgelt was usually as discreet as he was cautious. But this time, overheated by alcohol, he had let slip the secret thoughts that his prodigal nature contained. **He was jealous** of the nobles. The *taizh* in particular, who couldn’t even give up a single orphaned kid to the community, while he himself was lavish. “Those bastards suck the *khoshuu* dry, eating till their bellies burst and drinking like sponges. They can’t even get a few serfs to work. Incompetent! But they still manage to do damage. Imbeciles but greedy...” **Hatred** invaded him every time he thought about it. “If I were in charge of the *khoshuu*, I would find better things to do than raise taxes to make people like me pay off the debts these morons contract with the trading posts by eating out of the hands of the Chinese like children. I would gather together all the beggars of the *khoshuu*, and see if I could not get them to weave cloth as strong as canvas! He had reached this point of hidden **resentment**.

He had been careful not to reveal his innermost thoughts to anyone”.

Хянамгай бөгөөд ухаантай Итгэлт архины халуунд нандин сэтгэлийн нууц бодлоо дэлгэчих шахжээ. Итгэлт, ноёд, тайж нартай **атаархаж** явдаг. Ялангуяа тайж нар албанд өнчин ишиг ч өгөхгүй байхад өөрөө өдий төдий юм өгч байгааг бодох бүр **сэтгэл нь хорсон, атаархлаар дүүрч** «Хошуу тонож хагартлаа идэж, илжиртлээ унтахаас өөр юу ч чадахгүй дамшгууд. Ядахдаа хэдэн хамжлагаа ч зарж чадахгүй арчаагүй мөртлөө хортой, мунхаг мөртлөө шунамгай амьтан» гэж жигшин бухимдаж хэрэв би хошуу толгойлж байсан сан бол эд нар шиг хөдлөх бүрдээ хятадын пүүсэнд нялх хүүхэд шиг мэхлүүлэн өр тавьж албан татвараар мань мэтийнхнийг чирэгдүүлж байхын оронд хошууны тоогоо алдсан гуйлагчныг цуглуулж авчраад уяагий нь уртхан уяж, угаадсы нь өтгөхөн шиг өгч байгаад цэмбэ нэхүүлэхгүй юү» гэж хүртэл бодож байсан билээ.

Гэвч **энэ тухайгаа хэнд ч хэлээгүй.**

I have underlined in this extract what reveals the relationship between hatred, jealousy and dissimulation that underlies Girard’s reasoning. If Itgelt envies the *taizh*, it is because he admires part of what they are, but he can conceal it because he himself enjoys an enviable position, being rich enough to rival them:

“Although Itgelt envied the nobles, he had never thought of confronting them openly. He did not see the point. “With all their privileges, they're not as powerful as I am. He who, just a few years earlier, had just a few spare mounts had become one of the biggest breeders in the *khoshuu*. The *taizh* themselves came to borrow money from him, patted him on the back and offered him the best of their airag and *arkhi*. It was enough to flatter his pride, confident as he was in his entrepreneurial abilities. **As much as he envied them, over time he had come to despise them** and did not hesitate to look down on them whenever he came across them”.

Итгэлт ноёд, тайж нартай атаархаж явдаг боловч тэдэнтэй ил тэмцэхийг огт бодохгүй. Тэмцэл ч хэрэггүй мэт байдаг байлаа. Тэд хэдийгээр эрх ямбатай боловч над шиг чадалтай биш, хэдхэн жилийн өмнө солих мориор ховорхон байсан Итгэлт одоо хошууны тэргүүн баяны нэг болжээ. Түүнээс тайж нар хүртэл мөнгө зоос зээлж, айлчлан очиход нь хөл алдаж, архи айргаа барьж байхыг хараад өөртөө бахархан, чадалдаа бишрэн итгэх сэтгэл оволзож явдаг билээ. **Энэ учраас сүүлийн үед атаархлын хажуугаар тэдний арчаагүйг доромжлон шоолох сэтгэл төрдөг** бөгөөд түүндээ ханаж тэдний дээрээс ширвэн харж явдаг болжээ.

If the relationship is reversed, if the *taizh* themselves begin to envy his wealth and admire his entrepreneurial skills, his pride is reassured. But if anyone stands in his way, he immediately resumes his envy and hatred. To take an example:

“Around midday, two riders came to join them: Zhambal and Zaya Gegeen. Pavlov’s wife and daughter were so excited that they ran to greet the pure incarnation. Dressed in a blue silk *deel* with a black collar and belted with yellow crepe, the Gegeen wore Russian-style red felt boots.

Itgelt rose to bow before him and be gracious. Pavlov’s wife said a few words that made all the Russians jump to their feet. Zaya Gegeen smiled:

- Come on, sit down.

He was beaming.

Itgelt was astonished to see the two women showing the Radiant Emanation the kind of respect and familiarity reserved for old friends. “So they know each other? And not just a little, I see...”

Usually, whatever the crowd at Pavlov’s, it was he who was held in the highest esteem and treated with the greatest attention. But this time, **he was overshadowed by the radiant Zaya**. All eyes were on the young lama. **Jealousy overcame him”**.

Үдийн хирд хоёр морьтой хүн ирсэн нь Жамбал, Зая гэгээн хоёр байлаа. Павловын эхнэр охин хоёр гэгээнийг хөл алдан угтав.

Гэгээн хар захтай цэнхэр торгон дээл дээр шар дурдан бүс бүслээд орос улаан эрээн эсгий гутал өмсчээ.

Итгэлт босож адис авлаа. Павловын авгай хэдэн үг хэлэхэд бүх хүмүүс босов.

- Зүгээр, сууцгаа гээд гэгээн баясгалантай инээмсэглэв. Павловын эхнэр охин хоёр гэгээнийг хуучин, дотно танилын ёсоор үлэмж хүндэтгэн зочилж байгааг хараад «Эд хэдийд ийм сүрхий танилцсан юм бол» гэж Итгэлт гайхав.

Үүнээс өмнө хичнээн хүн цугларавч Павловын байшингийн хамгийн хүндэт зочин нь Итгэлт байдаг билээ. Гэтэл энэ удаа Заяын гэгээн хамгаас илүү хүндлэгдэж, бүхний анхаарлыг татаж байгааг хараад Итгэлтэд атаархах сэтгэл төрлөө.

At the same time, there is nothing that satisfies him more than to feel everyone's admiration for him.

“He was well aware that everyone gathered in the tent was doing their utmost to please him, which could only fill him with pride. Sure of his ascendancy over the others, he had the impression that he was the master of the world, and that a simple word from him would change mountains into steppes, deserts into wooded mountains. He made Erdene sing the chorus of *The Valiant Black Hawk* five times, just for the pleasure of showing off his superb tenor voice to the others”.

Энэ майханд цугларсан бүхэн өөрт нь сайн хүн болохыг хичээж байгааг ойлгосон Итгэлтэд бардам сэтгэлийн их баяр оволзон, хүсвэл хорвоогийн уулыг тал болгож, талыг уул болгох чадал биенд нь байх шиг санагдаж байв. Эрдэнэ «эр бор харцага»-ыг дуулсанд Итгэлт хоолой нь цээлхнийг магтаж таван түрлэг дахиулав.

The complexity of the relationship between Itgelt and Erdene stems from the fact that Erdene has qualities that Itgelt lacks. He can read and is praised by everyone when he sings. Jealousy is always latent. As long as Erdene remains docile and subordinate, it is never expressed. The novel takes a turn for the worse when Itgelt's somewhat subdued admiration for Erdene leads him to covet his wife, Dolgor. Applying to this situation Girard's theory of “triangular desire”, the “object of desire” here takes the form of Dolgor.

Mongolian literary critics have been interested in the reasons why Itgelt's character stands out in the novel at least as much as Erdene's, if not more. A statistical analysis of the scenes and actions in which the two are involved has highlighted this quantitative importance, which seems to make Erdene the protagonist. The conclusion reached is that while Erdene's trajectory fluctuates according to circumstances, and he allows himself to be carried along by the movement, Itgelt appears to be the sole master of his destiny. The conceptual model of “triangular desire” proposed by Girard seems to be able to shed new light on all the work that has already been done, if we take as our starting point the fact that what is at stake in this novel is also a relationship of mixed admiration and hatred between these two characters, which determines the whole course of their existence from the moment they meet, with Dolgor appearing as a collateral victim - but who also has his own trajectory - of this rivalry. And according to this model, Itgelt is no more the master of his destiny than Erdene is: he is the slave of his desire:

“Jealousy and envy presuppose a threefold presence: the presence of the object, the presence of the subject, and the presence of the one we jealous or the one we envy [...]. [The] victim of internal mediation [...] easily persuades himself that his desire is spontaneous, that is, that it is rooted in the object and in that object alone. The jealous always maintains, therefore, that his desire preceded the mediator's intervention. He presents the mediator as an intruder, a nuisance, a *terzo incomodo* who interrupts a delightful tête-à-tête. Jealousy is the irritation we all feel when one of our desires is

accidentally thwarted. True jealousy is infinitely richer and more complex than that. It always includes an element of fascination towards the insolent rival”.³⁷⁶

Itgelt’s “jealous” temperament, following this definition, is constantly underlined by the author. Let’s look at how this character is constructed and presented to the reader, and begin by seeing how the meeting between the two men is sealed. In chapter V:

“Erdene had read the words written between the red lines of the parchment in one go, without the slightest hesitation. Itgelt was stunned. That a man in rags, with an emaciated face and hands callused by hard labour and life in the open air, could read messages written by nobles and officers in silk deeds and thin white hands seemed to him incongruous, to say the least.

When he was young, Itgelt had tried to learn to read, but had never succeeded. Today, when he kept his accounts, he used symbols. A circle within a square for pregnant animals, a simple square for sterile animals. To have an educated man come and work for him was a boon he would never have dreamed of.

- Your people are said to be tough... but there are small trees as there are big ones, some men are good, others bad. And since when has a Mongolian not helped a brother in need? You can come and sit by my side from now on, he said, his voice full of empathy and understanding.

When a man is at the bottom of the abyss, it’s not difficult to win his trust. Erdene regained hope”.

Эрдэнэ бичгийг авч задлан өндөр дуугаар «Ахай бээсийн хошууны захирагч Жамсрангийн бичиг...» гээд үргэлжлүүлэн уншив. Тэр бичигт ахай бээсийн хошуунаас Дарьборын өртөөнд хийх албыг ацаглан залгаж байгаа Итгэлтийн авлагыг хошуунаас гаргуулж төлөх болсон тухай дурджээ. Улаан шугамтай муутуу цаасан дээр бичсэн бичгийг нэг ч удаа түгдрэлгүй дуржигнуулан уншиж байгаа Эрдэнийг хараад Итгэлт ихэд гайхав.

Торгон дээлтэй, нарийхан цагаан хуруутай ноён түшмэл нарын уншдаг бичгийг уранхай дээлтэй, туранхай царайтай хатуу ажилд эвэртэж борлосон гартай цагаачин уншиж байгаа нь Итгэлтэд үлэмж сонин хэрэг байв.

Итгэлт багадаа бичиг заалгах гэж оролдсон боловч сураагүй. Тэгээд одоо малынхаа дансыг хээлтэй малыг дотроо дугуйтай дөрвөлжин хүрээ, сувай малыг дөрвөлжин хүрээ хийх мэтийн тэмдгээр зурж тоолдог юм. Энэ учраас бичигтэй зарц өөрөө хүрээд ирнэ гэдэг бол зүүдлээгүй баяр байлаа. Танай хошууныхан хэцүү гэлцдэг. Гэвч олон мод өндөртэй, намтай олон хүн сайнтай, муутай байдаг бас тэгээд монгол ах дүү байна ядарсан хүнд туслахгүй яхав. Ер нь шууд манай хаяанд ирээд бууж орхи гэж өрөвдсөн элэгсэг дуугаар хэлэв. Гачигдаж ядарсан хүн итгэхдээ амархан байдаг болохоор Итгэлтийн энэ үгэнд Эрдэнийн сэтгэл баяр найдвараар дүүрэв.

Erdene possesses something that Itgelt lacks - the ability to write. But insofar as he can subordinate Erdene and make use of her skills, this quality is not an obstacle to fulfilling his ambitions. On the contrary, he can use it to his advantage:

³⁷⁶ I cut this quote here, even though the rest is not interesting: “It is always the same people who suffer from jealousy. Are we to believe that they are all the victims of an unfortunate chance? Could it be fate that creates so many rivals for them and multiplies the obstacles obstacles in the way of their desires?”

“Itgelt had been welcoming and had reached out to them when they were in need. Grateful, Erdene and Dolgor tried to do everything he asked of them, or even what he did not ask of them.

- Erdene, my friend, after the Naadam, I must take a census of my animals. Keep my accounts up to date and you will be of great help - Itgelt had just taken the previous year's register out of his box. For a scholar like you, it will be a laugh. And no one but me can understand what is written there. Let's take a few days to look things over, and I'll explain everything to you.

Itgelt was not a man to leave anything to chance. When someone could be of help to him in his affairs, he was as gentle as a calf. But **he could be as treacherous as a poisonous snake with those who tried to stand in the way of his wishes**. When it came to work, he was as hard-working as any member of staff on the camp.

Nothing was dearer to him than his desires and aspirations. His own. And he knew how to give without counting the cost to those who could satisfy them. But as much as he didn't skimp on expenses in difficult times, he wouldn't give a penny and was intractable to those who didn't need it. But this Erdene was useful to him. So he treated him like a docile steer.

Итгэлт бол үнэндээ хэрсүү хүн байж билээ. Өөрт нь тус болж, ажилд нь хэрэгтэй хүнд гэж тэжээмэл бяруу шиг, хүслээ биелүүлэхэд саад болсон хүд хорт могой шиг, ажил хийвэл энэ гэрийн хамгийн үнэнч зарц юм. Итгэлтэд хамгийн хайртай, хамгийн дотно юм гэвэл өөрий нь хүсэл, эрмэлзэл бөгөөд үүнээ хангахад хэрэгтэй бүхнийг юунаас ч буцахгүй хийдэг байлаа. Хэрэгтэй үед юугаа ч өгөхөөс буцахгүй өглөгч, хэрэггүй бол сэтэрхий зүү ч хүнд өгөхгүй цэвдэг сэтгэлтэй ажээ. Эрдэнэ үлэмж хэрэгтэй хүн болохоор Итгэлт түүнд **тэжээвэр бяруу шиг** номхон байв.

But apart from his intelligence, which Itgelt could use as he pleased as long as he kept him under his thumb, Erdene had something else that Itgelt didn't have:

“Erdene was intelligent and resourceful, but Itgelt had also spotted his naivety. To ensure his trust, he treated him with fraternity and respect, trying not to make him feel the de facto hierarchy that existed between them. And while he took pleasure in humiliating Galsan with his bullying, and made fun of Nyam, with Erdene it was quite different, he was as respectful as he was friendly.

But he also had an ulterior motive. Dolgor's haughty beauty, a beauty that not even the harsh trials of life had been able to alter, tickled his senses”.

Эрдэнэ бол ухаантай, чадалтай гэхдээ амархан итгэмтгий, шударга хүн гэж бодсон Итгэлт түүнийг өөртөө үнэнч байлгахын тул хүндэтгэн нөхөрлөж, түүний дээр нь биш, дэргэд нь байхыг хичээдэг байв.

Энэ учраас хэрэв Галсанг доромжлон загнаж, Нямааг шоолж өгөж зардаг бол Эрдэнэд үргэлж хүндэтгэсэн нөхөрсөг дүр үзүүлж байдаг байлаа. Үүнээс гадна Итгэлтэд өөр нэг бодол байв. Хатуу амьдрал ч дарж чадаагүй үзэсгэлэн гоо Долгорын өнгө жавхлан түүний тачаангуй сэтгэлийг нь маажиж [байсан].

Pyotr's intervention is important because it is he who first alerts Erdene to the imbalance in this deceptive relationship. It is not insignificant that Pyotr is the

representative of “Bolshevism”, the character that makes it possible to integrate the Marxist conception of social relations into the novel. This makes it possible to relate fiction to what it proposes to reveal about the way society works.

“As for Erdene, with his emaciated face and torn *deel*, Pietr could see that, swept along by the tumultuous flow of existence, he not only stayed afloat, but had enough tenacity to swim upstream when the time came. He had a clear mind, like the crystal-clear flow of the Tamir... But he also had the innocence of a farm steer. Pyotr knew that too.

When Erdene praised Itgelt, he would reply:

- It is not out of pure generosity. Everything is fine as long as he can profit from your blood, sweat and brains, but after that...

Erdene did not want to admit it.

In the end, the conversation took a political turn, and engaged them in virulent debates about the balance of power between rich and poor, a balance of power that should have been broken”.

Петр энэ уранхай дээлтэй, туранхай царайтай монгол бол харанхуй амьдралын үерт урсавч тохиолдсон бүхнээсээ барьж авч чадахаар барахгүй нэгэн цагт хүчтэй сэлэлтээр сөрж чадах чадалтай бөгөөд Тамирын гол шиг тунгалаг ухаантай боловч тэжээмэл бяруу шиг итгэмтгий хүн байна гэж ойлгож байлаа.

Эрдэнэ Итгэлтийг магтан ярихад Петр «Итгэл чамд сайн, өглөгчдөө биш, чамаас цус, хөлс, сэтгэлийг чинь хямдхан үнээр авч байгаа болохоор одоохондоо сайн байна» гэдэг бөгөөд үүнийг нь Эрдэнэ зөвшөөрдөггүй.

Note that in this passage we see the constant to-and-fro between the general and the particular. We will come back to this sentence uttered by Pyotr, which will resonate very differently in Erdene’s mind once the rupture has been consummated. But let us take a look at the scene that will bring about the change:

“Night had fallen. In the “big *ger*”, Dolgor was cooking. Itgelt was sitting quietly, smiling.

- Do you miss Erdene? he asked, still smiling.

- Oh, what a bore! I am not a kid any more!

- And if I replaced him for tonight... he continued with a little laugh, staring at her lewdly.

- Don’t talk nonsense.

Dolgor hurried off to finish eating, put the meat dish on the coffee table and walked straight to the door.

In the morning, she had noticed a change in Itgelt’s attitude.

Itgelt’s attitude. The fire of desire burned in his eyes. She had seen it and made no mistake. “The wind before the rain, the crow before the wolf”, as the saying goes. Preferring to play it safe, she was already about to leave. He stopped her:

- Put the kid to bed. Then you can go”.

Долгор их гэрт хоол хийж Итгэлт инээмсэглэн суув.

- Эрдэнээ санаж байна уу? гэж Итгэлт хөгжилтэй инээмсэглэн асуув

- Яршиг даа ямар хүүхэд биш
 - Өнөөдөр би Эрдэнийг орлож үзэх үү дээ гээд Итгэлт жингэнэсэн дуугаар инээн, зальтай нүдээр Долгорыг харав
 - Балай юм яриад яах юм бэ? гээд Долгор идэж дууссан тавагтай махыг авч хөлийн авдар дээр тавиад шууд үүд рүү явлаа.
 Өглөөнөөс хойш эрс хувирсан Итгэлтийн зан, шунал тачаангуйн гал оволзсон түүний харцыг Долгор ойлголоо. Энэ ч учраас борооны өмнө салхи, боохойн өмнө хэрээ гэгчээр хэлсэн үг нь тоглоом биш гэдгийг Долгор мэдэж байв.
 «Долгор оо охиныг унтуулаад яв» гэж Итгэлт ихэмсэг бөгөөд төв дуугаар хэлэв.

Dolgor's resistance is an important factor in Erdene remaining a rival for Itgelt, even if he has been able to use his skills for his own benefit up until now. As far as Dolgor is concerned, it seems clear that Erdene will not give up on him so easily.³⁷⁷

“Dolgor wouldn't risk angering him for the world. He had been so generous to them when they were in need. But although she respected him, admired his intelligence and the way he succeeded in everything he did, she had no desire to give herself to him. He never took his eyes off her, scrutinising her every move. A thousand things were going through his mind. And he was determined to have his way. This very night, he would overcome her resistance.

It is never easy to take the first step. Even for someone like Itgelt. His first words had not had the desired effect, far from it. And the last thing Erdene needed was to get wind of the affair. Who knows what would happen if he learnt anything.... “The goat can try hard, but it won't break its pack, and the camel can try hard, but it will never reach the sky”, as the saying goes. True, but if Erdene discovered anything, nothing good would ever come of it”.

Ядарч яваа цагт нь гараа сунгасан Итгэлтийг уурлуулах хүсэл Долгорт байсангүй. Итгэлтийг чадалтай ухаантай хүн гэж бахархан байдаг боловч түүнтэй самуурах хүсэл Долгорт хараахандаа байсангүй. Итгэлт Долгорын хөдөлгөөн бүхнийг ширтэн байхдаа элдвийн юм бодож байв. Өнөө шөнө Долгорыг оролдож, санаж хүсэж явснаа гүйцэтгэнэ гэж шийдсэн. Гэвч юм бүхний эхлэлт хэцүү байдаг болохоор энэ эхлэлт нь олигтой болсонгүй. Энэ хэргийг Эрдэнэд мэдэгдэхгүй хийх нь чухал. Хэрэв Эрдэнэ мэдвэл юу ч гэж магад. Хэдийгээр ямаа туйлаад янгиа эвдэхгүй, тэмээ туйлаад тэнгэрт хүрэхгүй гэж бодогдовч Эрдэнэ мэдэж ямар нэгэн хэрэг төвөг гаргавал тусгүй байлаа.

Itgelt did overcome Dolgor's resistance, but by force. She has not given herself to him voluntarily. Erdene doesn't understand this when Dulmaa reveals what she knows (Dulmaa surprises Itgelt as he leaves Erdene's house after raping Dolgor in her absence):

³⁷⁷ A brief exchange between Dulmaa and Galsan points this out a few chapters earlier (Galsan, for his part, turns a blind eye to the fact that Itgelt is also taking advantage of his wife, Dulmaa).

Galsan came out as well - It looks like our man is going to get his way with Dolgor, he bleated with amusement.

- Erdene Guai will wring his neck!
 - When you have fortune and power on your side, you always end up getting what you want.
 - Erdene isn't like you, that cricket can always jump. Wherever it goes, Erdene will catch it.
 - And bite whoever's feeding it? Impossible, old girl, what a mistake he'd make! Come on, come and sleep with me.

“Erdene was stunned, like a wrestler flattened by someone weaker than him. He put his shovel on the ground and looked towards his yurt, then began to zigzag with an unsteady step like a child just learning to walk. In his mind, it was as if the whole world was playing tricks on him. He felt like he had fallen into a black hole. His wife, his beloved, the only person he had ever trusted, had cheated on him! That was by far the hardest thing to swallow”.

Эрдэнэ дутуу бяргай хүнд ойчоод буултаа өгөх гээд зогсож байгаа бөх шиг хоцров. Хүрээ газар тавиад гэр рүүгээ ажиглан харснаа хөлд дөнгөж орж байгаа хүүхэд шиг энд тэнд гишгэн явлаа. Эрдэнэд бүх амьдрал нь хүн бүхэнд хуурагдаж доромжлогдсон харанхуй нүх мэт санагдаж, түүнийг ингэж доромжлогдоход хайрт эхнэр, итгэж явсан ганц хүн нь гэмтэй байсан нь хамгаас гомдолтой, жигшилтэй байлаа.

It is this feeling of having been betrayed that changes the course of Erdene’s life. The idea of taking revenge on the world, as an alternative to suicide, closes the first book of this four-part novel. It is only from this point onwards, when he abandons Dolgor, that Erdene becomes involved in the social and political struggle. Let us read the end of the chapter:

“Can you trust no one on this earth? **His only crime had been to believe - the innocent! - that truth triumphs over all.** To believe that as long as you remain **honest**, you are bound to get away with it. What a child he was! His naivety had lost him. With every step he took, he fell into a trap set by someone more cunning than he. He would have liked to throw himself into the Tamir, or run headlong into the Rock of Taikhar and get it over with once and for all. Or... No! **He had to take his revenge.** Pay back the **bloody world that had played him for a fool.** The **desire for vengeance** rose up inside him like a burning fire that engulfed his entire chest.

Энэ ертөнцөд үнэнч юм огтгүй ажээ. Эрдэнийн хийсэн гэм гэвэл үнэнчээр амьдарч болно, үнэн ёс байна гэж нялх хүүхэд шиг гэнэн бодож явсан сэтгэл ажээ. Өөрийн гэнэн сэтгэлээс болж алхам бүхэндээ хүний ухаанд багтан маллагдаж явснаа бодоход Тамирын голд унаж, Тайхар чулууг мөргөн үхэхэд гомдох газаргүй мэт. Гэвч доромжилсон хорвоогоос хариуд нь доромжилж баймааж өшөөгөө авах хэрэгтэй мэт бодогдоно. Орчлонг занасан сэтгэл цээжинд нь оволзож явахад

And then he remembered what Pyotr had said to him:

“Itgelt... It was Pyotr’s words that came back to him, ringing in his ears over and over again: “It is not out from pure generosity, everything is fine as long as he can profit from your blood, your sweat and your brain, then...””.

«Итгэлт чамд сайн өглөгчдөө биш, чамаас цус, хөлс, сэтгэлийг чинь хямдхан үнээр авч байгаа болохоор одоохондоо сайн байна» гэж алия Петрийн хэлж байсан дуу чихэнд нь дахин дахин сонсогдон дүнгэнэж байлаа.

Let us leave *Tungalag Tamir* for a moment, because the idea of taking revenge on the world that marks the start of a quest through which the hero of the twentieth-century Mongolian novel engages in the socialist and revolutionary struggle is a constant. In *Erdene Zasgiin Unaga*:

“Zankh or Chorkh, I don’t know which, but there’s one I’m going to get. And I’ll run away, no matter where, as long as it’s on the back of my zagal. With Mother’s dead, I’ve got nothing to hold me and nothing to support me. And those three horses, I’m done looking for them. Feline of the universe, you’ll see what I’m made of. We’ll see who’s the strongest. There’s no point in trying conciliation with you, you scum of the earth. Let’s try confrontation. Universe! To be treated by you as nothing more than a speck of dust in your eye, a piece of meat stuck between your teeth. A world where the liars, the thieves, the bootlickers and the ass-kissers have the upper hand, while the honest, hard-working, courageous people who believe in justice always get the shaft! The good die and all that’s left is the dregs! In a lawless world like this, I’d rather be blamed for making a mess of things! I’ll take my horse and go. What do I risk apart from death? Bloody blind world!

Ямар ч байсан Занх Чорх хоёрын бодийг хөтлөөд нэгийг харна. Загал морьтойгоо оргож босоод хаашаа явсан яадаг байна. Ээж л өнгөрсөн хойно, юунд хоргодох вэ. Одоо тэр гурван морийг ч эрэхгүй. **Хуурамч муу хорвоо** чамтай хутга мэсээр үзэлцэж эхэлье. Хэн ч дийлэхээ үзнэ дээ. Эвээр яагаад ч болохгүй хорвоо билээ. Эрээр нэг үзье. Ийм хорвоог яасан ч яадаг байна. Тэртээ тэргүй намайг нүдэнд орсон хог, шүдэнд орсон мах шиг үзэж байдаг юм хойно. Худалч, хулгайч, зусарч, бялдуучууд нь өөдлөөд, үнэнч шударга, ажилсаг зоригтой нь уруудаж, сайн нь үхэж, муу нь үлдэг ийм сүнс нь зайлсан хорвоод агсам тавихад яадаг байна. Мордоод арилж өгнө дөө. Их сайндаа л үхдэг юм байгаа биз, илүү яадаг юм гэж харалган **сохор хорвоо**³⁷⁸

This is not to say that Erdene’s or Gombo’s (, or ...'s) commitment to the independence party or to the advent of socialism is insincere or that he does not believe in the ideals of justice that he professes, but to insist that what drives him is disillusionment mixed with a desire for revenge. I will not dwell upon the consequences of this “disruptive element” in the novel, especially as I quoted many passages earlier that describe it, but rather to suggest that although Erdene manages to find in political and social struggle a new purpose in life, one that replaces the one hitherto formed by his family life, he will never be completely satisfied with the success he achieves in this endeavour. There will always be something missing. This passage confronts his success in his mission as a representative of the party, with his personal disarray:

“Erdene, who had been appointed government delegate to the *khoshuu*, arrived in the capital of Luu Gün by night and set about his mission in the morning. He had already achieved a great deal. First of all, he had assembled the nobility and the *khoshuu* administration to explain the policy of the People’s Government, for which he had

³⁷⁸ *Tsag Töriin Üimeen* үглб зжүсшбу фиүэхуж учфдзлу үө эху энзуь

confiscated the governor's seal. He then spoke of the elections that would soon be held to form the new local council. His speech had been received coolly. He then released all the prisoners and sent Badarch and the other takhar back to their homes. He then called a citizens' meeting at the post house to set the date for the elections and sent messengers to the four corners of the *khoshuu* to announce them.

He would have liked to ask people about Dolgor, but did not feel brave enough to face up to the implacable reality. He gave up. As soon as he had arrived at the chief town the previous night, he had been overcome by her image, and his eyes had flooded with tears. How could he have hurt her so much? Nothing he could do would ease his guilt. Unable to banish it from his thoughts, he couldn't sleep either”.

Dolgor, whom everyone had thought dead, finally reappeared. As soon as he heard, Erdene wanted to see her again, ready to forget the past to find her, and Dolgor too had hoped that he would come back for her. The illusion that a return is still possible doesn't last long. Erdene has not been the same man since he embraced the socialist cause. Their now impossible love affair takes on tragic overtones. Dolgor's character expresses this implacably:

“Dolgor had waited for Erdene from the moment he left, abandoning her. She had waited for him with tenderness and loyalty. When she saw him again for the first time, she felt an infinite happiness. If people could explode with happiness, she certainly would have. But at the very moment when the happiness beating in her heart erupted, resentment swelled and surfaced too. And the more time passed, the more she told herself that this Erdene wasn't the one she'd been waiting for. At first, she tried to suppress this feeling, but the harder she tried, the colder and more distant Erdene seemed to become.

- I am not the Dolgor I once was to you, and you are not the Erdene you once were to me. There is probably no hope of us living together now, you and I, she finally said.

- But Dolgor! It is true, I hurt you. But if there was no ovoo, where would the magpies land? Think it twice! Forget the past, think of the future and live! We still have a son!

- Yes, we have a son, replied Dolgor. But after a silence she added, in a calm, serene voice:

- It is no good trying to force a heart hardened by resentment. If you force it, it may explode. You heard the suffering I went through, but you did not endure it.

- After enduring so much suffering, our love must not disintegrate at the door of happiness.

- But what fault could I have committed! Why did not I die that winter! Who would you see today, who would you talk to? She began to cry.

He tried to comfort her, but when he put his hand on her shoulder she pulled away and pushed him away.

- Dolgor, I left you alone in a foreign land, like a kid lost without its mother. I was harsh, a coward. I've been guilty. But if you won't think of me, think of our son.

- Erdene, shut up!

Үнэхээр ч Долгор Эрдэнэ хоёрын дунд Дэжид гуайн хэлдгээр муу зай буй болоод мөч өнгөрөх тутамд гүн болж байлаа. Долгор орхиод явсан мөчөөс нь Эрдэнийг хүлээсэн. Сайн ч хүлээсэн. Үнэн ч хүлээсэн. Анх уулзаад ч хязгааргүй баярласан Баяраас хүн хагардаг бол Долгор хагарах байсан. Гэтэл оволзсон баяр нь оргилж байхад гомдлын сэтгэл үүсэн гарч яваандаа Эрдэнэ бол хүлээж байсан хүн нь биш юм шиг санагдаж эхэлсэн. Анхандаа Долгор энэ сэтгэлээ хүчлэн дарах гэж оролдсон. Гэтэл хүчлэх тутам Эрдэнэ ангид, хүйтэн болж байлаа.

— Би ч чамд эртний Долгор биш, чи ч надад эртний Эрдэнэ биш болж дээ. Одоо ч чи бид хоёрын хамт амьдардаг хөг өнгөрсөн бололтой гэж эцэст нь Долгор хэлжээ.

— Долгор минь. Чи намайг гомдоосон үнэн. Гэхдээ овоо босгоогүй бол шаазгай хаанаас суух вэ гэж үг байдаг. Чи бодооч бид өнгөрснийг мартаж, ирээдүйгээ бодож амьдаръя. Бид хүүтэй шүү дээ.

— Тиймээ хүүтэй гээд Долгор хэсэг дуугүй сууснаа нам тэлүүн дуугаар

— Гэвч гомдож хүйтэрсэн сэтгэлийг хүчилж болдоггүй бололтой. Хүчлэх гэвэл дэлбэрч магад байна. Миний туулсан зовлонг чи сонссон. Гэвч үзээгүй.

— Зовлон туулсан бидний сэтгэл ингэж жаргалын өмнө сарних ёсгүй.

— Би ямар нүгэл хийсэн хүн бэ. Юунд тэр өвөл үхсэнгүй вэ. Би тэр өвөл үхсэн бол чи хэнтэй уулзаж, хэнтэй ярих байсан бэ гээд уйлахад нь Эрдэнэ аргадаж мөрөн дээр нь гараа тавьтал эрс хөдөлгөөнөөр түлхэж зайлуулав.

— Долгор минь чамайгаа хүний газар өнчин ишиг шиг орхиж хатуу сэтгэл гаргасан миний буруу. Намайг бодохгүй гэхэд чи хүүтээ бод.

— Эрдэнэ чи битгий дуугараач

Interestingly, the author notes that if, at the time of their reunion, it had been Erdene who had first put up a barrier, Dolgor might have mechanically returned to him:

“There is no hope for us to live together, you and I”. What if it had been him who had let his bitterness speak? Wouldn't Dolgor have silenced her own? Stopped the resentment that was brewing inside her from erupting? Except that a fire whose two edges meet is very likely to erupt on all sides. Who knows what might have happened? No one can say, only guess. Life is made up of so many secrets that if we ask ourselves too many “What if? What if?”, dwelling on our frustrations and chasing after things from the past like a shadow, only feeds disillusionment”.

Хэрэв Эрдэнэ «Чи бид хоёр хамт амьдардаг хөг өнгөрсөн бололтой» гэж түрүүлэн хэлсэн бол, Эрдэнийн гомдол эхлээд дэлбэрсэн бол Долгорын гомдол, гомдлоос гарсан жигшил оргилохгүй байж болох байсан болов уу? Аль түймрийн хоёр үзүүр нийлээд оволздог шиг болох болов уу. Үүнийг хэн ч тогтоож чадахгүй зөвхөн тааж л чадна. Харин таасан тэр нь зөв буюу буруу байсныг баталж болохгүй. Амьдралд ийм олон нууц байдаг болохоор тэгсэн бол яах байсан бол, ингэсэн бол яах байсан бол гэсэн мухардмал өдий, төдийн таавар өнгөрсөн юмны хойноос сүүдэр шиг дагаж явдаг бөгөөд гомдол, харамслын эх булаг болдог жамтай.

Dolgor eventually realises that she still loves Erdene, but yet their love remains impossible: she dies in his arms, hit by a bullet after trying to warn him that the counter-revolutionaries are planning to kill him during the night.

“With his cheek pressed to his horse's mane, Tügzhil whipped and whipped, preparing his machine gun. Dolgor had chosen an excellent horse. But it seems she had not

managed to find the best one. Slowly but surely, the distance separating this Dolgor on the run from a Tügzhil chasing after her was shrinking. Between them and the district, there was almost nothing left. Barely half a mile. Tügzhil fired at close range. - Come on, my friend! Come on, my friend! The road's not long now, keep running! moaned Dolgor, riding hard, turning round to look behind her. But a bullet hit her in the right shoulder. It was only a matter of time before she fell, in sight of the main town. Nothing could stop the haemorrhaging and everything turned red. Blood red. And yet she kept going. But another bullet hit her, this time in the chest. Her senses failed her. She clung to the front pommel of her saddle.

As the sun set, the shadows of the mountains grew darker and darker. The sound of gunfire had raised the alarm in the district capital and people had come out of several of the yurts to watch the chase between the two riders in terror. When he realised that he would never catch up with her again, Tügzhil pulled on his reins, turned and rode off in despair. His braid had unravelled. Dolgor was now nothing but blood. But she continued her frantic race. When she reached Erdene's *ger*, she stopped. He was outside, stunned by the manhunt that had just unfolded before his eyes. So it was Dolgor who was fleeing. He might not have recognised her. He took her in his arms to slide her off the horse. Pressing her left hand against the breast that had been shredded by the impact, she gasped:

- Erdene, my Erdene, they're going to kill you. Tonight! And also the leader of the banner... Tomorrow morning, armed men... bring down the People's Government...

She didn't finish her sentence. The immortal flame in her big black eyes had just gone out, replaced by white. Her body abandoned her, overcome by the stiffness of death.

- Dolgor, my Dolgor! screamed Erdene whose voice had become nothing more than a rattle.

The arms clutching the body were red with blood. A torrent of tears burst from his eyes, which had dried up so many years ago.

His cheek pressed against Dolgor's icy cheek, he sighed from the depths of the abyss: "Why? Then, taking her in his arms, he stood up. In the yurt, he laid her on the bed and then knelt down, contemplating her face for a long time, all signs of life gone. It was only after a while that he pushed aside a lock of hair stuck together by the blood to caress her.

- And I was so hoping you'd finally come...

He kissed her broad forehead, stood up and wiped his tears with the palm of his hand, grabbed the Berdan hanging from the head of one of the trellises, slung it over his shoulder, retrieved a few bullets from his trunk and stuffed them into his *deel*. As he was about to leave, he stopped abruptly:

- I might not be able to come back.

He turned and walked through the door".

4. From literature to society

This entire section is based on literary sources, but its aim is to draw out reflections on Mongolian society, on representations of human relationships, history and identity. If art and human artefacts are material for historians and ethnologists, there is no reason why literature should not be. Through fiction, in this case historical fiction, twentieth-century Mongolian authors offer us a glimpse into the society of the time, probably more the society from which they are writing than the society they are describing, though the two are not the same thing. Rinchen's work is acknowledged by specialists in Mongolian studies for its historical significance, while Lodoidamba's is undoubtedly more concerned with the ethnological, sociological and psychological dimensions.

The authors of the novel had the explicit mission, assigned by the party, of providing "the people" with models on which to model their conduct, representatives of the new, socialist order. These models appeared in the novel through the character of the hero of the revolution, whether inspired by the biography of an illustrious man like Sükhbaatar or Magsarzhav, or presented as a fictional character (Erdene, Tömör, Gombo, Shirchin, Nasanbat, etc.), although in many cases these characters were also inspired by individuals who really existed.³⁷⁹

In the novels, these characters act as models for each other, but by staging this mimetic relationship between them, the writers were also suggesting that readers model their behaviour on models validated by the authorities.

They were "calibrated" works, "commissioned" so to speak, by the government and the party. The values they embodied and the ideals they pursued were therefore necessarily in line with the propaganda of the time.

However, if we look a little more closely, as we have tried to do, we see that without even breaking this rule, the authors also tell us something else about human relationships, and the relationship of the individual to history. Drawing on the work of Humphrey and Girard, I wanted to show here that Lodoidamba, particularly in the examples analysed, offered a rich and complex reading of the mechanisms of galvanisation and emulation that are important from the point of view of commitment in the name of a cause or an ideal. The struggle for independence, sovereignty, justice, the advent of socialism and everything that formed the basis of the propaganda of the time appears to this author to be motivated by the conviction that what individuals set up as heroes, as models, is right (Sükhbaatar, Pyotr, etc.), but not only that. Rivalry, spiteful love and ambition can also be hidden motives for commitment, and Lodoidamba shows us all that too.

Now let us take a step back from our sources. If Lodoidamba manages to speak to us with finesse about the complexity of the relationship between commitment to a cause, by integrating what has to do with psychology, love, hatred: what we have brought together under the analytical concept of "mimetic rivalry" coined by Girard, we are justified in thinking that he has drawn on his own experience of human relationships. This leads us to make two observations:

1 - Firstly, with regard to the analysis of the "*bagsh/shavi*" relationship in Mongolian society, the importance and cultural originality of which have been recognised by specialists, we can draw on the work of the ethnologist Caroline Humphrey, who has taken

³⁷⁹ Researchers agree that Erdene of *Tungalag Tamir* is in fact Lodoidamba's father, which the author has not denied. Rinchen himself has explained that he used the memoirs of a soldier to create his character of Shirchin.

a specific interest in Mongolian society, to shed new light on it, inspired by the work of the anthropologist René Girard. We have seen that the novel *Lodoidamba*, in many respects, seems to confirm the relevance of Girard's analysis, and does so in the context of Mongolian society as described by a Mongolian author. In particular, the ambiguity of admiration for a model which, when thwarted, can lead to hatred and a stubborn struggle against the person whom one continues to admire, appears in *Tungalag Tamir*, a novel in which the analysis of the special relationship between the guide - bagsh - and his disciple -shavi - retains its validity and importance.

2- Secondly, as a Mongolian and as an author, the person proposing this reading was himself a stakeholder in this society, and what is more, a politically, socially and culturally committed author and researcher. In other words, *Lodoidamba* was a representative of the "intelligentsia" as well as Rinchen was. The work of the Mongolian ethnologist Tsetsentsolmon supports our thinking here, as her article cited earlier shows and describes the social mechanisms at work within the Mongolian Writers' Union charged with a propaganda mission. Tsetsentsolmon describes rivalries and enmity, combined with political and cultural commitment, which resonate with Girard's analysis.

I would therefore like to conclude this chapter by suggesting that, while fulfilling their mission as propagandists - and we have seen that this was the case - Mongolian authors of fiction during the socialist period were also able to take a lucid and critical look at the politics they had to carry out. And I would like to quote Caroline Humphrey again:

"Everyone understands the arbitrariness of any individual's position in the hierarchy of power, and everyone knows, therefore, that morality rests elsewhere".³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ Humphrey, "Remembering an Enemy: the Bogd Khaan in Twentieth Century Mongolia", in R. Watson (ed.) *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, Santa Fé, School of American Research, 1994, p. 26.

Chapter six: From shadow to light or Rinchen's two shades of Bogd

“Instruction as a weapon” both with respect to the context of writing and as a literary subject

In order for literature to fulfil its mission of infusing ideal of society promoted by the party into the minds of the people, it was essential to make it accessible to them. From the outset, therefore, education policy and the establishment of a modern, nationwide education system were among the party's highest priorities (and we can figure out the ordeal it was in this huge, underpopulated area where the majority of the inhabitants were constantly in motion). We saw this in our presentation of the Mongolian Writers' Union. As the instructions to authors were to produce realistic, partisan, revolutionary and popular works, it is not surprising that this policy and its implementation were among the favourite themes of the novels of the time. It appears in one way or another in all the novels we consulted for this research, even if some of them only refer to it by allusion. It is central in at least two of the three novels commonly considered to be the great masterpieces of twentieth-century Mongolian realism: Rinchen's *Üüriin Tuya* and Lodoidamba's *Tungalag Tamir*, and more discreetly in *Tsag Töriin Üimeen* by Namdag the question of one's own relationship to culture and scholarship being one of the main character's major preoccupations. The styles of these authors, we have also said it, their ways of expressing and depicting things are very different.

1. From the heart of darkness...³⁸¹

In both *Üüriin Tuya* and *Tungalag Tamir*, the “obscurantism” associated with the old system is severely denounced. While in the first of these two cases this appears from the outset and then follows a chronological framework, in *Tungalag Tamir* it is rather in retrospect that the criticism becomes evident, through the way the characters involved in the revolution look at the society they are trying to reform. Yet, a few clues make this clear in small increments from the beginning of the story.

When the question arises as to which passages would best illustrate this idea, one finds himself spoiled for choice. In a sense, it can be said that in Rinchen, the “obscurantism” of feudal society makes system. The structure of the narrative, broken down into multiple tableaux, creates a panoramic effect and paints an exhaustive and striking picture of this society. It can thus be argued without too much anxiety to wander over the point that the author's objective in this work was not so much to tell a story as to convey an idea, a message. While this dimension is also present in Lodoidamba, the novelistic, fanciful aspect, the spirit of adventure and the sense of intrigue remain in the foreground. If we force the line a little, we could say that *Tungalag Tamir* is a historical novel, *Üüriin Tuya* a reconstitution.

³⁸¹ Needless to say that I am referring to representations, not expressing a point of view.

In this latter, the adoption of the little Shirchin by Zhamba gives rise to a fire ritual in the rich herder's camp. Through this scenery Rinchen suggests the hold exerted by rites and beliefs inherited from past centuries on populations that clearly lack the critical thinking that would allow them to appreciate the incongruity of the situation. The incantation quoted does not come from the author's imagination: it is an extract from the "fire sutra", reproduced in its original form, that is, not retranscribed in contemporary Mongolian language. A short passage of the chapter can be quoted:

"Repeating this ritual homage from the depths of the ages recited by the elder, they made copper trays filled with "white jewels" of all kinds – *aaruul khuruud*, *öröm* and *byaslag*, but also candy sugar and prunes – describe circles, turning in the direction of the sun's path to the cries of "khurai, khurai, khurai".

While the participants in the ritual do not seem to be struck by the anachronism, the author forces his reader to take awareness of it:

"[...] This was the incantation to the master of fire.

Dressed in a silk *deel*, Zhamba proceeded from the door to the hearth, before which he bowed three times, then turned back to the door and bowed three more times to pay homage to the guardian of the lintel. A rope imitating the one that prevented the ram from moving was handed over from hand to hand in the congregation with cries of "güürgii, güürgii, güürgii": a way of calling for the growth of the sheep herd. A *khadag* was placed on the chest of the animal that was to be sacrificed to the fire, which was fed with fat to make the flames rise. And in this modest *ger*, the peaceful dwelling of a simple herder, becoming now this of a genuine family, like all the other ones of the popular class, they paid homage to the fire as did the imperious *taizh* of another time, guarantors of the feudal system. To say the least, to hear these herders, their wives, and even their children, repeat incantations intended to call for abundant war catches before launching an assault on the enemy sounded anachronistic and incongruous".

This sequence can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, Rinchen highlights and denounces the "ignorance" and "backwardness" of the people of the time, purportedly maintained in this state of ignorance by those "garants of the feudal order" mentioned in this excerpt and thus complies with the official discourse. Yet, on the other hand, by quoting the sutra, moreover doing so in its ancient form, he transmits to the Mongolian reader an element of literary and cultural heritage. Now, in the 1920s, Rinchen had made important collections of ancient texts without being able to publish them, shortly before he was tried

and convicted of “spying for the Japanese”.³⁸² This is perhaps a good example of the elusive transcripts theorised by Caroline Humphrey and that Tsetsentsolmon was able to identify (notably in Damdinsüren).³⁸³

A few chapters later, the author describes a ritual which this time involves the whole community, that is, the expulsion of the *zorig* with the mediation of an emissary that we quoted above. We have mentioned earlier the dialogue between the two lamas both specialised in the treatment of ailments and diseases, each one in his way. Then, the *güremch* having managed to convince the *noyon* that in order to overcome the evil of which he fell victim he must have it charged on a sacrificial victim who, at the end of the ritual, must be expelled from the *khoshuu*. The choice fell on Nasanbat, the son of the old Batbayar whom we have already met.³⁸⁴ Let us remember, as the ritual was approaching, the palace of the *beis* Lkha, the *noyon*, was in a state of great excitement while the *güremch* was explaining to the young boy the role he would have to play. But another character is then introduced by the author, an old soldier who overheard a secret conversation between the *güremch* and his disciple. What he reveals to Nasanbat shows very well that this ritual has for its organizers no other purpose than to abuse the credulity of people to serve their own interests:

“Do not be afraid. The evil one, the demons, the devil’s envoy: all of them are inventions of *güremchs*, people to be wary of, who by cunning destroy you a man. But you, do not fear the demons! If there is anything you should fear, it is humans. That raptor of a Tangut was talking to his disciple right next to me just now. I spent time in Tibet, I learned the language. These two spoke freely despite my presence, not suspecting for a moment that I understood. This *güremch* tangut intends to have you taken to the farthest reaches of *Khoshuu* to strip you. This is the reason why he was so keen to have you be granted with that much gold and silver. But that’s not all, he has spotted some priceless features in your skull and would like to make it his own”.

The next chapter describes in detail the ritual, “great and terrifying performance”, which makes a strong impression on the congregation, compared to a herd of sheep:

³⁸² “In the late twenties, [...Rinchen], then a young literary scholar, collected considerable quantities of oral literature, epics, tales and proverbs, from folk singers, but was never able to publish them until, from 1960 onwards, an opening was found in western Europe. Between 1926 and 1929 he was fortunately able to record almost all the repertory of a well-known contemporary poet Tiddler Luvsan, who had to emigrate to Verkhneudinsk when, at the end of 1929, the leftists in Mongolia forbade folk-singers to recite in public as an “illicit continuation of feudal traditions”. Luvsan’s epics and tales were not published in full till they appeared in Western Germany in 1960”, Bawden, 1968: 376; Rinchen, *Folklore Mongol*, Vol. 4, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1965.

³⁸³ Tsetsentsolmon, 2018: 221.

³⁸⁴ Let us also remember that Batbayar is the head of one of the households that make up Zhamba’s camp, and in the scene mentioned he told how he had been attacked by a *taizh* from his *khoshuu* that he had come across in a Chinese counter in the capital, *taizh* who had taken a malicious pleasure in spending even more, boasting that as long as there were poor people to bear the burden of the debts of the upper class, this latter would have no reason to go without.

“Intimidated by the terrifying aspect of this grandiose ritual performance, those who, like sheep, had massed themselves in a compact flock to witness it, all together let out a cry of fright, jumping up in one go”.

In Western culture and literature, metaphors of this type which, on the one hand, return man to his animal side and, on the other, deindividualise him in order to merge him into a herd or a crowd, clearly have the function of connoting ignorance, the absence of a critical mind and, in this case, the fearful side which is quite characteristic of sheep. The ritual takes place as planned, and Nasanbat is expelled. Thanks to the old soldier however, he manages to avert the attack of the *güremch*'s disciple and neutralise him. Yet, he lets him live. As in a fairy tale, he gains here an “adjutant” who will later help him out of a bad situation in Beijing. But as this is not the place to tell the whole novel, let us focus on the subject I intend to develop here³⁸⁵ And turn to *Tungalag Tamir* to find a passage that might give us some basis for comparison. An interesting one can be found in chapter eight of the first book: captivated by the beauty of two black horses Tömör, the Brave of the Hills, has stolen them during the night from the *zairan* (shaman) to whom they belonged. In the morning, he returns to the camp where the excitement is at its peak since the theft was discovered, but as no one suspects him, Tömör can attend with the others the ritual in which the shaman claims to put his thief to death by devouring his heart:

“When night came, he took [the horses] and went to tie them up in a wood. When he returned in the morning, the commotion was in full swing:

– Tonight, when the stars begin to shine, our zairan will tear out the heart of the man who stole his horses and eat it. But if that evil rascal comes to return them, the shaman will pardon him. He will let the dog live. Come and see our Master Zairan tear the heart out of the thief!

Tömör had often heard people praise the incredible powers of these powerful shamans. He was not completely serene. “This one is not really going to eat my heart!... They say that the strength of shamans is immense... “The famous Tsakhiur Tömör of Zasagt Khan, terrified by a shaman, went to give him back two horses that he had stolen. Can you believe it?” What an appalling rumour! No. He couldn't let that happen! He could not suffer such a disgrace.

Sanzhaa Zairan then emerged from the large tent. He was a small man of about forty, with sloping shoulders and an elusive look, his long hair braided and already greying. He wore a blue *deel* belted with purple, and his knife was matched with a silver firelighter. He had become a shaman at the age of 20. One day, on his way back from hunting in a clearing, he had seen two cows grazing. Sanzhaa Zairan became famous by telling the owner who was looking for his lost animals that he was able to find them for him. Not only had he forgotten that he had seen the two cows, but he had convinced himself that he had been guided by magic. And since then he had been warning people that they were in danger of being shot, or sabred, or something like that, without knowing whether it was magic or malice that was speaking through him. People would

³⁸⁵ (The chapter in question allows Rinchen to digress at length and summarise the story of the Taiping revolt of 1853, as told in Nasanbat by two men who themselves participated in it, *Üüriin Tuya*, “mökkhözh baigaa töriin niisleld”, 1951, p.)

rush to touch the bottom of his *deel* or the soles of his boots, hoping to be touched by the grace. A man wearing a purple *zhins* approached him and said a few words.

– I’m going to make his bloody heart beat until it bursts, the shaman shouted loudly. He laughed contemptuously.

“That’s it! Eat my heart if you are so powerful. But if you lie I will take your horses”, Tömör muttered to himself... That evening, as the universe was draped in a dark veil, the zairan called all the masters of the mountains into the great tent and threatened the thief with every possible curse, accompanying his words with theatrical gesticulations. He began by beating his drum with regular strokes, then two longer ones, and then began to sway. Throwing the drum away, he stood up and leapt to the back of the tent, then sat down again. He seemed to be holding something in his hand, which he pretended to devour greedily. By the light of the two large oil lamps, the spectators could see the blood flowing from the corner of his lips. At the same time, both his hands began to tremble furiously. They were covered in blood.

– The thief went to the other side, by Burkhan!

– He feasted on his heart and lungs!

– What a power!

– Serves him right, the dirty thief!

– You said it. Death is seizing him!

The murmurs were flying in the assembly. Tömör felt his chest grow light. A sharp pain seized him. He felt as if he were suffocating. Feeling ill at ease, he went outside. In the east, the moon was rising just above the mountains. The cool night wind whipped his face. “The dead are said to have no shadows”, he thought as he looked at the ground. His was perfectly normal. He headed straight for the uya. “Facing a *chötgör*, the horses would tremble”: he approached cautiously but the animals did not move a muscle. As he walked away, perched on the back of one of them, he kept glancing at his shadow. He was sweating and feeling his chest all the time. He was already a long way from the two tents when he stepped ashore. “The dead leave no trace”, he said to himself, pacing the mud. There too, his footprints were showing normally. He even tried taking off his boots. The result did not change”.

Тэр шөнө Төмөр хоёр хар морийг хулгайлж аваад модонд уяж, үд өнгөрөхийн үед майханд эргэж ирвэл бөөн үймээн болж байв. Орой од түгэхийн үед хоёр хар морио авсан хулгайчийн зүрхийг суга татан иднэ, авсан муу хулгайн морьд авчирч өгвөл зайран багш ивгээж нохойн амийг өршөөн нигүүлсэнэ. Өнөө орой зайран багш хулгайчийн зүрх сугалахад ирцгээгээрэй гэж нэг хүн өндөр дуугар зарлаж байв.

Ид чадал нь багтаж ядсан сүрхий бөө нарын тухай сүртэй яриа олныг сонссон Төмөрт энэ үг баяртай сэтгэл төрүүлсэнгүй. Энэ чинь зүрхий минь үнэхээр идчих юм биш байгаа даа. Бөө нар сүрхий арга чаргатай гэж ярьдаг гэж бодогдоно. Гэтэл «Засагт ханы цахиур Төмөр бөөгөөс айгаад явсан хоёр морио авчирч өгсөн гэнэ билээ» гэж шуугин ярих шившигтэй яриа сэтгэлд нь орж ирлээ.

Том эрээн майхнаас Санжаа зайран гарч ирлээ. Шувтан мөртэй туранхай нам биетэй, тогтож явсан хурц нүдтэй, үзүүрт нь цагаан сур сүлжсэн алаг цоо бууралтаж яваа гээгтэй, дөч орчим насны хар хүн ажээ. Хөх дээл дээр хүрэн бүс ороогоод мөнгөн хэт билтэй хутга зүүжээ.

Энэ хүн хорин насандаа бөө болж, ан хийгээд буцаж явахад нь модны цоорхойд идэж байсан хоёр үхрийг хараад эрсэн эзэн нь мэргэлүүлснийг олж өгснөөр алдаршжээ. Гэхдээ тэр хоёр

үхрийг урьтаж үзээд дараа нь олж өгснөө аль хэдий нь мартсанаар барахгүй харин ид шидээр олж өгсөн юм шиг бодож явдаг ажээ. Одоо бол хүнийг буудах, сэлэмдэх зэрэг түмэн зүйлийн ид шид үзүүлдэг болжээ. Ингээд хаа заль хэрэглэж, хаа ид шид хэрэглэж байгаагаа өөрөө ойлгохоо больсон хүн юм. Хүмүүс түүний хойноос хуйлран дээлийн хормой, гутлын өлмий зэрэг хүрсэн газар бүхнээс адис авч байв. Хүрэн жинстэй нэг хүн зайрантай уулзаж юм хэлэв.

- Бор зүрхий нь булгилуулж байгаад хүртэж орхино гэж зайран чанга дуугаар хэлээд их л бардам инээв.

«Чадалтай юм бол чи миний зүрхийг эсвэл би чиний морийг» гэж Төмөр сэтгэлдээ шивэглэв. Тэгээд орой болж ертөнцийг хар бүрээс таглан харанхуйлах үед зайран их майхандаа түмэн уулын савдаг дуудан хулгайчийг сүртэй хараалаар зүхэн занаж дөвчирхөж гарлаа. Холбоогоо шажигнуулсан тал хэнгэрэг нь эхлээд жигд дуугарч байснаа сүүлдээ үргэлжилсэн хоёр цохилтоор дүжигнэж эхлэв. Бөө хэнгэргээ хаяж босоод майхны орой руу үсрэв. Тэгээд буцаж суудалдаа суухдаа ямар нэгэн юм гартаа барин шал шал хийтэл идлээ. Том гэгчийн тосон дэнгийн гэрэлд харвал зайрны завьжаар цус цувж, цус болсон хоёр гар нь чичирч байлаа.

- Хулгайч цаашаа харлаа, бурхан минь

- Уушги зүрх хоёрыг нь зооглож орхилоо шүү

- Ийм чадалтай хүн байх гэж

- Муу хулгайчийн хохь нь доо

- Хэлээд яахав. Үхэл нь ирж дээ гэх зэрэг хүмүүсийн шивнэлдэн ярих дуу сонсогдов.

Төмөрийн цээж нь хөнгөн болчихсон ч юм шиг, хатган өвдөж байгаа ч юм шиг санагдав. Төмөр амьсгаа давчдан дотор нь эвгүй болоход майхнаас гарвал дорнод уулын оройгоос том гэгчийн сар салж ядан мандаж байв. Шөнийн жихүүн хүйтэн салхи хацар руу нь үлээж бие нь жирс жирс гэлээ.

- Үхсэн хүнд сүүдэр байдаггүй юм гэнэ билээ гэж бодоод сүүдрээ харвал хэвээрээ байв. Шууд уян дээр очив. Чөтгөр болсон юм боль морь үргэх байх гэж бодоод мориндоо хянамгай ойртвол морь нь огт хөдөлсөнгүй. Мордоод явахдаа дахин дахин сүүдрээ харж байв. Хүйтэн хөлс нь чийхран, дахин дахин хэнхдэгээ барилан явсаар майхнаас нилээд холдоод «үхсэн хүнд мөр байдаггүй юм гэдэг» гэж бодоод бууж шавар дээр гишгэвэл бас л байлаа. Гутлаа тайлж байгаад хүртэл үзсэн боловч мөртэй байлаа.

Here we see a Tömör torn between his pride as a “Brave of the Hills” - supposedly fearing no one and having taken an oath not to live under the *ger*, not to kneel before any god or Buddha - and the awe that the shaman inspires him, as he is unable, however “brave” he may be, to remain impervious to the popular beliefs of society from which he cannot completely emancipate himself.

The character in *Tungalag Tamir* who best embodies popular naivety is probably Nyam. With this character, however, Loidamba subtly raises the question of the ineffability of the concept of belief.³⁸⁶ Nyam often invokes the gods and spirits and goes to the temple whenever he can to worship them, as we shall see, but this does not prevent him from “sharing” with them the offerings that others make to them, especially when it comes to spirits. His interventions in the novel are generally not lacking in humour.

³⁸⁶ On this matter, see for example Hamayon, Roberte N. « L'anthropologue et la dualité paradoxale du « croire » occidental », *Revue du MAUSS*, vol. n° 28, no. 2, 2006, pp. 427-448.

“On a summer morning, an empty cart left the Itgelt camp from the north and headed for Luu Gün Khüree. Two riders were driving it, riding side by side. It was Itgelt and Erdene. They were soon joined by Nyam, riding an old white mare received from Itgelt several years before. The reward for his work.

– I’ve fallen behind in sipping my tea. But from now on I’m riding with you.

– And where are you going? asked Erdene.

Itgelt smirked:

– What a question! Dear Nyam is going to pay tribute to the *sakhius*³⁸⁷ of the *koshuu*.

– Praying brings spiritual well-being, making amends brings material well-being, and everything is good for the *khiimor*³⁸⁸, Nyam recited. He lit his tobacco. "If bowing to the *sakhius* brought luck and *khiimor*’, this one would succumb to the weight of wealth," Itgelt thought. He winked at Erdene:

– Nyam Guai brings luck and *khiimor*’ from all sides.

And Nyam agreed happily:

– I have no complaints. No stumbling horse, no cold all year round! When the day was not good for the sheep.

Nyam was used to go to the *khüree* to pay tribute to the *sakhius* of the *khoshuu*... and to come back quite drunk, with *balin* paste to treat the whole camp: “*Damshig!* Don’t bite your thumb! Take it easy: it’s with the index finger that we suck this”, he used to say when sharing it”.

The scene that follows is not lacking in flavour. And it is a good example of how Lodoidamba has appropriated “socialist realism” and its pedagogical requirements but to tell story that are truly literary compositions:

“In a barely audible voice, he greeted some of the faithful who were entering and leaving the temple in a continuous stream. He entered in his turn. Lit by the flickering silver glow of the candles, permeated by the smell of incense, the temple almost disappeared under the *khadag* and was bathed in a solemn atmosphere, as if protected by some mysterious secret that held the hearts of the faithful bound by the invisible threads of piety. Nyam went to prostrate himself before the *sakhius*:

– Oh great almighty *sakhius*, will you offer your nectar to the sinner that I am? If you will not give me your attention, who will? When Badarch offers the best of his *arz*³⁸⁹ to Itgelt, to me he serves only a bad still residue. And as he laid his forehead on the altar to collect the *adis*³⁹⁰, he glanced around. He stood up, clasped his hands above his head, bowed again... and gulped down the strong vodka contained in the silver *tsögst*:³⁹¹ this strong alcohol was poured into it every day, as an offering to the *sakhius* of Luu Gün. Nyam approached the tall *balin*³⁹² pyramids, from the back of which he

³⁸⁷ “Tutelary genius”

³⁸⁸ “Good luck, good fortune, spirits, morale”. Bawden, 1997, p. 439.

³⁸⁹ “A spirit twice distilled, a spirit distilled from *arkhi*”, *ibid*: 25.

³⁹⁰ “Alesing received by being touched, blessing”, *ibid*: 6.

³⁹¹ Here: “a bowl for holding a religious offering”, *ibid*: 510.

³⁹² “Sacrificial offering shaped out of dough (Buddh.) (Skr.) *ibid*: 40

removed pieces of dough and put them in his *övör*³⁹³. But as he passed the temple gate, he came face to face with a lama pulling on the bridle of his mare”.

Тасралтгүй орж гарсаар байгаа мөргөлчин нарын заримтай нам дуугаар мэндлэлцэн явж лавранд орлоо. Ганцхан мөнгөн зулын гэрэл анивчин хүж арцны үнэр анхилж, хаашаа л харвал хадаг яндаг болсон энэ сүмийн юм бүхэн нь ер бусын нууц, эрхэмсэг бөгөөд мөргөлчдийн сэтгэлд үзүүргүй бишрэлийн оосрыг үхлүүт зангидна. Нямаа залбиран хошуу сахиусны өмнө очоод наминчлав. Агуу хүчит өндөр сахиус минь, нүгэлт надад сархдаа хайрла. Танаас өөр намайг өршөөн соёрхох хэн байх билээ. Бадарчийнх Итгэлтэд арз өгөөд надад тарган цийдэм өгч байна гээд ширээний ирмэгээс адис авах зуур хулгай нүдээр орчин тойрноо ажиглав. Өндийж толгой дээрээ наминчлаад дахин бөхийж мөнгөн цөгцтэй хар архин нанчидыг ууж орхилоо. Луу гүний хошуу сахиусанд өдөр бүхэн хар архиар нанчид тавьдаг билээ. Нямаа цааш явж хэдэн том балингийн араар гарахдаа хэд дахин базан авч өвөртлөөд сүмийн хаалгаар гарахад цагаагч гүүгий нь нэг лам хөтлөөд явж байснаа зогсож [...]

Other characters, more secondary, also illustrate the hold that religion has on people’s minds. Sodnom, with whom Dolgor is united long after her separation from Erdene, is a good example. The passage here is taken from the end of the novel, the people’s government is now in power but its position is fragile and, in the west, it will soon face the armed uprising that marked the year 1932:

“Sodnom was a fervent worshipper. He never went anywhere without asking his *bagsh* lam to read him the conjecture. “My old friend the *bagsh* said that it would not be a good thing to do the transhumance on Thursday”, “My dear old friend, the *bagsh* said that it is on the day of Davaa that it would be good to start shearing the sheep”, “My dear old friend, the felt, it must be rolled on the day of Myagmar, and starting with pulling a *zeerd* horse, the *bagsh* said”... And so on. “The *bagsh* said, the *bagsh* told me”, Dolgor heard nothing but that. Sodnom had also decreed that the days of astral discord for them, like the day of his mother’s death, should be marked by a respectful taboo. Sodnom was one of those people who could not take a step without consulting the lamas. And the previous spring, when he had asked the **khamba**³⁹⁴ of Zaya Khüree about the recommended route, the **khamba** had told him that he would be fine without suffering any illness or loss of livestock if he crossed the Khanui to the other side of the valley”.

Tuya’s story (Tungalag Tamir)

As for the story of the young Tuya, it is possible that it was used as a pretext to brush a portrait of the Bogd Zhavzandamba which does not speak well for him. This is the first time that the character actually appears in the story, although he is referred to several times before. Tuya was, we are told, the wife of a senior official of the Minister of the Treasury. At the age of twenty, the very pretty young woman had been noticed by the Bogd’s Shadar Soyvon, Danigai, who was, we are told, on the lookout for a pretty creature who might

³⁹³ “Breast of a gown, pocket”, *ibid*: 266.

³⁹⁴ “Abbot of a lamasery” *ibid*: 424

appeal to his master. This is how the young woman becomes the paramour of the Bogd Zhavzandamba. Blinded by faith, Tuya does not feel that she is committing a sin:

“Tuya had faith in divine providence. Crushed by the weight of her beliefs and superstitions, her vision of the world was simple: everything was either white or black. And so, to her, having caught the Bogd’s attention seemed to be the most enviable of fates for a human creature. A sign of heavenly grace. She was therefore in no way embarrassed to indulge in the pleasures of the flesh with the Most High. On the contrary, she was lulled by the illusion that she had already left this world to take her place in the Divaazhin, and continued to pray with the same devotion. In the same way that a sheep looks up to heaven when it is slaughtered, thinking that Tenger is watching, Tuya sincerely believed that it was destiny that had granted her favours by predestining her to become the whore of the one-eyed and concupiscent Tibetan”.

This chapter gives us the opportunity to see the Bogd waking up, his mouth pasty and burping like a goret:

“Daylight filtered through the open window, illuminating the room. Bogd was slumped on his bed in his underwear, shaking and belching loudly.

– Ah, Danigai, here you are... I can’t sleep. But you came very early, didn’t you? Well, help me get dressed.

The sovon gathered up the clothes that were scattered about and helped the monarch to put them on.

– What’s the girl’s name again?

– Tuya.

– Oh yes... Tuya. Twenty years old... a very pretty girl, isn’t she?

– Definitely my master, a very beautiful girl.

– Fine as hell... But can’t you see she is not yet ripe”.

Danigai having advised him to get rid of Tuya to avoid giving grist to the mills, the Bogd effectively abandons her but takes her away from her husband to make her marry the *taizh* Pürev, to whom she never manages to get used to. To make matters worse, in the Bogd’s couch, the young woman contracted a venereal disease and ended up killing herself by throwing herself into the Tamir.

This micro-narrative, integrated into the novel as an offshoot of the main plot, portrays the Bogd in a way that is typical of the literature of the genre. A comparable one can be found in *Üüriin Tuya*, under the title “Where ‘Demoness’ Nipples’ got a Disciple”. As always with Rinchen, and in contrast to the dynamic style of Lodoidamba, the scene and the setting are described here at length, with an attention to detail that creates certain heaviness.³⁹⁵ The soyon Danigai is replaced here by the jester or “Bogd’s fool”, a character who, like his counterparts in the European courts, had the privilege of being able

³⁹⁵ From a literary point of view, Mongolian scholars generally agree that aesthetics and poetry are lacking in Rinchen. If one wants to compare his style to those of the great French classical authors, one quickly thinks of Proust or Zola, known for their exhaustive, long descriptions, requiring the reader to make a significant effort of concentration.

to make fun of his master.³⁹⁶ The latter's lover is not a young woman in this case but a great lama, the *khuvilgaan* Gendenpuntsag from the Dashchoimbol college of the Gandantegchilen monastery.

“Beside his Eminence's bed, a bed almost as wide as it was long, resting on a shelf of precious mahogany wood with incusted mother-of-pearl beads forming like snowflakes, was a cup carved from a monkey's skull, lacquered with fine gold inside. At the foot of the bed, on a lion carved from *suman* wood,³⁹⁷ siding with boots richly embroidered with threads of the five colours lay the saffron silk trousers of the Bogd, and on a thick carpet of alashan wool, other shoes, pants and purple silk trousers with the fly open.

The *khutagt* was lying on his side, fatuously pretending to be absorbed in the story of Zun Pin mei calligraphed on a notebook by a scribe with the greatest care. His features were prematurely marked by the taste and abuse of spirits, and his face already bore the signs of old age, and the loamy colour of those who indulge in alcohol. The thick, sensual lips, the fixed, cold gaze, the superior air, gave that mouth and those eyes something chilling.

Next to him, wrapped up to his head in a lambskin-lined blanket, a young *bandi* had poked his nose out as the jester entered, only to emerge completely, revealing a face painted like a woman's, cheekbones flushed with red and lips glowing crimson. It was a *Khuvilgaan* from East Khüree, a very high ranking lama belonging to the college of Dashchoimbol called Gendenpuntsag. He was the latest *bandi* of the Bogd”.

The rest of the chapter also allows the author to evoke the unenviable fate of those who, like the Tuya of Lodoidamba, were able to attract the favours of the Bogd for a time. One point should be noted. In Lodoidamba, the “empathy” is always directed towards the positive characters: one can find passages that report the thoughts and state of mind of a “bad guy” (the *taizh* Pürev, Badarch, Tsamba or Tügzhil to name but a few) but it is through the point of view of an omniscient narrator that the reader has access to it. With Rinchen it is much more ambiguous, here it seems that it is much more the internal point of view of the Bogd that is offered to the reader, which to a certain extent forces him to put himself in the shoes of the character, which could be a way of suggesting that the vitriolic portrait that is made of him must be looked at with a critical mind. I will come back to this. After an exchange permeated with a satirical irony between the jester and the Bogd's lover, two visitors are announced: Zhamba, who has come from the provinces with a white ambler for the Bogd, and a lama with the curious nickname of “Demoness' Nipples”:

³⁹⁶ However, I am not making the comparison to suggest an influence, the character of the madman also appears in the Tibetan tradition, it is likely that if we want to look for influences it is rather in this direction that we should take inspiration. On the matter, see Nathalie Gauthard, « Les maîtres-moqueurs du Tibet ou les métamorphoses du rire », *L'ethnographie*, 2 | 2020, mis en ligne le 20 mars 2020, consulté le 20 mai 2023. URL : <https://revues.mshparisnord.fr/ethnographie/index.php?id=346>.

³⁹⁷ A variety of Mahogany wood.

“No sooner had Zhamba left the hall of tributes than a bronze bell rang, it was the jester who came running in, followed by a porter who himself introduced a lama with an unusual physiognomy, his skull as round as a copper ladle and on which not a single hair grew, his tiny nose pressed on both sides by puffy jowls which hung on either side of his chin, similar in every way to the portraits of the divine “Demoness’ Nipples” executed by the copyist monks. This Samdan had not stolen his nickname.

He prostrated himself three times and presented the *Khutagt* with a *sonom khadag* supporting a bronze bell worked with extreme finesse. But even after the *adis mutar* was passed to him through the consecrated silk knot, he stood there in a reverent yet contrite pose, as if charged with passing on an extremely heavy request. With clasped hands he bent down until he touched the ground:

– Speak up! What do you have to say to me? Bogd asked him.

– Your Radiant Eminence, the wretched *shavi* before you is a disciple of the Dashchoimbol College, of the same congregation as the great *khutagt shireet* Gendenpuntsag, with whom he would like to live out the rest of this existence. May His Excellency grant me the same compassionate regard that he has for the creatures of this world.

The tremors of his hanging, flabby jowls betrayed all too well the shame that filled his ruddy, ungainly face. And yet he dared to face the inert and icy eye of the Bogd.

A dead silence fell over the hall of tributes while, for a moment, the *khutagt* allowed himself to go into secret introspection, recalling the adventures into which the appetite for the flesh had drawn him. He remembered those who had successively obeyed his desires without saying a word and thus gained his favours, those who had enjoyed a fleeting pleasure with him, only to find themselves plunged into the depths of the eighteenth of the underworld, rotting in prison until death came to them. The *soyvon* Letseg, with the face of a figure and the body of Apollo, the *khutagt* Zhalkhanz who chased power, the young Noyon Khan Na with his girlish features... He was still in these dreams, scrolling through all these lamas, when Samdan, the so-called “Demoness’ Nipples”, let out a deep sigh that drowned out in a groan. He turned his gaze in her direction and thought: This poor creature must have been driven to the height of despair to dare to come and make such a request, and is waiting for the knife to fall. Could he not give in to the prayer of this wretched lama of low extraction, deny him this young bellicose, this *khuvilgaan shireet lam* who was already burning his wings in the fire of privilege? He must really be consumed with desire to have come to this. For once, let us leave this saintly and somewhat presumptuous incarnation to be pampered by this Samdan, this “Demoness’ Nipples”.

He nodded to the porter:

- Call the *khuvilgaan*. [...]

Critics of religion and religious figures taken over by characters in the novels

Generally speaking, lama characters are the main target of criticism in all this literature. We have just seen some examples of this in the form of scenes narrated or described by an omniscient narrator. Those taken over by the characters in the novel themselves are equally

revealing. Let us read, for example, what Pyotr tries to make Erden “understand” to Erdene during one of their first political discussions, Erdene who obviously does not agree:

“Pyotr, for whom religion was of no use, was very critical of the Bogd. And here again Erdene disagreed:

- You Russians can’t understand! But for us Mongols, there is nothing more important than our Bogd and our faith”.

Erdene’s point of view will change quite radically in the course of the novel. Note that here the reader does not have access to Pyotr’s arguments which would allow him to make up his own mind. We can guess that he exposes them to Erdene who is, according to the text, broad-minded enough to listen to them:

“Some people are easily worked up by such debates and cannot refrain from shouting or calling each other names to make themselves heard. This was not their case. They took the time to listen to each other and appreciate each other’s arguments. These exchanges only strengthened their trust and friendship”.

The reader follows the same progression as Erdene and a few others, who are not revealed the “truth” all at once by some kind of prophets embodied by the Bolsheviks, the process is more subtle, we become aware of things little by little and it is when we are “ready” to receive them.

Although there is also a progression in *Üüriin Tuya*, from the start we are confronted with long speeches or dialogues in which the characters develop their analysis of the society of the moment. One scene at the beginning of the novel is noteworthy because it is the one that will guide the whole story: it is constantly referred to in order to mark the stages of the cultural transition – the cultural revolution – that forms the framework of the story. The title is not insignificant: “Meeting with a scholar or the memory of a lifetime”. The old Batbayar is near the ruins of the city of Khar Balgas when he sees a Russian scientific mission setting up camp there. As he gets closer, he meets the academician Radlov who is curious to know what the old Mongol knows about these ruins and the mysterious inscriptions he has just discovered. Radlov really existed. Born in 1937, he was a great orientalist and can be considered the founder of Turkology. Among the many field expeditions he carried out, one of the most important took him to Mongolia in 1891. It was on this occasion that he discovered the “Orkhon inscriptions”, which today remain fundamental archaeological evidence for understanding the interactions between the history of societies and the evolution of languages in very remote times. Batbayar, a fictional character from Rinchen’s imagination, although a simple herder and ignorant as he is (as he himself admits to the scholar), is not as rude as he says: he is interested in history and is particularly open-minded:

“- But, Batbayar Guai, do you know who this city belonged to?

- One hears all sorts of things. According to the elders, there was once a large Uighur city here.

- Well done, dear Grandpa, you're quite right. And these Uyghurs, what people do you think they were?

- In those days, before there were any Mongolian sources, it was the writings of the Uyghurs that provided access to knowledge, this I read in an old history book. In Xinjing, there is a man – Sambanzhamba is his name – who, after having collected the testimonies of dozens and dozens of people, believes that the people who speak Mongolian in Tibet are descended from the Yellow Uyghurs, whereas those who use a language close to that of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang are Black Uyghurs. And in Khövsgöl, I also saw Tsataan Uyghurs, a people who do not know the written word. Couldn't they also be descendants of the ancient Uyghurs?

- It's possible since the ancient Uyghurs populated this region before the Genghishanid era. This Sambanzhamba you were just talking about, who is he?

- He's an old man who's great at telling you about places, and humanly speaking, a very fine man. The second time I met him, he was in the company of a man called Potanin, who was travelling with him.

- Oh but then he is a man of science our Sambanzhamba. And you know Potanin's wife, Aleksandra Vassilievna?

- Of course I do! A tall lady with blue eyes, very nice, isn't she?

The old scientist was delighted and confirmed:

- Yes, yes, that's exactly right! Golden people, the two Potanins. At the moment, they are preparing for a fourth expedition. But wait! What do I see here? Could it be a stone of light?

And the old scholar strode off towards the large granite block covered with inscriptions:

“Look at this, Batbayar Guai, these Uyghur characters, they are very similar to your Mongolian letters, don't you think? And these are Chinese ideograms. And here you have runes”, he explained through his interpreter... an interpreter whose rudimentary vocabulary was usually used to greet people, ask about the road ahead, the geography of the regions crossed and exchange a few words of everyday life, but who had never been confronted with the subjects that interested this scholar and Batbayar, the old herder familiar with Mongolian sources. In a state of panic, he found himself at a loss for words, whether in Russian or in Mongolian, to reproduce this impassioned exchange of questions and answers. Let us figure out the patience this was demanding from him”.

In many respects, the realism of Rinchen is more marked than that of Lodoidamba: the accuracy of historical or cultural references, the detail and precision of the descriptions. However, if we look at the character of Batbayar, he is not that credible in his role as a simple herdsman when he launches into a long presentation of ancient history to the Russian expeditionary, which would probably be more appropriate in the mouth a doctoral candidate.³⁹⁸ This is just one example among many that lead me to say that realism in the construction of his characters was not at the heart of Rinchen's priorities. To take an image, one would sometimes have the feeling of being faced with puppets that the ventriloquist

³⁹⁸ This can be a question to debate, I only express my point of view.

author uses to support his thesis. In this sense, there is perhaps something in *Üüriin Tuya* that comes close to a “philosophical tale”, such as Voltaire’s *Candide*. The following scene is long, but it is crucial to the story, so I will reproduce it in full:

“That evening, Fedor Ossokin had to struggle again to convey the conversation between Batbayar and the scholar, grand scholar who recounted the ancient history of the many peoples of Central Asia to the old herder eager for knowledge in simple and understandable words.

Hanging on the old scholar’s every word, Batbayar asked him:

- In some of our ancient historical records it is written that towards the north-east there lived a people called “dog-men”. It seems that among them the women are human but the men are said to be dogs. Given the direction, they should live in your Russia. Are there such people in your country?

The old Batbayar had read “The Mirror of Truth” and wanted to clarify a point that had left him circumspect.

- No, such people does not exist. These are legends that gushed out from the testimonies of people who, in the past, had seen hunters in the north dressed in furs rather like dakhs and who used dog-drawn sledges to travel. In the past, when we still knew very little about the world around us, in the whole of Europe, people believed in the same way that in Russia there were dog people, and also headless people whose eyes opened on their bellies, that it was the sun that turned and that this was the origin of the alternation of day and night, they also spoke of gigantic mountains... all these stories were very widespread in the Middle Ages, written texts even take them up. But we were very far from the truth.

- China has the king of stone, Russia the king of iron, but the king of the jewel of knowledge is in Tibet, they say. Now I know that the king of knowledge is not in Tibet but in Russia, said Batbayar the elder, full of gratitude for this great Russian scholar who was shedding light on these captivating subjects for him. I can go to bed happy and serene after this.

He went out.

In the morning, when he bid farewell to the old scholar, he presented him with a *khadag*:

- The encounter with a wise man remains engraved in your memory for life, they say. I met two Russian scientists, you and Potanin, and thanks to you I heard things I had never heard before, I discovered things I had never imagined before. I will always remember this unforgettable opportunity to welcome you and to meet wonderful people. We Mongols are terribly backward, the countries of the world are all one step ahead of us. But the Russian people, the Russian scientists, do not consider us as subhuman, and that will help us. I hope so. I, a simple uneducated herder, offer this white *khadag*, a symbol of purity, to a great scholar from the bottom of my heart, with warmth and deep respect. I insist. Honourable scholar, may your projects succeed as you have conceived them, may Russian science shine as brightly as a thousand suns and become for mankind the Chintamani, the stone that fulfils all dreams.

- I am very heartened by your good wishes. In my opinion, the day is fast approaching when your wise people will take the path of education, when your young people will

see the door of knowledge open before them. At present, in your country, those who want to learn have no other way out than the khürees and the monasteries to become a lama. But this path is not the path of knowledge at all, it is the path of misleading. What a sorry plight that the true path of knowledge has not yet opened up before the youth of your people. But that time will come and the young Mongols will be allowed, like the young Russians, the young Hungarians, the young French, the young Italians or the young Czechs, to educate themselves, to choose their path, to decide what to use their strength for. Those days are coming. Some of us may be called upon to reach that threshold beyond which Mongolia will see the opening of a new era in which it will have, trained in Mongolian universities, its own doctors, its own engineers, its own Lomonosovs (Fedor, my friend, said in Batbayar Guai that the greatest of Russian scholars was the son of a simple farmer), its own scientists. I am convinced that this time is no longer light years away. In Russia, among the Mongols living on our territory, there is a scholar whom all Russian, European and Western scholars know: Banzaryn Dorzh, an Uriankhai.

– An Uriankhai scholar you say? But then he is a man of my clan! exclaimed the old man joyfully.

– Indeed! Russia will help you, the Russian scholars will bring up those of their young Mongolian students who will have distinguished themselves from the others, the day will undoubtedly come when your people will remember with happiness the help that each one of them will have received from our Russia, I think exactly as you do, Batbayar Guai.

– May this wonderful omen come true, enthused the old herder”.

We will come back to this scene a little later when we comment on the one that echoes it in the last part of the story. But for the moment let us continue to focus on the characters’ denunciation of the educational system of the time, or to be more exact, of the system that hindered access to culture and “real” knowledge, to quote the point of view expressed by these critics. It is not uncommon for the recrimination to come from within the Lamaist institution. Let us turn to *Tungalag Tamir*, for its treatment of the issue is no less interesting. In this novel, the case of Erdene is something of an exception. The incipit tells us that he was able to learn to read somewhat by chance, having been lucky enough to benefit from the lessons that the *taizh* for whom he worked had given to his son. Historically, such opportunities did exist, and many future leaders from working-class backgrounds were able to benefit from them. As the Russian scholar says in the excerpt just quoted, and says so to lament it, access to education at the time was mainly through lamaseries. In *Tungalag Tamir*, Bat and Khongor are sent to Zaya Bandida lamasery at the outbreak of the war between Germany and Russia. The lama who receives them appears to be quite unsympathetic, to say the least:

“On the right, wrapped in a thick fur *deel*, a large book in his saffron silk cover on his knees, a Lama of about forty with a glazed complexion and a flabby, fat body, sat in front of the bed. The scent of incense, mixed with the pervasive smell of dampness and mustiness emanating from objects that had certainly not been moved for years, assailed the nostrils of visitors more accustomed to the purity of the steppe wind.

In the sanctuary space, the altar consisted of two chests on which sat the *güngervaa* dedicated to the Burkhan, whose glass reflected the cold, metallic glow of the daylight filtering through the half-open roof. This oppressive atmosphere immediately dampened the enthusiasm of the boys, who had been so excited by the promise of a new life”.

If we compare this portrait with the one given of the Bogd in *Üüriin Tuya*, which we have read above, it seems that a typical portrait of the lama emerges, which is repeated throughout the literature of the period. Here is another example with Danigai, who we recall is the *Shadar Soyvon*³⁹⁹ of the Bogd in the novel by Lodoidamba:

“It was in Khüree East, on the right of the street known as the “Wise Lamas Avenue”, that the surrounding wall stood, dark, massive, closed by a large gate. In the courtyard, to the north, the large *ger* was sheltered under a canopy. Pürev entered. The lama was sitting cross-legged on an alcove draped with a thick bedspread, stuffing himself with enormous pieces of meat dripping with fat. He was a man with a paunch so large that he had lost all human form, and a glazed face. The *soyvon* Danigai could see from his *zhins* that Pürev was a *taizh*, but he barely looked up, frowning”.

All these lamas who could be classified as “negative ones” on the basis of the binary division of characters required by propaganda, more or less fit this portrait: fat and greasy to suggest that they do not have to suffer from hunger, arrogant and as stingy with others as they are quick to spend when it comes to themselves. They are often seen, as here, filling their stomachs in a very unappetising way. Erdene, who at this point in the story is far from being a communist revolutionary, is no less critical, not of religion but of those who divert it from its essence to satisfy their love of wealth and power. The lama to whom he has come to entrust his and Itgelt’s son only reinforces his opinion:

– My respects, Lama Guai.

Without stopping to turn the pages of his book with his large, pudgy fingers, the lama stared at the visitors. He returned Erdene’s greeting:

– Thank you. Good morning to you,– he squinted, looking at them inquisitively – So these are the two boys Itgelt mentioned. Well, come in, sit down there! he ordered, pointing to the right of the *ger*.

He stood up and pulled on the boots which lay side by side at the foot of the bed on a thick carpet.

– You! Go and get some wood from the pile on the right of the *ger*. And don’t knock it all over! When you come back, take a pot from the cupboard and put it on the stove.

The order was addressed to Bat. Turning to Erdene :

– What’s his name?

– Bat.

Bat went out, took in some wood and was about to take a tiny pot from the cupboard when the lama again shouted at him in a brutal and irritated tone:

³⁹⁹ “Senior attendant on a high lama”, Bawden, 1997: 301.

– This one is still raw, isn't he! You start by taking the lid off the stove and adding wood. Be careful not to burn yourself, you'll find a cloth next to the pots.

But no sooner had Bat begun to load the stove than the lama rose moodily to his feet and shoved him aside to take his place to light the fire himself. I guess all the dirty work will fall to my good little boy in this house, Erdene thought. Well, he'll learn.

A short time later, the tea began to boil. When it was ready, the lama poured it into a small copper teapot. He took out three wooden bowls from one of the many drawers at the head of the bed, and a copper dish filled with cakes, which he placed in front of Erdene:

– Here is some tea and food. He removed his boots and sat cross-legged on the bed. Erdene filled the three bowls with tea. There was not a drop left in the pot. Erdene had always abhorred the stinginess of the lamas, of which the present situation was only a reflection. His own life was a far cry from that of the **geshe**. As for the lama, he had arrived at the Zaya compound at the age of 22, and was now 40. He had passed his elementary examination at Zaya, thus attaining the rank of **myandag**. Promoted to **myandag**, he had gone to Ikh Khüree where he had become master of the incense burners in Gandantegchilen, in the western temple. The backroom intrigues of lamaic life held no secrets for him. As for finances: exorcisms and other esoteric rituals, various predictions and services of all kinds ensured him a comfortable income... which did not prevent him from looking at the smallest expense when it came to others. And when one day one of his uncles, the only ascendant left on earth, came to visit him, it took him several days to recover from having treated him with two **khuushuur**. “The stomach is the enemy of the brain”, he used to repeat to his disciples, although he himself never had to fall asleep on an empty stomach. True, he had dedicated his life to teaching the scriptures and maintained many aspirants in the monastery, but if he had a long arm for taking, when it came to giving, he had it short. And very short indeed. He spoiled the best, was very hard on the rest, and believed himself to be of superior intelligence, which raised him above the rest. There was only one person on earth for whom he spared no expense. Tsamba. Whatever he took from others, he gave to his Tsamba with the same prodigality that he would have given water from the Tamir. “Do you need anything?” Coming from him, no one but Tsamba would ever hear this phrase”.

This passage gives an idea of what awaits the two boys. The reader will not learn much about the kind of teaching they receive, and this is perhaps in itself revealing, only that their master sometimes orders them to take up their books and they start chanting again. The adventures of Bat and Khongor at Zaya's *khüree*, if one wishes to make a comparison, have a certain familiarity with the *Malheurs de Sophie* of the Comtesse de Ségur. They – Khongor in particular – are not the last to do something stupid, which the lama knows how to make them regret by constantly beating them. The allusion to Tsamba in this passage is worth noting: Lodoidamba never explicitly writes that the lama has homosexual relations with his disciple, whereas in Rinchen, as we have seen, this is clearly stated. The allusion is however rather clear:

“Sometimes the Geshe would be visited by his dear novice, his Tsamba, the favourite of all. The two kids would prepare **khuushuur** for them and then the lama would send them out to play. So they were not unhappy when they saw Tsamba coming, and even waited for him impatiently. How could they have imagined what brought this lanky, diaphanous lama to their master? Curiously, the lamas in the next courtyard or other vague acquaintances would sometimes ask them:

– By the way! Do you know what he is doing at your place, Tsamba?

They always gave the same answer:

– Eating **khuushuur**? Once they’ve been served, you can go out and play”.

This raises the question of the representation of sex and eroticism in this censored literature. This is a very interesting subject which I have looked into a bit, but which I can only touch upon here from time to time.

Erenchin (Tungalag Tamir)

It must be noted that it is not so much the religion itself that is the target of criticism but those who claim it and use it for devious purposes, who “pervert” it. And here sex, the ambiguous relationships between the great lamas and their same-sex disciples are obviously regarded with a circumspect eye, to say the least. As an evidence that not all lamas are unanimously condemned, let us consider the case of Erenchin in *Tungalag Tamir*. In the novel, Bat leaves Zaya’s *khüree* to search for his father, who has fled to the capital after hitting Itgelt and abandoning Dolgor, who had had an affair with the latter that was not really consensual. In Bogdyn Khüree, Bat is taken in by a lama, Erenchin, who introduces him to the Dashchoimbol College of the Gandantegchilen Monastery. With this character, Lodoidamba shows a certain admiration and respect for the erudition of the lamas, when they really invest themselves in the study of the word of the Buddha and work to transmit it to others. His portrait can be read:

“This lama had left the *khüree* of Nar Vanchin when he was still very young to walk to Gandan. From the rank of *youlzhin*⁴⁰⁰ he had worked his way up to the highest level of erudition one could have. And so it was that, having mastered the esoteric art of *tarni*,⁴⁰¹ he had defended his *agramba* a few years earlier.⁴⁰² His name was Erenchin. From morning to night, crowds of people came to consult him and follow his teachings, from simple disciples to great scholars”.

The contrast between Erenchin and Bat’s former master is explicit. In the description he gives us of him, the author tells us nothing about his physiognomy, but in terms of his attitude, while most of the others lamas often appear to us with their fingers dripping with the fat of the meat they are stuffing themselves with, Erenchin is from evening to morning reading or teaching. And he doesn’t beat knowledge into his pupils’ heads with a stick or by whipping them in the face with his beads:

⁴⁰⁰ A degree in lamaism

⁴⁰¹ Incantations. (dharani).

⁴⁰² Degree lama versed in spells (тарни) (Tib. snags-rams-pa)

“At Zaya, Bat had studied the Bogd’s Igshaa. But Günchin Lama’s one is just as profound, said Erenchin, to whom the book did not matter, only the teaching did. So he had introduced him to the Dashchoimbol College. His new lama master did not beat Bat, on the contrary, he pushed him to study more and more. In fact, when he wasn’t teaching, Erenchin himself spent his time learning. Bat had no idea what time he got up. And in the evening, after they had drunk tea and drawn the *örkh* on the roof, Erenchin would sit cross-legged with a furry *deel* and open a book in his lap. Illuminated by an oil lamp, he began to turn the pages, smiling at Bat:

- Come on young geshe, it’s time to learn! Bat took out the wooden box where his book was stored and took himself in his *deel* to sit on the other side of the lamp. Late in the night, Erenchin wiggled his arms slightly and stretched:

- Come on my Geshe, it’s time to sleep now. In the morning, when he woke up, Bat found him reading again. The first *shavi* would arrive at sunrise”.

Here emerges the theme that answers to that of the criticism of ignorance – or that of the voluntary maintenance of populations in this ignorance – a theme which is that of the praise of knowledge, of learning, of transmission and of debate. Erenchin is a master of rhetoric, that is to say, he is not content with imparting knowledge to others, he confronts his own knowledge with that of “opponents” through oratorical jousts. It is no exaggeration to say that for Bat to see him at work is a revelation that will determine his own trajectory. In the following excerpt, he measures his force to this of a lama who has been travelling in Tibet:

“For two days the two lamas engaged in a fierce contest of rhetoric. Bat was ecstatic. Even Erenchin’s voice sounded different, stronger. It was as if he had grown younger. His forehead was dripping with sweat and his eyes sparkled. From time to time, heat seemed to come to his face. The temple was crowded and everyone was in awe. Puffed up with pride, Bat felt like shouting, “He is my Bagsh!” By the evening of the second day, the lama who had returned from Tibet began to show signs of fatigue. And by the time night came he was literally exhausted. He let himself be led by Erenchin’s argument, without flinching. He finally admitted defeat.

As soon as he left the temple, Erenchin saw trouble and began to stagger. He lost consciousness. His *shavi* had to carry him home. It was not until the early morning that he regained his senses. When he opened his eyes, the *ger* was full of young people who were looking at him with worried eyes.

– This young man is full of knowledge, let us invite him to join us.

And so he instructed Bat to go and carry him a long *khadag* of Ayoush, to consecrate his integration into the group”.

To support what we have just written, this type of teaching through gentleness, dialogue and encouragement seems to be what works as Bat follows Erenchin’s model and makes rapid progress himself.

“Bat soon obtained his youlzhin, being among the ten most brilliant students and already close to the third. When he arrived happy to tell him so, Erenchin was perhaps even more delighted than he was:

– Come on Geshe, from now on you must learn, learn, learn. Spend the night studying Günchin Lama’s Igshaa and only wrap your book when the first birds start singing”.

This brings us back to an idea that we put forward earlier when we proposed the concept of “mediators of desire” (or prestige) to talk about these characters who, through the aura they radiate, lead those around them to desire the same things as they do and to act accordingly. The congratulations of the “model” reinforce the emulation effect. The character of Sühbaatar will also play this role for this of Bat as we will see very soon.

Because he is himself educated and lucid about what he sees, the Erenchin lama cannot ignore the failings of the Church. Towards the Bogd in particular, he is particularly critical. This is revealed in the very first chapter in which he appears, when his friend Baldan, a caravanner who had helped Bat to reach Khüree and entrusted the boy to him, returns to visit him:

“At last Baldan broke the silence:

– Tomorrow I will pray to the Gegeen, to lighten some of the sins of this ugly noggin.

Erenchin burst out laughing:

– The Bogd? That Tibetan would even bow to my Geshe in a rhetorical contest. They would literally crush him.

Baldan opened his eyes wide and clasped his hands together.

– Hey, Burkhan Gonchig Süm Mini! How can you say that? Don't you fear the weight of sin? If I allowed myself to speak as you do, I would be fit to burn in hell for all eternity.

Erenchin retorted with a smile:

– Chasing women and indulging in alcohol, he wouldn't be able to recite any *maani* properly.

– Burkhan Almighty, you can't talk about the Bogd like that!" Baldan muttered again, frightened by the weight of sin.

He made a sign of prayer. But he had nothing to say”.

But the sneering denunciation soon gives way to a profound dismay, when Erenchin realizes the consequences for the country and for the people of what might at first have been only a matter of intrigue and the business of the Bogd alone. As a ruler, but even more so as a guide revered by his people, the Bogd is accused of leading them into a dead end while at the same time accentuating their misfortune and suffering:

“Bat was startled awake by the first shots in the east of the city and leapt to his feet. He was running towards the gate when his master, up before him and already in the courtyard, blocked his way:

– Don't go! Do you hear those explosions? Those are cannons. But what's the point of killing each other like that...

Erenchin went to lean against the wall under the porch. Seeing the gemin invade the country, looting, massacring, humiliating the men and the flag had torn his heart. His resentment for Bogd was growing day by day, this Bogd who had been elevated to the head of the state as well as of the faith, and who had only plunged Mongolia into chaos and desolation. How to save the country? This was a question that would never leave him. And he was unable to answer it. What was certain was that if he continued to philosophise about the principles of faith with docility and abnegation, he would inexorably be left to rot to the core. Mongolia had embraced the Yellow faith in the hope that happiness would prevail and misery would recede. The religion had spread, but the country, far from being lifted up, had sunk into stagnation. At this critical point, this faith would not help. Erenchin was capable of arguing for days on end, no Geshe was able to counter his arguments. But one bullet from the *gemins* and he was totally helpless. And it was not just him! All the lamas of Gandan could join their prayers, but they could never have stopped the horrors perpetrated by these *gemins*. Of this, Erenchin was fully aware. Steeped in this Yellow faith, the Mongols had all wanted to raise themselves to the rank of burkhan. They had forgotten their land, their roots. And the country, engulfed in its archaism, had lagged far behind all the other peoples of the planet. Nothing is easier for those who itch to steal from it, to humiliate it. This is what he thought now. Need I say it? He had no power to save the country. But worse, he had not been able to discern the path to salvation. Everyone agreed that he was a very great lama, a man of extraordinary intelligence. But the only thing he had done was to lead others down an obstructed path. Entangled in these dark thoughts, Erenchin had lost all hope. He was beginning to be overcome by anguish”.

Through Erenchin’s thoughts and doubts, Lodoidamba expresses the same ideas and observation as Rinchen did through the mouth of the old Batbayar when he met with the Russian scholar. To quote the original Mongolian text, we have here “*Шарын шашинаас болж монгол хүн бүхэн бурхан болох гэж зүтгээд улс орон, үндэс угсаагаа мартсанаас дэлхий дахины бусад улс түмнээс арчагуй хоцроод гар нь загатнасан бүхэнд доромжлогдох болжээ гэж Эрэнчин боддог болжээ*” and in *Üüriin Туяа* “*Бидний монголчуд ихэд хоцорч, дэлхий олон улсаас хүзүүгээр дуту болчихжээ*”. It is in both cases the idea of a backwardness (1. хоцроод/2. хоцорч) over others (дэлхий дахины бусад улс түмнээс/дэлхий олон улсас хүзүүгээр дутуу) that is pointed out.

As he is tortured by his impotence and even remorse and guilt for having contributed to maintaining this system, Erenchin’s descent into hell accelerates. He ends up losing his faith completely. If the proclamation by the eighth emanation of the Bogd that he had identified a reincarnation of the fifth in the Baron von Ungern arouses sarcasm in him – “And he read that at the bottom of a vodka bottle? The Khalkh country did not need a Bogd to plunge it into the morass in which it finds itself mired. What will happen to us if a second one comes along?” – he actually plunges very quickly into despair:

“After the capital was seized, the Baron’s troops hanged dozens of poor people and sacked hundreds of homes. One evening, Erenchin received the Geshe who had studied in Tibet. They talked until very late at night.

– When you ponder it, the teaching of the Burkhan turned out to be a stream of vacuums.

The young man stared at him in amazement:

– Bagshaa, are you getting mad?

– Not at all. I’m finally waking up.

– That’s exactly the kind of question Landorom was asking in the first place... We know how it ended. You had better leave Khüree as soon as possible.

The Geshe did not linger. Erenchin had devoted his life to the word of the Burkhan. If he had to carry all the books he had read, a whole caravan would hardly have been enough. But the more time passed, the more meaningless what he had learned seemed. It is the extinction of all passions that leads to Nirvana, said the Burkhan. But the suppression of all desire, all passion was destroying the creatures of the world here below. His words were not in the direction of life, they were backwards. According to Buddhism, the six cosmic destinies are the key to the balance of the universe. But more than happiness, this dogma brought only death and torment. It was fear that made the faithful docile and malleable, and Bogd would stop at nothing to weaken them – Erenchin knew this well – But neither he nor his followers practised the suppression of passions that he preached. And now he was also deceiving the believers by claiming that this Baron, who had entered the country with weapons in his hands to sow nothing but misery and desolation, was the reincarnation of Bogd V. “Yes... but you, what have you done to make your fellow man happy?” Erenchin, who was now aware of all this, also asked the question to himself. It never left him. Palavering and oratory never fed anyone... Because of his doubts, he had tried hard to find an answer to his anxieties in esoteric teaching. But the more he read, the more he came to doubt. One day he asked Bat:

– Gevshe, do you have faith?

Bat looked at him in surprise, without understanding. Erenchin looked back at him.

There was gentleness in his eyes, almost candour. Finally he sighed sadly:

– Alas my Gevshe, I think there is nothing more painful in this world than to lose one’s faith”.

Erenchin’s criticisms having reached the Bogd’s ears, the Bogd has him murdered by Zhambal and Tsamba, two lamas whom the reader is already familiar with at this point in the story. The two greedy lamas agree to carry out these dirty deeds, which do not do without negotiating a high price for their involvement. Erenchin does not die immediately. He is still in agony for some time before he dies, which allows him to express his suspicions and make his final recommendations to Bat:

“Around noon he slowly opened his eyes and looked around at his students, watching his every move.

– May I be forgiven... I am but a man lost along the way.

In the evening he sent them all away, keeping only Bat close to him.

– Who hit me?

– Thieves.

–What did they take from me?

- They didn't take anything...
- If they didn't take anything, they must not have been thieves... A dirty trick from the Bogd then?
- Was it? But Bagshaa, Why would the Bogd wish you harm?
- In any case They're certainly not thieves. You, you obviously don't know who murdered the Chin van Khanddorzh. And the Da Lam Tserenchimed. Bogd has a pretty long arm. My son, get out of this bottomless pit while you still can. He fell silent. There was not the slightest noise in the *ger*, the light from the large oil lamps was fading. Erenchin breathed very slowly and only intermittently.
- Gevshe you are wise. You must find your way. Don't be like me. Don't risk finding yourself in the twilight of your life, moping when you look back, with the terrible feeling of having lost all your illusions. Where I die, life must be reborn. At the beginning, the road ahead seemed as wide as an avenue. Today it is not even a path. My son, find yourself a narrow path at the beginning but one that widens as you go along. It may be that this path is the simple life of the honest man, the layman..."

Bat will follow the advice. This is fiction. The character of Erenchin is a creation of the author. Chin Van Khanddorzh and Da Lam Tserenchimed did exist and were among the five ministers of the Bogd government, those who brought the Bogd to power, as we saw it. Today, the mystery of their deaths remains unclear,⁴⁰³ but during the socialist period, the official legend was that the two men were assassinated by the Bogd, just like Erenchin in *Tungalag Tamir*. In *Üüriin Tuya*, Rinchen did not use a fictional character to denounce the darkness of the Bogd as prescribed by the doxa. In a chapter entitled "Ultima ratio regum" (1951 version), he recounts the last hours of Chi Van Khanddorzh who knows he is threatened and tries without much hope to save his skin. However, he is eventually caught. Note that, as Pomian had pointed out, Rinchen insists that he is indeed in the vein of the historical novel by adding a note at the very end of the chapter to warn the reader:

"In this chapter I have condensed the testimonies left by people who at the time followed the events well. The names have all been respected".⁴⁰⁴

2. From shadow to light in "*Üüriin Tuya*"

I will focus here on three important chapters of *Üüriin Tuya*, which can be read as stages in a long progression from "darkness" (or shadow) – represented by feudalism, obscurantism and decadent Lamaism – to "light", that is, the advent of the socialist model of education, modern, rational and following the path indicated by the Soviet "brother". If on the surface the propaganda is sometimes almost makes one feel uncomfortable for being subtle as a sledgehammer, we will try to show that Rinchen's text is much more ambiguous than it appears.

⁴⁰³ [Монголын түүхийн тайлбар толь \(mongoltoli.mn\)](http://mongoltoli.mn)

⁴⁰⁴ "Энэ бүлэг дэх явдлыг учир байдлыг мэдэх тэр үеийн хүмүүсийн ярьсан ёсоор товчилхийн бичив. Хүний нэр ус цөм үгэн".

The first stage in this process, as we have already seen, is the exchange between Batbayar and the academician Radlov, who both regretted that Mongolia had lagged behind the other nations of the world in terms of access to knowledge, and expressed their hope that one day, with Russian help, this backwardness would be overcome.

The second sequence I would like to comment on takes place during the reign of the Bogd, at the time of autonomy. This time it features Nasanbat – Batbayar’s son, who we remember was expelled from his *khoshuu* when he was very young, as an “expiatory victim” and charged with taking with him the demon that had taken hold of Lkha Beis – and Khaisan, a historical figure of Kharchin origin known for his affinities with the pan-Mongolist movement, who was part of the three-man delegation sent to Russia just before the proclamation of independence and who held important positions in the Bogd’s Ministry of Internal Affairs, alongside Da Lam Tserenchimed.⁴⁰⁵

One point worth noting is that, from one edition to the next, the versions of this chapter have undergone some interesting changes. First of all, there is one in the title between the first and second editions. In the 1971 edition it is entitled “Ухна ишигийн зовлон мэдэхгүй” (the goat does not know the suffering of the kid), a diction (*züir tsetsen üg*) meaning that the individual is indifferent to the misfortune of others. In the first edition, it was an Italian proverb which was chosen, written in the original language, that is, “*Il re non litterato e un asino coronato*”, meaning, as the author wrote in a note (in Mongolian “*номггүй хаан титим зүүсэн илжиг*”), “An ignorant king is a crowned donkey”. As each chapter of the book – and this is by the way rather common in Mongolian literature at that time –, and the title is immediately followed by a quotation, this time a double one, the first in Mongolian and attributed to Abai (probably Abai Kounanbaïouly) “*нохойд очир амласан хэрэг алга*” (the dog has no use for a diamond) and an English version of the Mangalasutra: “To serve wise men and not serve fools/To give honour to whom honour is due - this is greatest blessing”.⁴⁰⁶

To sum up the situation, after the exorcism ritual mentioned earlier, which marked the beginning of Nasanbat’s exile, he crossed Inner Mongolia and spent some time in Kalgan, where he learned woodworking from a Chinese man he had met in Uliasutai before his expulsion. This work enabled him to integrate into local life and to learn Chinese, winning him the sympathy of the neighbours. A former teacher even offers to teach him how to write and his involvement in learning their language and culture is highly appreciated by the people of the surroundings. Nasanbat’s education opened the door to new horizons to him and helped him develop a critical eye. He discovered that the ideas he had formed about the Chinese people, based on the representations that the Mongols had made of them in their own country, were in fact very far from reality. He realised that most of the people he met had very little in common with the usurious merchants with whom the Mongols got into debt in their own country, and that they were hard-working people who, like the Mongols, were exploited by the Manchus as well as by the foreigners who were trying to penetrate the Chinese market by force at the time. Nasanbat was already beginning to open his eyes to the situation in the world and was beginning to take an interest in the revolt

⁴⁰⁵ See in Bawden, 1968: 194, or for more informations: Nakami Tatsuo “The Minority’s grouping: further light on Khaisan and Udai”, *Journal of Asian and African studies*, n°20, 1980.

⁴⁰⁶ Б. Ринчен, *Үүрийн Туяа* боть II “Гал усны гашуун зовлон”, Уланбаатар, Улсын хэвлэх үйлдвэр, 1951, p.135.

movements, of which until then he had only heard distant echoes, such as those of the Hui people in Shaanxi and Gansu. To form his own opinion, he decided to go to Beijing, where he was amazed to see how freely available books were, and even managed to get hold of pamphleteer leaflets and books about the Taiping revolt. He was then told the story of the revolt and the reasons behind it by direct witnesses to the events, the two “Li”, two old men who in 1853 had fought with the rebels led by generals Lin Fenxiang and Li Xiucheng.⁴⁰⁷

These biographical details about Nasanbat are important for contextualizing the scene, because in the 1951 edition his character is almost completely overshadowed by that of Khaisan, the chapter taking the form of a long monologue. This difference tends to support the hypothesis already suggested earlier that *Üüriin Туяа* was not intended at first as a novel but rather as a series of political and historical considerations on the period. So it is only through Khaisan’s comments in this first edition that we can guess that Nasanbat told him about a publication project, probably some kind of encyclopaedia of natural sciences. Khaisan is dubious, to say the least:

“My dear “Na”, do you think that your hope of having these few volumes published by this ministry, in which you give an account of the history of the earth and things in nature based on Western science, has any chance of being fulfilled? Really”.⁴⁰⁸

Khaisan has in fact just told him about his own experience having himself sought to have published a dictionary offering a transcription in Mongolian of five different dialects, a totally “innocent” document compared to Nasanbat’s encyclopaedia, which his Western influences immediately classify as subversive documents.⁴⁰⁹

If even he, despite the position he held in the ministry alongside Da lam Tserenchimed, his titles and distinctions as a hero of independence could not get his writings published, Nasanbat has no chance of meeting with more success. He even warned him that if he naively revealed his sympathy for the knowledge developed in the West that was at odds with the Lamaist doctrine professed by the government, he could get into serious trouble (he later cited the case of several people who were served poisoned alcohol by the Ikh Dagina, the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt’s consort for expressing differing opinions).

According to Bawden, the period of autonomy was not entirely barren in terms of educational advances:

“The new regime which replaced the Manchus was in many ways progressive. It initiated a number of necessary reforms [...] and a start was made with the introduction of a systematic modern education”.

Nevertheless, Rinchen put in the mouth of his Khaisan a very harsh speech about all the Bogd ministers, the nobility and the lamas. He pointed out that of the five ministries

⁴⁰⁷ Б. Ринчен, *Үүрийн Туяа*, Уланбаатар, Улсын хэвлэх үйлдвэр, 1971, р.93-103.

⁴⁰⁸ Чингэхэд, баруун далайн эрдэмтний сургалыг бариталж, гажрын жүй, түмэн бодисын түүх тайлбарлан бичсэн таны хэдэн тус яамнас дармаллаж өх болов уу гэж горьдог нь ямар байнам ?

⁴⁰⁹ Дотоод Яамны дэс түшмэлийн тушаалд тохоон тавьсан боловч энэ таван жүгийн агуу аялгуу бичиг тэр хоргүй бичгийг хүртэл дармаллан гаргая гэж жүгтээд, чол, жэрэг, тушаал гурвын хүч хүрэхгүйг та бодож үж.

that make up the government, not a single one was responsible for developing a system of education, the rulers being reluctant to spend money (*Манай энэ улсад өдгөө хүртэл сургууль соёлын явдлыг эрхлэх яамгүй. Одохон дээр тийм яамыг жардал сүйтгэлийн нэмэр гэж үжэх ажгуу*). His criticism spares no minister, the Minister of the Interior, Da lam Tserenchimed :

“Our Minister of the Interior, Chin van Da lam Tserenchimed, replied that my book would be of no use to the children of the nobility, let alone those of the common people, who needed to learn nothing more than the rudiments necessary to become copyists. And these are the words of the most learned of our ministers, the man who heads the order of lamas, imagine that!”⁴¹⁰

The other ministers have no interest whatsoever in geography or sciences of the earth, he insists, and he lists: the Minister for the Budget, the Tüsheet Khan; the Minister for the Armed Forces, the Dalai van Gombosüren (which is rather ironic if one thinks of the title of historian Yves Lacoste’s famous 1976 essay *La géographie, ça sert, d’abord, à faire la guerre*),⁴¹¹ while the justice minister, Namsrai, “if there is no question of champagne or vodka, he doesn’t give a damn about what geological structures look like”. According to Khaisan, the only person likely to be interested would be the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chin van Khanddorzh, but he would not risk being suspected of doctrinal deviance if he were to support the publication of a scientific treatise based on Western knowledge. This is the only moment in the first edition when Nasanbat intervenes, but he only has time to place a “but” (*gevch*), which is immediately cut off by Khaisan, who tells him:

“But, you’re going to ask me, won’t the Bogd be concerned that his people should have access to culture, to educate them, to develop knowledge and science? That’s what you’re thinking, isn’t it? This year, on the fifteenth of the last month of spring, a private reception was held at which Ekh Dagina in person, the mother of the nation, carried a chom of poisoned *arkhi* from her noble hand to the Zhasagt Khan,⁴¹² who was known for his affinity with the Chinese and who didn’t please the lamas very much. I weighed things up carefully and, however good this *arkhi* served in a chom may be and which reduces a man’s life expectancy, not having myself yet any desire to count my days, I refrained myself and buried this project to publish my dictionary”.

The “Dawn”

Apparently opposed to this denunciation of the attitude toward culture and education under the autonomous regime, the chapter in *Üüriin Tuya* that recounts the school celebration at Khutag-Öndör Uulyн *Khoshuu* school also deserves our attention. This statement is somewhat paradoxical, because what caught my attention in this scene was its lack of depth, its overrated and grandiloquent character, propagandist to the extreme, at

⁴¹⁰ Манай дотоод яамны сайд чин ван да лам Чэрэнчимэд, ноёдын хүүхдэд энэ ном хэрэггүй, бичээч болоход монгол үсэг элбэг хүрэлчэх тул, харц ардын хүүхдэд мөн хэрэг алга гэж хэлсэн билээ. Манай хамгийн мэдэл ихтэй сайд, лам нарын намын тэргүүлэгчийн үг харну ийм ажгуу.

⁴¹¹ Lacoste Yves *La géographie, ça sert, d’abord, à faire la guerre* Ed. Maspero, Paris, 1976

⁴¹² To render the accent of the Karchin Khaisan, Rinchen replaced all the 3/Z with Ж /Zh and Ц/Ts with Ч/Ch.

least on first reading, to the point of being almost embarrassing. The school, which the reader has seen built, is celebrating four years in operation, but above all the completion of their schooling by the first class of pupils to enter. The pupils and their teachers have organised an open day and an exhibition to show their parents, families and friends what they are doing and learning at the school. It was quite by chance - as he himself admitted to Nasanbat, now the school's teacher and director - that an official from the Ministry of the People's Enlightenment ("ardyn gegeerüülekh yam") stopped at the *khoshuu* on his way to Ulaanbaatar. Nasanbat invites him to attend the graduation ceremony.

Where the problem lies, if I may say so, and which is likely to raise the eyebrows of even the most moderate critics of socialist realism, is that the entire chapter screams deception. The results achieved at this school are outstanding, the teachers are as exemplary as they are modest, the pupils are brilliant and hard-working, the parents are admiring - the list goes on. The characters appear as cruelly lacking in depth, even the main characters in the story - but isn't this ultimately the case throughout the novel, one suddenly wonders in retrospect - too listless, too perfect, they lack that inner conflict, that existential tension that makes Lodoidamba's heroes so rich.⁴¹³

The chapter begins with the arrival of the Russians, the man that old Batbayar calls "Yavaan" and who was mentioned in a previous chapter to illustrate the harshness of the Mongolian winter. Yavaan's son, Mishii (Mikhail), is an officer in the Red Army. Invited to look at the exhibition put on by the pupils, he congratulates them and asks them a few questions to check their knowledge, which the pupils answer without hesitation. He then signs a message in the school's "Golden Book" in praise of socialism and the party. We can illustrate this with a few short extracts, when "Mishi" stops in front of a child's drawing and asks for an explanation of what is represented. One of the children's representatives launches into a tirade in which he replies that young Bat (the author of the drawing) has depicted the courageous struggle of the Korean people against their oppressor, a tirade that has all the makings of a recitation of a speech learnt by heart and spat out like a parrot:

"Where is Korea? Would you be able to locate it on the map? To answer Mishig's question, Odserzhandmaa took the master's pointer and circled the Korean peninsula on the map.

This is it. The people of Korea suffered Japanese oppression and enslavement, but continued to fight for their freedom. People who fight in the name of freedom will inevitably win. All the justice-loving people on this planet can only support this struggle. The youth unit of our *khoshuu* has sent three hundred yanchaan to help the children of Korea.

This is a drawing by Bat, depicting the confiscation of land from large feudal landowners by Chinese peasants in the Hunan region.

In the lesson on the state of the world, the head teacher spoke to us about the struggle of the Chinese people in the name of freedom, and told us that the farmers of Hunan had seized the land of the landlords. That was the inspiration for Bat's drawing".

⁴¹³ I am not disparaging the author. I will even suggest in a while that this might be purposeful on his part.

“– Солонгос гэж хаа байдаг билээ? Та зураг дээр зааж өгч чадах уу гэж Мишигийн асуухад, Одсэржандмаа заадаг модоо барьж, газрын зураг дээр Солонгосын хойгийг тойруулан зааж, – Энд байна, Солонгосын ар түмэн, Японы эзэрхэг түрэмгий нарт талхидуулан боолчлогдсон боловч, эрх чөлөөгөө тэмцсээр билээ. Ер, эрх чөлөөгөө тэмцдэг ард түмэн заавал дийлэх ёстой юм. Тэр тэмцэл нь, дэлхий дахины бүх шударга хүний сэтгэл талархлыг биедээ татдаг юм шүү дээ. (Манай хошууны залуучуудын үүр, Солонгосын хүүхдэд тусламж үзүүлэх гэж, гурван зуун янгчаан цуглуулж явуулсан билээ.

[...] Энэ болбол, Хятадын Хунан мужид тариачин ардууд, газар ихтэй байсан феодалын газрыг булаан авч байгаа юмаа. Ван авгайн Бат зурсан юм аа.

Захирал багш, дэлхийн байдал заахдаа бидэнд Хятадын ард түмний эрх чөлөөгөө тэмцэж байгаа байдлыг ярьж, Хунан зэргэг мужид тариачин ардууд, газар өмчийн эзэн баячуудын газрыг хараан авч байгааг ярьж өгсөн санаа авч, Бат зурсан билээ.

The Red Army officer, Mishi, congratulates students and teachers on their “brilliant” assimilation of international history as inculcated by the party. In the praise he leaves in the School’s Golden Book, there is one sentence that might nevertheless alert the reader:

“It was with great interest that I was able to see the exhibition presented on the occasion of this celebration marking the first graduation of pupils who had completed their schooling at the Khutag Öndör Uulyn jhoshuu primary schools. I do not read the traditional Mongolian script, but everything we see, the drawings and sculptures, bear witness to the talent of young Mongolians, their sense of observation and the sincere love they have for their homeland. It is a delight for me to be able to admire all these works of art expressing the fraternity between peoples and the spirit of the proletarian international.

The teachers of this school have all carried the word of the People’s Revolutionary Party and fully accomplished their mission. May all the teachers of this school, guided by the Mongolian Revolutionary Party, see their efforts crowned with success for this devotion with which they strive to bring the people out of obscurity and carry them forward”.

“Хутаг-Өндөр уулын хошууны анхны бага сургуулийн тэнхимийн сурагч, анх удаа сургуулиа төгсгөсөн бахдалтай баярт зориулсан үзэсгэлэнг их л сонирхон үзэв. **Монгол бичиг үсгээр бичсэн зүйлд чухам юу байгааг хэдий мэдэхгүй** боловч бидний нүдний эрхтэнд тусаж, сэтгэл оюнд орох зүйл бүхнийг анхаарвал, **сурагч хүүхдийн зурсан зураг, хатгамласан зүйл, баримал зормолын зүйлийг үзвэл, монгол хүүхэд багачуудын билэг авьяс үлэмж, юм анхааран ажиглах чадал их, төрсөн эх нутагтаа үнэн хайртайн сэтгэл маш илэрхий үзэгдэж, олон түмний нйрамдлын эрхэм санаа, дэлхий дахины хөдөлмөрчин олны нэгэн сэтгэлтэйг урлан бүтээж дүрсэн хийсэн бүх зүйлээ их л яруу сайхнаар үзүүлсэн нь үнэхээр сэтгэл бахдав.**

Тус бага сургуулийн тэнхимийн бүх багш нар ардынхаа **хувьсгалт нам засгийн үзэл сурталд зориг бадран хөгжиж**, биендээ хүлээсэн маш их үүрэг бүхий хүндтэй сайхан ажил хэргээ нр төртэй биелүүлжээ. Тус сургуулийн бүх багш нарыг Монгол ардынхаа алдарт хувьсгалт намаар удирдуулан жолоодуулж, ард олноо гэгээрүүлэх эрхэм үйлдээ улам сайхан, улам урагштай ур бүтээлтэй болж, эрхэлсэн хэрэг нь тулдаа хүрэх болоосой гэж ерөөе”.

Why has the author made it clear to “Mishi” that he does not know what is written in Mongolian characters? It may simply be a detail designed to enhance the realism of the scene: it makes sense that the Russian officer does not read traditional Mongolian. But we can still consider the implications. His judgement is limited by this constraint and is therefore based on what is directly accessible to him: drawings, embroidery and handicrafts. This leads him to praise the Mongols’ sense of observation and their obvious attachment to their country. It is an ambiguous praise, because even though it may be sincere and genuinely admiring, it nonetheless sends “the” Mongol back to ‘Nature’ (instinct, affection) and not “Culture” (literacy since he can’t talk about it, reason). It was suggested above that this image of the Mongol as being close to nature, which earns him the admiration of the West, is not without a certain condescension.

I have also reproduced Mishi’s message because of the ready-made formulas praising the people and the party that guides them. Let us not dwell on this any further in order to continue reading the chapter, but we shall see that this characteristic is confirmed. My hypothesis is that the author has deliberately accumulated these formulas, at the risk of damaging the literary quality of his work but to make the reader understand that this is a satire, that this chapter is not to be taken at face value. Remember that Rinchen is not addressing a reader who is unaware of the reality of what he is describing. Despite a slight temporal gap between the time of the story and the time of the writing, the Mongolian readership of the time knew what to expect when it came to the discrepancy between reality and official discourse. Like the “pioneers” of the school, the teachers and the parents who came to attend the school festival - the showcase of the new socialist society under construction – Rinchen’s readers also had to applaud the “achievements of the working people guided by the party” on a daily basis, and not to do so would have meant exposing oneself to the suspicion of not being a good patriot.

The Ministry inspector, who arrives there by chance, is a caricature of himself: he’s fat, well-dressed and drives around in a car, all clues that suggest a certain superiority over the local population. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that he almost ignores the ordinary teachers and speaks only to Nasanbat, reproaching Nasanbat for not letting him know that his father was the “head of the *khoshuu*”, and by the interest aroused in him by the message left in Russian by Mishi, “probably not a simple herder”. Here again, a number of clues, “sprinkled in” by Rinchen, blur the interpretation. Basically, we have to ask ourselves whether, and in what way, the model of socialist education praised in the chapter is really different from those of previous periods, which the characters constantly denounce throughout the novel. Is the socialist indoctrination made glaringly obvious by the caricature of this scene really so much better than the Lamaist indoctrination it is supposed to oppose?

The hypothesis I wish to defend here is that, while claiming to offer a social allegory leading “from darkness to light” (or from night to dawn), Rinchen pits the old system against the new. The characters who think for themselves, who are capable of making a judgement or forming a well-founded opinion that is not the repetition of a speech learnt by heart, Nasanbat or Batbayar, have not been taught by any kind of educational model. It was through his wanderings and because he was curious and open, and also through his exchanges, that Nasanbat accumulated knowledge and sharpened his understanding of the world. Rinchen’s message in the form of an “elusive transcript” could therefore be as

follows: true knowledge (the kind Batbayar and Radlov talked about at the very beginning of the novel) cannot be acquired through indoctrination of any kind.

3. Two shades of Bogd

The scene I would like to comment on in this part, which will bring our discussion to a close, is twofold: I will be comparing two editions of *Üüriin Tuya*, Rinchen's novel, that of 1951/1954 and that of 1971, for the way in which the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt hands over the seal of the monarchy to the People's Government and takes the oath.

Let us recall once again the context: after the People's Army, assisted by a few units of the Bolshevik Red Army, had taken possession of the capital Ikh Khüree, a People's Government was formed and the Bogd was reinstated as monarch, albeit with very limited powers (the analysis of the situation by the character of Sühbaatar in *Tungalag Tamir* and the way he sees the relationship between the new government and the Bogd can be read as a complement to what follows).

As a first step, I obtained a specimen of the 1971 edition of *Üüriin Tuya*, and it was from this text that I began to work. This scene had already really caught my attention, because if one compares it with other representations of the Bogd character in other novels, and even in this one, one can't help but notice that Rinchen has added a new and rather daring nuance to it this time, albeit within tolerable limits in terms of ideology. If I may make a personal judgement, it seems to me that this scene is particularly powerful, perhaps the most accomplished in the novel (I would say that one could suspect a shakespearean inspiration). As I have not kept my plans to translate *Üüriin Tuya* into French a secret, I have received a great deal of encouragement and advice, particularly that of basing my work on the text of the first edition. I had already planned to use this scene to support my argument on the question of the instruction of the people when I wanted to read it again, this time opening the copy of the first edition that I had bought in the meantime. And there was none of what I had found so remarkable on my first reading. The scene is not necessarily any less interesting and, on reflection, the 1971 scene also has its faults - perhaps an excessive propagandistic side from a certain point of view - only that the Bogd is once again the usual caricature: a miserable one-eyed alcoholic, greedy and scheming, as full of his power as he is ignorant, and in reality subject to the desiderata of those around him, Ekh Dagina in particular. Both versions of the chapter begin with the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt and his consort, the Ekh Dagina, locked away in the Green Palace in a heavy, oppressive atmosphere. Their tête-à-tête is interrupted each time by the appearance of the jester, who had already appeared in a scene at the beginning of the novel, and is immediately chased away by the Ekh Dagina, who throws an alarm clock at him. In the 1971 version, the scene ends with an interior monologue by the Bogd; but in the 1954 version, it opens with a conversation between the Bogd and the treasurer of the Erdene Bandid Gegeen that goes on late into the night, according to the text. Once outside, the lama takes the Bogd's words back to the Erdene Bandid Gegeen, after which a large gathering is organised. It was held a few days later in the presence of all the highest echelons of the Lamaic Church, during which the measures decreed by the Bogd to counter the popular government were set out in front of thousands of disciples. The chapter ends with an exchange between a woman called Togoo and an old man called Chambai, two

very secondary characters in the novel, a scene that also appears in the 1971 version, but which has been switched to the following chapter. I will come back to the closed-door scene between the Bogd and the Ekh Dagina later, but first let us look at the vision of religion and its greatest representative as it emerges in the second edition.

Physically, we are presented with an old man before his time, worn out by excess of all kinds, almost blind and practically impotent. When a valet, a lama, comes to announce the treasurer of the Erdene Bandid Gegeen, it is an old blind man numbed by alcohol who turns to him.

“A cough was heard through the door and the blind khaan, although unable to see anything, turned in that direction to ask in a hoarse, alcohol-drenched voice: Who’s there?”

The lama announced the treasurer and the Bogd asked to be taken to the room where he usually received his very close allies, the text tells us. And here again it is a heavy old man, who can hardly move and can see nothing - the author insists heavily, - that the servant carries to the alcove:

“The chamber lama came to support his blind sovereign and help him to his feet, and carried him to the right-hand chamber where he used to receive the most intimate of his allies, a secret alcove dimly lit by the flickering light of a candle planted in the centre of a large silver chalice.

He seated the khaan on the low armchair where a few cushions had been stacked, lit two red candles in their silver saucers, closed the door of the sleeping temple and left without making a sound. Leaning against the backrest softened by a carpet, the khaan stood motionless, like a massive brass statue. Familiar with the exercise, he managed to give his flushed, flabby face an impassive pose”.

There’s something pathetic about this scene, in which Bogd is portrayed as great and indifferent when he’s already lost control of everything. The portrait is cruelly laughable.

The big rally held a few days later is no more forgiving. It is once again obscurantism that is being denounced, a harsh indictment of a system in which the credulity and obedience of populations kept in ignorance and fear prevents any change. For readers who have already realised that the power of the lamas gathered there is already no more than a facade, the cynicism of the scene is all too obvious.

“And, a few days later, when the evening came, in the sumptuous salon of the Gegeen, several hundred renowned lamas had gathered from all around, myandag of very high rank whose influence weighed heavily on the people: a crowd of these lamas who were indoctrinating these rough and innocent people from the highlands, enjoining them not to take the slightest action without first consulting the master lama.

And all these old, very old lamas drank their tea while listening to the treasurer tell them the latest news circulating in Khüree”.

“Тэгээд, хэд хоносон хойно, нэгэн үдэш, Гэгээний гоё сайхан өргөөнд хийдийн нэртэй нэртэй, хийд хөдөөгүй хэд хэдэн зуун шавь нартай, олонд их нөлөөтэй мяндагтан хэргэмтэн лам нар хуралдсан нь, цөм, хөдөөний харанхуй бүдүүлэг гэнэн хонгор сэтгэлтэй ардын аливаа хэрэг явдалд ачит лам багш гэж аврал сургаалы нь шүтдэг тийм лам нар ажээ. Гэгээний өргөөнд хуралдсан тэр настай настай лам нар, Хүрээнд юу юу үзсэн сонссоныг нэгд нэгэнгүй дэлгэрэнгүй айлтгасан нярав ламын үгийг цай ууцгаан сонсч сууваас...”

The fact that these lamas are very, very old (the superlative being indicated by the repetition of “*nastai, nastai*”) is probably not insignificant: this scene depicts an ancient, decrepit, reactionary order that is once again trying to keep up appearances, or to conceal its true face by draping itself in a pomp that is no longer anything more than pomp and circumstance. This is just as clear in the portraits of the few individual lamas:

- When our Khaan, who held the reins of State and faith with a master's hand, is reduced to such extremes, what will become of our most honoured patrons of mercy, our high nobility, our great incarnations, our spiritual guides?
said a very old tsorzh, one of those dayanch who take a vow of retirement and go off to live as a hermit, a man with an emaciated face, long to the ground, whose eyes burned with fanatical fervour.

“Даяанч хүний эцэнгэр царайтай, үхширтэл баримтлах мухар бадардан аягүй хурц хүдэтэй, их шаргайн шинжтэй туранхай өвгөн нэгэн цорж унтууцан дуугарлаа”.

But it is above all in the content of what they say that there is a glaring discrepancy between history on the march and the reaction that these lamas claim to be opposing it. The measures taken by the Bogd to counter the advance of the new people's government, a “secret” decree (*nuuts zarlig lünden*) revealed to the faithful, consist of exorcising its leaders and making the name “party of the people” (*ardyn nam*) taboo, which the faithful will henceforth have to banish and replace with the same expression used to designate the soldiers of the Red Army, the “Gentle Greys” (*nomkhon bor*), derisory, grotesque measures that clearly highlight the ridiculousness of the decadent class that this literature was intended to illustrate.⁴¹⁴

A very common motif in these novels, and one that is also to be found in *Tungalag Tamir*, is the rumour that spread at the time about members of the government supposedly undertaking to kill father, mother and master lama when they took their oath, during which they would pass under the legs of a Russian woman or under a picture of a Russian woman giving birth.

⁴¹⁴ Yet if we are to follow Bawden this is more faithful to the reality than the second version. “The revolutionaries were summoned to return to their allegiance, and this summons was reinforced by magic ceremonies of exorcism performed at Khüree to keep the people's army from coming any nearer. A did or magical structure for repelling demons and evil influences was conveyed out of Khüree towards the north in the presence of the Khutagt, and a crowd of Tibetans fired after it with guns, but to no practical purpose”. Bawden, 1968: 234. Yet, Bawden's work dates back from 1968 whereas the second edition of *Üüriin Tuya* was released in 1971. Were new elements brought to public knowledge that may have Rinchen adapt his story?

It should also be said that those who want to join the party of the "Peaceful Greys" must first pass under the spread legs of a Russian woman, or on the Dagerreotype of a Russian woman in childbirth, tread on the *Ikh Khöldön Sudar* and the *Sundui Zhadamba* and take an oath. They are then emptied of their substance and reborn as heretics, forgetting the respect due to their mother, their father, their bagsh lam and the descendants of Tenger: betrayers.

“Бас, Номхон борын гишүүн болох хүнийг орос эмийн өмдөн доогуур буюу төрж байгаа орос эхнэрийн дүрст зураг доогуур шургуулан гаргаж, их хөлгөн судар, сундуй жадамба тэргүүтэн дээгүүр алхуулан гаргадгаас боолж⁴¹⁵, хүний ухаан мунхарч, буруу үзэл төрөөд, лам багш нарыг хүндэтгэхгүй, төрсөн эх эцэг, тэнгэрээс заяат ихэс ноёд, лам багш нараа, эцэг эх, ноён багш гэж үзэхгүй тэрсүүд буруу үзэлтэй болдог юм гэнэ гэж цуурхан хэлэлцэх боллоо”.

Apart perhaps from the fact that it depicts a significant event in the history of Mongolia in the first half of the twentieth century and the author’s own style, this chapter does not particularly stand out from what we have read elsewhere in the 1954 version. As we can see, the picture painted of the declining Lamaic Church is typical of the genre and the period. In the 1971 version, on the contrary, the character of the Bogd takes on an interesting and even rather surprising depth. Let us compare the two sceneries.

To begin with, it is the same scene, the same setting, the same hushed, heavy atmosphere that is described to us, slightly more elaborately in the second version. Where the comparison reveals a difference that suggests that the story may take a different turn, and therefore a different meaning, is in the presentation of the characters and their respective attitudes. Let us look at the two passages in parallel

<p>Богд Хаан Эх дагина хоёрын муухай зан хөдөлж, муу оёг орсон тул, шадар лам соёг хаалгач нар, үг дуугаа хурааж танхимаар сүүдэр мэт чимээгүй, маш болгоомжлон явах ажээ</p>	<p>Наран гэлт Богд хаан, Эх дагинын хамт тэр танхимд хоёулхнаа чив чимээгүй сууж бодол болон байдалтай. Эх дагинын царай унтуулцсан байдалтай, муу оёг нь орсон шинжтэй, хэдий дургүй суувч хааны зүг байн байна хялан хялан харах ажээ</p>
<p>The unease was heavy and neither the Bogd Khaan nor the Ekh Dagina would hide their bad moods. The lamas in the suite, the doormen and valets, moved like shadows, quietly and with the utmost caution.</p>	<p>Naran Gerelt Bogd and Ekh Dagina were both sitting mute, as if deep in thought. And Ekh Dagina looked angry, sullen. Even though she was silent, she kept casting askew glances at the Khaan.</p>

While the characters are still both silent, in the second version the author adds that they are deep in thought. And unlike the first version, only the Dagina clearly shows anger or hatred. The Bogd soon reveals himself to be in the throes of introspection, with a lucid and

⁴¹⁵ Эдгээр үг өгүүллийг тэр үест ойролцоо цагийн бичиг хэвлэлээс авсан баримттай зүйл билээ.

bitter view of the situation, bitterness not towards the popular government as might have been expected, but towards himself and, to a lesser extent, towards the Ekh Dagina.

In the 1954 version, it is clearly the Ekh Dagina who has the upper hand; the Bogd, completely overwhelmed by events, allows himself to be agonised without resistance when she lists all the things the government has just deprived him of by forcing him to sign the agreement by which he agrees to see his powers limited. “But what could I do?” he simply replies, to which she reminds him of what he represents for the faithful, the aura he enjoys. Note that in *Tungalag Tamir* it is through Sükhbaatar’s thoughts that the reader is reminded of the parameters to be taken into account when analysing the situation. An extract from the chapter depicting the parade of soldiers from the victorious People’s Army as they enter the liberated capital is worth reading:

“There was another thorny problem: the Bogd. By siding with the gemin and then the baron, how much misery had he caused? How much suffering had he caused? We had to get rid of this traitor. But it was impossible to simply eliminate him. The day before, in Khuyin Burgaltai, the Bogd ambassador had greeted Sükhbaatar with a long *khadag*, the gift of a powerless man at a dead end, hoping by this obsequious attitude to flatter the victor. Sükhbaatar had seen through his game. But popular sentiment dictated that he treat the emissary with respect. Why? Because when it came to Bogd, there was no room for error. It was impossible to oppose him head-on as long as the people placed their blind trust in him, as long as he enjoyed the fervour of the people. The proof? When this ambassador arrived, the people of the region flocked en masse to prostrate themselves at his feet, presenting him with all sorts of offerings. “The Bogd ambassador himself came to welcome the regular army”, “It was said that he presented Sükhbaatar with a long *khadag*”: the rumour spread immediately. But it also meant that support for the People’s Government was growing. The soldiers listened to the Bogd’s message with their eyes closed and in prayer. The end of the speech was greeted by a thunderous:

- Long live Bogd Zhavzandamba!

The Bogd was undeniably a formidable opponent. It was impossible to defeat him with weapons like the gemin or the baron. They were to Mongolia what parasites are to the organism: vermin to be eradicated and crushed. But the Bogd and the Yellow Faith were real boils: tumours that could not be removed without risking widespread infection. We had to be extra careful, and treat the root of the problem.

Insofar as the novels of the period often present themselves, as is the case here, as several variations on the same theme, we can force the analysis a little and say that the scenes and characters “respond” to each other, echoing each other. By this I mean that, insofar as they influence the reader’s overall perceptions, they can no longer be seen as self-contained, radically separate universes. Having taken this precaution, we can say that the exchange between the Ekh Dagina and the Bogd of the 1954 Rinchen justifies the caution of the Sükhbaatar of Lodoidamba. According to the Khaan’s consort, Sükhbaatar was the enemy to be eliminated as a priority and the source of the danger. As for the measures proposed by the Bogd to combat these enemies, the reader is all the more reminded of how pathetic they are when the Ekh Dagina herself laughs when he suggests

performing exorcisms (which he does in the end in this version of *Üüriin Tuya*) and is not much more convinced when he suggests inviting Sükhbaatar and poisoning him. In the end, she has the last word, and the Bogd is reduced to applauding her and expressing his admiration. His exclamation could have been ironic, but it is not presented as such, at least not openly:

Wonderful! Of the three dagina of the three countries, you are the greatest, your intelligence shines through!

– Ухлай! Гурван орны дагинасын дээд таны мэргэн ухаан, нарийн аргыг гайхан бишрэв гэж хаан баярлан өгүүлэв.

It is a much more complex Bogd that Rinchen proposes in the 1971 version. This time, the enemy to be feared was not Sükhbaatar but Kostorovets, the Tsar's ambassador, whose icy gaze and disturbing face, seen in a dream, made Bogd break out in a cold sweat. The author conveys the tension and distress that seems to be gripping his character by depicting him desperately clutching his rosary, which he repeats almost mechanically, muttering prayers as if to chase away the ghost that has just imposed itself on his mind. The explanation for this terror is given in the text: it is Kostorovets who has made him his plaything, a sham king at the head of a puppet state, and who has forced him to eliminate all those who oppose his views and those of Tsarist Russia.

“A reflex he had acquired as a child, he picked up his rosary and began to pray it, chanting inwardly and, without even realising it, began to whisper. He appeared before our eyes, as clearly as if he were there, with his big nose pinched between his glasses, his icy gaze, the gaze of a being who would stop at nothing, that cruel face... to stir your insides: Korostovets. This despotic consul in charge of executing the Tsar's policies had, since the day he arrived in Khüree as a permanent resident, ingeniously played up the threat that China posed to Mongolia by trying to re-impose its yoke, in order to turn all the Mongolian ministers and even the sovereign himself into mere puppets to play his game with. The Bogd was reminded of the decrees issued on Korostovets' orders, by which he had dismissed those of his ministers whose ideas did not agree with those of the consul, and had sometimes had them poisoned or passed from life to death”.

... багаас сурсан заншлаар эрхээ татаж, аман дотроо уншлагаа өөрийн эрхгүй шивнэн унштал, өндөр хамрынхаа хянганаас нь хавчиж өндөр хамрынхаа хянганаас нь хавчиж тогтоссон шилтэй, муу юманд юунаас ч буцахгүй хүйтэн харцтай, харсан хүний дотор арзас хиймээр аягүй харгис царайтай Коростовецын дүр гэнэт цээжинд нь ургаж, нүднийхээ хавчаас шилийн цаанаас хүйтнээр инээмсэглэн харж байгаа нь тов тодхон харагдах шиг боллоо. Оросын цагаан хааны харгис бодлогыг биелүүлж байсан тэр эзэрхэг консул Хүрээнээ суух үес хятадын цэргийн эрхтний Монгол улсыг дахин эзлэн дарахыг ямагт чармайдаг аюулыг далимдуулан, монгол сайдаас эхлэн улсын хааныг цөм тоглоом мэт үзэж байсан нь Богд хааны сэтгэл дургаж, Коростовецын амаар тушаасны нь хааны нэрээр зарлиг буулгаж Коростовецын санаанд үл нийлэх сайдыг огцруулан халж, хор амсуулж, төрөл арилжуулж байсан нь санагдлаа.

That evening, the Bogd thought he had perhaps reached the age of reason (or so he said, or so he thought) and was in for a rude awakening: he became fully aware that by fearfully allowing himself to be manipulated by Kostorovets, he had created a vacuum around him, wiping out those who were most loyal to him and who died without ever withdrawing their trust (Da Lam Tserenchimed and the holy Noyon Khan Namnansüren, among others). Those who remained were merely flatterers greedy for titles and privileges, not people to be reckoned with. But what a tragedy! What a tragedy! he laments inwardly, racked by remorse as much as self-pity.

“The Bint Van, the Minister of Administrative Affairs and the Sa Noyon Khan Namnansüren, the Da Lam Tserenchimed, all had faith in me, they worshipped me, the Oroin Chimeg Orkhi Manlai Bogd. They were ready for anything, gave everything of themselves, all their strength, until their last breath. They still trusted me at the very moment when I had them poisoned. All my loyal ministers, whose only fault was that they didn’t share Korostovets’ ideas, all of them I had poisoned to obey this monster. From now on, all those who remain to support me are people who only care about titles and privileges. Those who, like these loyal assassins, are devoted body and soul to their State must be able to be counted on the fingers of one hand. All those who had foresight, a long-term vision, I had them discreetly removed. I turned this State into a blind nation, my actions were dictated by someone else, I became a mere puppet and all those of my ministers who were educated I had removed. What a tragedy! What a tragedy! he sighed in torment”.

“Бинт ван гэдэг бичгийн сайд, сайн ноён хан Намнансүрэн, Цэрэнчимэд даа лам-цөм надад итгэж, оройн чимэг, оь манлай Богд эзэн хаан гэж шүтсээр, хүчин зүтгэсээр, миний шавь гэу амьсгал хураан хураатлаа итгэсээр надад хорлуулсан нь цөм Косторовецын санаанд нийлүүлэхгүй шударга сайд шавиа би тэр харгисын заавраар хорлодог байлаа. Одоо миний түшиг бологсод гагцхүү хэргэм ямба бодохоос, тэдгээр нөгчигсдийн адил, амь биеэ твчин төрдөө шударгыг гүйцэтгэгсэд ховорхон боллоо. Аль л учир мэдэх, хэтийг бодох хүнийг далдын нарийн аргаар үгүй хийж, нүдгүй төр болгож байхад нь би гар хөл нь болж, ам заавры нь даган гүйцэтгүүлж, аль эрдэмтэй сайцуулаа үгүй хийлгэж байлаа. Юутай харамсал, юутай харамсал хэмээн сүүрс алдан бухимдаж суувай”.

The ignorance of his ministers and entourage, and the systematic rejection in the novel of “real” knowledge based on scientific knowledge – let us not forget what Khaisan said to Nasanbat when, in the days of autonomy, he thought he could have an encyclopaedia of natural history and geography published - deprived them of the discernment that would have enabled them to understand what was happening and perhaps prevented their state and their king from becoming a puppet in the hands of Kostorovets, the character laments. “Is there anyone who understands the drama experienced by the sovereign of a small state?”

As he sighs incessantly, the Ekh Dagina becomes impatient and asks him why he is constantly sighing like that. But while in the 1954 version the distraught Bogd lets him get the upper hand, in the 1971 version the balance between the two characters shifts and, without paying him any attention, he dives back into his thoughts.

- What are you sighing about all the time?

He seemed to have heard her but, immersed in his own thoughts, paid her no attention.

“Та байн байн сүүрс алдаад, юу болчихвоо? Гэж асууж байгаа нь дуулдах шиг болсонд бодлогонд дарагдсаны улмаас үл ажиг өнгөргөж,

He then twice unrolls the thread of events that have taken place over the past few years, namely - in the words of the characters, need I add - : the fall of the Tsarist government in Russia, overthrown by a people who had put up with (*хүлцэн тэсвэрлэх хэмжээ хэдийн хэтрэн өнгөрч*) its authoritarianism (*харгис*) for far too long, the recognition of Mongolian independence and the cancellation of old debts by the government, Lenin’s accession to the highest state responsibilities with the motto of non-discrimination of small and large nations (*Тэр Ленин гэдэг, их бага улс хэмээн үзэн ялгаавардаггүй*) and the military aid requested by Sükhbaatar from the new government to defend the country against Mongolia.

The form that Rinchen gave to the Bogd’s tirade raises many questions as to the explicit or veiled meaning that he may have intended to introduce into it. The fact that the sovereign goes back twice to sum up these few years of history, twice and from two different angles, suggests that this is the reading of someone who is hesitant, who in reality doesn't really have the keys to understanding them and who therefore only has the speech he was given to assess his own situation. To put it another way and in a very schematic way, we have more the feeling of being in the presence of a pupil reciting his lesson as dictated to him by his teacher than of a king who has just taken a crucial decision for the future of this country. A few observations which seem to me to support this argument: it was Da lam Puntsagdorzh who reported to him on the policy of Lenin, Sükhbaatar’s ally, with regard to large and small nations, and it was on this basis that he decided to hand over the State seals to the People’s Government. A detail that is perhaps not a detail: he stumbles over Lenin’s name, which prompts him to digress and remind the reader once again that he is blind, that he has only heard the name and has not been able to write it down to record it correctly:

And the Prime Minister of this Soviet Union... Lé... Lé what was it? Ah, Lenin, that must be it. My eyesight is failing and I can't write things down to remember them, so I have to rely on what I hear.

Тэр Зөвлөлт засагт Орос улсын ерөнхий сайд нь Ле... байз уу, Ленин гэсэн байхаа нүдний хараа тун муудсан учир, бичиг үзэж чадахгүй, ганц сонсголоор л юм тогтоогчоон болдог боллоо.

Without having to stretch the interpretation too far, Bogd’s blindness, constantly referred to by the author, whether through the mouths of other characters (Ekh Dagina in the corresponding chapter of the 1954 version, to take one example) or by Bogd himself here, may appear as a metaphor for the absence of intellectual insight, while the hearing on which he is forced to rely comes back to “noises”, to rumour. It is a hypothesis, but I think it is defensible.

In the 1954 version, the Bogd, although distraught and accused of cowardice by the Ekh Dagina, suggested poisoning Sükhbaatar and performing exorcism rituals to harm the people’s government. In the 1971 edition, on the contrary, he considered that the fact that

he had given his seal to the said people's government was a good thing for Mongolia. Admittedly, the speech is in line with the party's propaganda, but to have put it in the Bogd's mouth is relatively daring on the part of the author and raises questions in the reader's mind about the meaning of what is being presented. The Bogd then rewinds the thread of the story, but by leaving the State and the geopolitical reading given to him by Da lam Puntsagdorzh, to refocus on himself and the role he played or was made to play.

“To have had no king but the title of a toy in the hands of the Tsar's consul, a toy in the hands of the General of the Silinbüü troops when the Gemin occupied Khüree, and still a toy in the hands of the bloodthirsty Baron von Ungern, that renegade of the Tsar when the latter restored the monarchy for a time and obeyed him with his finger and his eye. Is signing this agreement that makes me a sovereign with limited powers not good for Mongolia, not good for me?”

This Bogd from the 1971 edition, who bitterly realises that he has always been manipulated and used by those stronger than him, and who was too cowardly or too blind to react - unless it was fate - ends up concluding that handing over the executive seal to the People's Government and agreeing to sign this agreement, which re-establishes him as monarch but gives him only limited powers, was the best thing that could have happened to him and to the country. At this point, Ekh Dagina, who had been quiet until then, finally lost patience and cynically asked him if not answering questions was a characteristic of sovereigns with limited powers. From one edition to the next, Ekh Dagina's character hasn't changed much, although she is even more scathing and cruelly ironic in the second edition. What has changed, and what helps to restore balance to the relationship, is the character of Bogd, who is no longer submissive to her as he was in 1954, but instead responds to her sarcasm by pointing out her own blindness: “Is there a single moment in my life when I haven't just worn the title of king?”, “For whom do you think you murdered all those ministers by making them wear that poisoned *arkhi* on their lips?”, “Haven't you yet realised that you yourself have been nothing but the maid of this servant of the Tsar?” And while in the previous version he admitted that the man to be shot was Sühkbaatar, this time he sings his praises and compares himself to him, only to realise once again that while some were fighting for the country, he let the *gemins* impose their dictatorship. He trusts Sühkbaatar, he insists: wasn't it comfortable for him in times of trouble to leave it to others to run the country's affairs, contenting himself with ratifying their decisions? Ekh Dagina continued to respond, but the 1971 Bogd did not give in. Both sides stuck to their positions until the Bogd declared that, having heard him criticised in this way, he should have put forward a counter-proposal when the agreement was signed. Ekh Dagina, who at that moment thought that the Bogd had accepted his arguments, was delighted and replied that it was not too late. “Not too late indeed”, continued the Bogd, but he then launched into a long indictment of himself in which he reproached himself, given the aura he enjoyed, for not having been able to use it to encourage his subjects to educate themselves, to take measures concerning schools and education, and to send Mongol children to study abroad. And in the end he gave him the coup de grâce by decreeing that when he signed the agreement he should also have given up his title of khaan to become simply the eighth incarnation of Zhavzandamba and devote the rest of his life to meditation and penance.

In this second version of the novel, Ekh Dagina is in a weak position when the jester appears. However, she throws him an alarm clock, just as in the first version. The scene ends with an interior monologue by the Bogd, who, when silence returns after the jester has disappeared, confirms the opinion he has just formed that he would have done better to hand over the title he has done nothing to deserve. May the people's government know in the future what it should do, because it knows nothing, it knows nothing! he sighs. Here is a summary of his speech in indirect style, using the same terms and content but cutting the length. This singular difference between the Bogd of 1954 and 1971 is intriguing, to say the least. On the one hand, the reader is confronted with a propaganda discourse in praise of the People's Government, whereas in the 1954 version criticism appeared in the discourse of the opponents. But on the other hand, the figure of the Bogd is no longer as legible as in the Manichean discourse promoted by the regime, which wanted everyone to be all black and white. The Bogd is not excused for the harm he has done to the country, but he is no longer judged as guilty as a victim of fate. If we were dealing with a tragic character, we could see in this scene, which is more elaborate on a literary level than the 1954 version, a reflection on the human condition that allows us - and this is my hypothesis - to look beyond the propaganda discourse. What would we ourselves have done in this Bogd's place, would we have been able to resist the pressures exerted from all sides? Would we have been able to emancipate ourselves from the indoctrination in which we were brought up? And if this applies to religious indoctrination, does it also apply to Marxist-Leninist indoctrination? In a system where, as Caroline Humphrey has rightly observed, everyone was both victim and culprit, and at least partly aware that they were, this chapter perhaps invites the reader to say to himself that nothing in the story before him is true. And it casts a new light on the scene at the school celebration, whose propagandistic nature has already been mentioned, to the point of being crude if not irritating.

Conclusion

The proposal for a new law requiring the teaching of English from the 1st grade is being debated in Mongolia, especially within the research community, with language and literature scholars in the forefront.

The passions unleashed by this (decision) is not without resurrecting another issue, which Tsetsentsolmon already pointed out in her 2014 article, “The ‘gong beat’ against the ‘uncultured’” focusing on the competing notions of culture and civilisation.

What emerges on the surface in the form of lively debates and sometimes clear-cut positions, is a feeling that is probably much more confused and in any case complex, combining what we will call “national” pride and a tendency to self-denigration. I propose to speak of an “inferiority complex”, rooted in history and maintained as much by openly depreciatory and arrogant speeches as by unconditional praise based on criteria that are often subjective and fail to grasp Mongolian culture in all its richness, depth and diversity.

Seen from the outside, in either case, that is to say, whether one marvels at it or, on the contrary, draws contempt from it, Mongolian culture is that of the nomadic world, as opposed to the grand sedentary civilisations that surround it. There is some truth in this, although the terms nomad and nomadism must be used with caution.⁴¹⁶

At the root of the problem, what appears is basically ignorance, lack of knowledge, and perhaps also a desire not to know what is disturbing or not entirely in line with our arguments and conceptions of things. In short, we project onto present and past Mongolia values that correspond to today’s values and concerns, a phenomenon that is heavily aggravated by the language barrier: the fact that research in Mongolia is largely conducted in Mongolian and is most often not translated (which brings us back to a certain extent to the debate mentioned at the very beginning of this conclusion on the teaching of English language).

The aim of this research was therefore to approach Mongolian culture and representation of the self, not from the nomadic prism even though one cannot obviously deny the role played by the latter even in our sources. And to do so we intended to take an interest in a part of its heritage that has been little studied in the West – with the notable exception of the Secret History – its written literature. To do this, we will have made a choice that is likely to make the task more difficult by taking as our starting point works produced under censorship, intended to serve as weapons of propaganda and situated in

⁴¹⁶ Orhon’s comments on The 2000 documentary film with Julia Roberts commented on by Orhon is very typical. Let us quote the geographer: “*In The Wild: Mongolian Horsemen with Julia Roberts* (2000) is one such example, it is a hollywood voyage to “a wild and desolate place”. Unlike other hollywood blockbuster fictional overdoses, *In the Wild* is a documentary based on actress Julia Roberts’ experience living with Mongolian herders. In the film, Mongolia becomes the object of the Western voyeuristic gaze. the film is also a portrayal of a ‘good’ Orient – warm and giving, at least on the surface. as the title suggests, Mongolia is a ‘wild’ place, in both metaphorical and the most literal senses. the recurrent image of the truly wild horses running in the prairie can be seen as a metaphor for the untamed, wild nature of Mongolia. The visual motif of Mongolian countryside serves as an essential décor in portraying Mongolia for the spectators’ gaze as a ‘wild’ and austere place”. Cf. Orhon. op. cit. 2011, p. 343.

that literary current that, as we have seen, has been severely decried, to say the least, namely “socialist realism”.

The core of the matter is the question of Mongolian feeling of a belonging together, how it is expressed, apprehended and constructed by those primarily concerned, and hence how it is staged. Of course, no research, no matter how extensive it may be, can claim to understand Mongolian polyphonic representation of the self – or indeed any such a representation – in its completeness. Beyond the diversity of the forms it can take, and the diversity of its modes of expression, there is also a problem of subjectivity, subjectivity which is both on the part of these who manifest their image and on the part of those who look at it.

Focusing on the notion of “*ekh oronch üzel*” as the ideal that was supposed to provide this feeling of belonging together during the socialist era, it is therefore a **certain way of** conceiving and representing patriotism that we have described, through its narration in the socialist twentieth century novel. The claims of this literature, which was clearly situated in space and time, brought a double dimension to the problem: the authors, indeed, were charged with **illustrating** patriotism, for the people and by the regime, and at the same time they were **acting** patriotically. From a temporal point of view, the question thus required to be addressed almost simultaneously in the time of the narrative and in the time of the writing, the two echoing and feeding off each other.

If we refer to the theories of nationalism presented at the very beginning of the analysis, the results of this research seem to plead for a constructivist approach, but which does not neglect the influence exerted by attachments that are not perhaps “primordial” but nevertheless deeply rooted in mentalities, and maintained by everyday practice. In the large family of these constructivist theories, the ideas put forward by the proponents of a socio-communicational, evolutionary or Marxist angles of attack all have their interests. One essential point that can be drawn from this discussion is the fundamental role played here by the regime’s voluntarist policy of shaping a common culture oriented towards the “progressive” socialist ideal – needless to repeat that we are quoting the term used at the time, the matter is not to debate its relevance – but which does not, however, trample on centuries of literary composition. This heritage was probably the bearer of a diffuse sense of cultural community, and thus perhaps already the seeds of modern nationalism. That the party slogan “nationalist in form, socialist in content” remained an empty one brandished but not put into practice by Mongolian writers – since this is the question raised by Tsetsentsolmon – reveals particularly well the depth of the problem.

At a time when “nationalist ideology” (*ündesnii üzel*) was severely denounced and banned from the official discourse, the reappearance of the term in the slogan charged with guiding literary production is surprising. And what is important here is perhaps not so much to judge the success of this programme, although the interest of the question remains, as to question what it reveals about the understanding of their “national identity” by the Mongols and about their attachment to a culture – but which culture? – around which to gather.

The critical writings of the time express an ambivalent feeling towards this national culture. On the one hand, there is an exacerbated pride expressed in the form of emphatic panegyrics typical of authoritarian regimes, which, seen from the outside and perhaps especially with hindsight, may seem surprisingly naïve: who do they hope to mystify with such crude language? One might ask. But on the other hand, there is also a seemingly deep-

rooted sense of inferiority and a tendency to self-deprecation. The whole thing has a rather confusing effect.

These two faces of the expression of Mongolian identity also both appear in literature. The novel of the socialist twentieth century provides a particularly telling example, insofar as progress – following a Marxist-Leninist pattern – is one of the main themes, if not the theme *par excellence*. We saw this with *Üüriin Tuya* but it is also very clear in *Tungalag Tamir*. The very title, in both cases, announces it from the outset in a metaphorical form. *Üüriin Tuya* is the sun rising, the light that illuminates the world in contrast to the darkness of the night which stands for the obscurantism embodied by the Church and the feudal system. And in the same vein, *tungalag* in Mongolian means “clear”, “limpid”, “pure”, it is also the truth that is supposed to triumph, calm succeeding to disorder.

The parable described in Rinchen’s novel is very explicit: the whole story tends towards the completion of the quasi-prophetic words of the Russian academician Radlov to old Batbayar at the beginning of the story. Everything is said about the narrative project in this exchange on the richness of human culture, when the two men are saddened to have to admit how Mongolia has lagged behind all the nations that have appropriated it, sometimes by dispossessing it of its own history, its past. The causes are also clearly stated. It is the “gross” ignorance in which religion and beliefs keep the Mongolian people, and this in a partly concerted way. And of course, as propaganda goes, it is the advent of socialism that is supposed to solve everything. Let us recall what Morson wrote about the criticism in the West of the literary poverty of “socialist realism”, where he noted:

Perhaps [the] most disturbing to Western readers, a lack of irony. In possession of the Marxist-Leninist method for solving all problems, the socialist realist novel eschews the kind of ambiguity and limited or individualized point of view that readers of Western novels value and in terms of which they often define literary art.

Is this irony really absent in Rinchen? This research leads me to argue that it is not. The “inspector” (*baitsaagch*), a representative of the regime, who comes to judge the success of the “model” school set up by the inhabitants of Khutag-Öndör Uulyn sum, old Batbayar in the forefront, is too caricatural for the satire not to be obvious. It is not the ideal being pursued – equal access to education and knowledge, and open to reflection – that is being questioned, but the ability, and perhaps the will, of the regime to achieve it. In the context of Mongolian society at the time, the system of education described by Rinchen at the end of the novel remains utopian and the readers could not be unaware of it. I would therefore propose to talk about *Üüriin Tuya* as a “realistic utopia” and perhaps to put into bracket its categorisation as a work of “socialist realism”, which, because of the history of the concept, condemns it from the outset. As for irony, it seems to me that it runs right through the text, cruel irony, tragic irony or dramatic irony depending on the case (we will not develop these concepts here, as they are a matter for literary studies).

The typical hero of socialist realism, we have just seen, is judged to be bland and insubstantial. If we may to a certain extent admit it for Rinchen’s “positive” characters, who may seem too honest, too wise, too courageous to express the complexity of human psychology, this is definitely not the case with his “villains”. Careful observation of certain passages invites me to consider that figures such as the Bogd were particularly well thought

out and worked out, in total dissonance with the ideology of the time, which made him a symbol – if not the symbol – of all that was to be hated in pre-1921 society. The scene entitled “An Evening at the Green Palace” (*Nogoo Ordon dakhi negen üdesh*) is perhaps the strongest and most meaningful in the novel from this point of view: the one in which the fallen Bogd himself makes his self-criticism and raises Sükhbaatar and the people’s government to the pinnacle, precisely on the issue of culture and education. For those who want to read between the lines, the reflections inspired by this scene alone could probably be the subject of an entire thesis.

The narrative canvas of *Tungalag Tamir* also clearly highlights this issue of progress and access to education. Independence and revolution are important, but there is more to it than swords and guns, says the character Sükhbaatar to Bat and Zhargal, when the latter asks him to join his army. What the country needs, continues the hero of the revolution, are educated, capable and willing teachers to impart the rudiments of knowledge to the children of the people (before their education can be completed). Bat’s struggle in the fourth book highlights in a fictionalized way the stumbling blocks faced by those who seek to instil “modern” ideas in minds still deeply imbued with their religious beliefs and who continue to hold the lamas in the highest regard. Fiction here allows the author to “tell a story”, to set out the terms of the problem in order to discreetly invite the reader to reflect and make up his own mind.

In both novels, this is the main plot, the one that is explicitly proposed to the reader and which forms the trunk of the story. But in both cases, and although in quite different styles, multiple ramifications, subplots, are grafted onto it, opening up so many spaces to suggest other possible readings and interpretations. With *Tungalag Tamir*, we have a realistic novel that tells the story of the war of national liberation, the revolution, the beginnings of collectivisation and the difficult establishment of a modern education system in a rural and traditionalist society, but around the character of Tömör in particular, or the complexity of the relations between Erdene, Dolgor and Itgelt as we have seen, other influences are condensed, allowing many Mongolian researchers to take it as an example so as to touch the question of the “renewal of tradition”.

The Mongol researcher Uuganbaatar, specialised in contemporary literature, focused on the scene in which Khongor, accused of theft, takes refuge behind the Brave of the Hills, (Tömör), who not only does not deny having anything to do with the story but manages to completely turn the tables on the accusers, insinuating that they might be the real thieves. In a short article, he points out the obvious similarities between this sequence and a popular story belonging to the oral tradition, the story (*khuuch yaria*) of Bandi Darlan, collected and transcribed by the academician Damdinsüren in 1962. This is in fact only one example among many of the numerous borrowings that Lodoidamba makes from this literary tradition that the regime itself, as we have seen, has set itself the task of preserving. The whole novel is peppered with proverbs and sayings, wishes, references to songs and rituals that constitute this heritage. The author thus demonstrates that modernity does not mean wiping the slate clean and adopting the model provided by “socialist realism” in its Russian or Soviet version, but that in order to unfold, it cannot ignore the value system through which readers can apprehend and appreciate it.

The same concern to integrate the richness of Mongolian heritage and culture can be observed in Rinchen. As we have seen, the novel's fragmented, interlocking structure allows for the integration of numerous tales, legends, and folk tales from popular culture. Moreover, in the case of *Üüriin Tuya*, they are often told by characters who themselves belong to the oral tradition that characterizes a literary heritage that the Mongols are now striving to have recognized – We mentioned earlier the debate around the notion of “nomadic civilization” and the passions it arouses – the *badarchin*, for example, are part of it. But the author goes further, the two chapters that take the reader to the ruins of Khar Balgas (or Ordu Baliq) with the characters of Radlov and Iadrintsev, open a window on the “cultural landscape of the Orkhon Valley”⁴¹⁷ and its archaeological remains, testimonies of the complex relationship between the nomadic and sedentary worlds already long before our era. As is often the case in Mongolian novels of the time (but not in *Tungalag Tamir*), each chapter is preceded by a quotation, some of which are borrowed from Mongolian folklore and popular culture, mainly in the first book, but which then opens up more widely to the heritage of humanity as a whole, with references to the Bible, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Latin quotations, and also to European and world literature. In this way, *Üüriin Tuya* brings us into the presence of a thousand-year-old culture made up of borrowings and intermingling that has never ceased to exist or to evolve, not even under Manchu domination or under the influence of Lamaism Buddhism, which on the surface the main plot might suggest insofar as it espouses the reading of history promoted by the regime, according to which it was not until Marxism and 1921 that the light finally penetrated Mongolia. It is therefore not too risky to consider that Rinchen makes full use in this work of what Caroline Humphrey calls “elusive transcript”, the possibility for the author to communicate with his readers through the lines, if we intend on putting it in our own terms.

The contingencies of the research led me to limit my ambitions with regard to the initial project by concentrating on these two novels while I would have liked to analyse all the works forming the corpus in equal measure. This constraint did not prevent me from reading them and integrating into the reflection what these readings inspired me. I can therefore safely say that they do not invalidate the argument I am defending here, even if I must admit that not all these authors exploit to the same degree the possibilities opened up by fictional discourse in its relationship to history.

This reflection leads me to consider that the literature of the socialist period deserves to be studied as a moment in a long history with which it maintains relationships of change but also of continuity. In other words, it seems difficult to reduce it to a categorisation in terms of “socialist realism” – with all what this implies – even if this was the term used by the authors themselves to describe their works. From the historian's point of view, it is valuable material in more ways than one. As far as this period is concerned, it bears the double testimony of events described by the narrative itself and that of the context of writing. And as Bawden noted in 1968, the historian faces a major problem with sources for this period, both in terms of quantity and quality:

⁴¹⁷ As Unesco calls it.

“The subsequent history of Mongolia [is] obscured and confused by the unsatisfactory nature of the documentation. The evaluation of what has been written about revolutionary Mongolia, and even of the original sources when they can be found, becomes, indeed, a major hazard from this time on. Several factors are responsible. Geographically, linguistically and psychologically, Mongolia is one of the most remote areas of the civilized world, where few Europeans have travelled, and fewer still have known Mongols as close friends or carried on a correspondence with them, least of all during the years of the revolution. We lack the human sympathy which enlivens, for example, the study of the Soviet revolution: we cannot check the official myth against what our friends and relatives tell from their own experiences, as we can with countries nearer at hand which have passed under totalitarian control. Neither was there any vocal emigration from Mongolia. Again, until recently no scholars outside Mongolia were interested in anything written in the Mongol language or able to read it, so that, even if it had been possible in the twenties and thirties of this century to collect Mongol books, magazines and newspapers, it would never have occurred to anyone to do so. For that reason there is, generally speaking, nothing in European libraries in the Mongol language dating from the first three and a half decades of the revolution, that is from 1921 till about 1955. But what makes the situation much more serious is that much of what we do have is formalistic, or suspect or both”.⁴¹⁸

And he insists a little further:

“[...] We must consider the grave fact that not only is secondary material often slanted, but that source material itself has been corrupted and falsified, either by the suppression of facts or the deliberate alteration of texts”.⁴¹⁹

Mongolia has come a long way since Bawden wrote these lines. It is now almost thirty years since it made the choice of liberal democracy and moved decisively towards a market economy. In this transition, it has encountered obstacles and many researchers suggest that the myth of a radical change of society should not be accepted too quickly. We have seen this in particular with Kaplonski. History is rarely, if ever, a matter of leaps from one system to another, and the evolution of mentalities may precede or follow moments of rupture, but it is very unlikely that it will be able to follow them completely. For three decades, however, contacts with the outside world have multiplied at the same time as a long process of re-reading the past, which has been necessary but at the same time colossal for the reasons we have just mentioned with Bawden. Numerous resources have been unearthed from formal and informal archives and made accessible to the public, and even more so to researchers.

This new configuration seems at first sight promising for the historian. In reality, is it as satisfactory as it seems? Also in 1968, Bawden wrote the following:

⁴¹⁸ Bawden, 1968, p. 221.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. p. 222.

“We must also remember that only the winning side has a voice in contemporary Mongolia, and that all accounts of the revolution present it as the necessary and right conclusion of a process whose outcome was never in doubt, and the justice of whose cause is not subject to argument”.⁴²⁰

The same mistake could be made again, even though the “winning side” is supposed to be open to criticism and debate, to differences of opinion, and to be free of ideological constraints. Liberal democracy cannot be compared to the totalitarian regimes that marked the history of the twentieth century, but this should not prevent us from welcoming with circumspection any proposal that claims to be ideologically virgin. Ethnology comes in support of history to remind us that any discourse must be linked to the subjective representations of which it is the product, and that it cannot completely avoid projecting onto what it describes the value system that corresponds to the issues of the moment. (To take one example, the diabolization of the Bogd Zhavzandamba Khutagt by the communists has given way in the historian Ölzibaatar to an injunction to respect it which, although argued, appeals more to the emotions than to reason).

Another problem is the dialogue between Mongolia and the West in the field of scientific research. On paper, everything seems to be in favour of exchanges and the enrichment of the debate through the confrontation of the views of specialists in Mongolian studies from all over the world. Indeed, there are countless conferences, congresses and other “international” gatherings organised in Mongolia, as well as partnerships and cooperation agreements signed with foreign research institutes and organisations. There are many specialists in Mongolian studies throughout the world and in some countries they have productive and powerful research centres. But what do we see in practice? Although research in Mongolia is prolific, it is almost exclusively written and communicated in Mongolian, with a very hesitant command of English as far as I can tell. However, even though there are many Mongolian speakers among all the researchers interested in the study of the country and the region, how many actually take the trouble to read and comment on the work of their Mongolian colleagues when it is written in that language? The question is not rhetorical, it is a genuine question on our part, but the challenge is less to answer it than to advocate for the use of these sources, for their discussion and for a truly constructive critique. Experience in the field suggests that such interaction, which would be mutually beneficial, is largely lacking. A lecture on “post-modernism” given by former president Enkhbayar at the Academy of Sciences this spring revealed that notions such as “post-modernism” or even “modernism” were almost novelty for most Mongolian PhD students in literary studies, even those working on the contemporary period. There is a pressing demand for clarification of the concepts and theories developed in the West.

These questions emerging from the research context seemed to me to have a place in a conclusion. I can now return to their implications for the work itself, for its results and for the perspectives it could open up. The results can be summarised as follows:

Mongolian historical fiction of the socialist twentieth century constitutes an abundant reservoir of material to both ethnology and history.

⁴²⁰ Ibidem.

The literature of the period makes up, albeit only partially, for the poverty of sources and documentation that Bawden mentioned. As we have tried to show through examples, the art of literature made it possible to circumvent censorship with varying degrees of success.

However, the exploitation of these resources requires precautions. In particular, it is essential to compare them with the other materials available and with the works that their analysis has produced. From this point of view, collaboration with Mongol researchers, historians, ethnologists, archaeologists, linguists, and specialists in literary studies can only be beneficial, especially if it favours the confrontation of the results of their analyses with works on similar or related questions. One of the major lessons that can be drawn from this doctoral research is that it allowed us to measure the extent of the work that can be carried out on the basis of these sources, and to note the existence of numerous tools that have yet to be appropriated, as the time allotted has only permitted to clear the way for this vast work.

The aim of this research was to question the relationship of Mongolians to their history and representation of the self. The corpus of texts constituted for this purpose invited us to approach the problem through the prism of “patriotism”, which itself points to the great question of “nationalism” and of its forms of expression. We saw at the very beginning of the analysis that “Mongolianness” was a strategic, political and social issue that went far beyond its borders. The appropriation of certain traits attributed to the Mongols in the Chinese process of identity construction, as we have seen with Bulan, inevitably has knock-on effects, with perhaps a tensing up on some of these traits insofar as the attraction they arouse in the neighbour sets in motion the mechanism of mimetic desire theorised in particular by René Girard. We are talking here about closeness to nature, virility, a “barbarian” side which, by a reversal of stereotypes, can be valued today within certain limits. As Billé has shown, contemporary Mongolian society has a notable adherence to these identity traits, which it claims as its own, with the constraints that this can generate for those whom they tend to exclude or marginalise.

If the image of the virile, untameable, savage Mongolian – and why not somewhat resistant to culture, at a time when science in the West is viewed with suspicion or even anguish for the excesses to which it may have led⁴²¹ – this image, then, in the twenty-first century, is generally viewed with sympathy, admiration or pride, depending on whether one places himself on the side of the representation of the “other”, or on the side of the representation of the self.

In 1996 the ethnologist Sergio Dalla Bernardina proposed a pioneering work on the use of the Girardian model of mimetic desire, applied to a situation comparable to the one we are observing.⁴²² He showed in particular how the Corsicans had invented an identity of hunters inherited from their ancestors, in contradiction with what emerged from the archive material, which showed rather a contempt for hunting on the part of a peasant society proud of having been able to distance itself from nature and the “savage”. He interpreted it as the appropriation by those concerned of values imported by foreign

⁴²¹ I would refer on this theme to the astonishing work by the French philosopher Michel Henri: *La Barbarie*, Paris, Grasset, 1987.

⁴²² “Pas légal mais presque. Autochtonie et droit de chasse dans le discours sur le braconnage en Haute-Corse”, in *La chasse en Corse*, Ajaccio, P.N.R.C, 1996

travellers and tourists, a source of both admiration and jealousy. The “mediators of prestige” or “mediators of desire” make something desirable because of the value they attribute to it. Our reflection has led us to adopt a similar approach. Twentieth-century Mongolian literature allows us to question the desirability of those attributes of virility, ruggedness and closeness to the savage that are attributed to the Mongols and that a significant proportion of them consider as their own.

Vigilance is still required when we propose to study these works with the ambition of seeing in them an image of the mentalities of an era. Even though the multiplicity of characters and the diversity of their situations seem to reveal the way of seeing the world of simple herdsmen, *khamzhлага*, soldiers – common people, to summarise – we must never forget that the person holding the pen belongs to an intellectual elite that is much more informed than the populations they are supposed to describe. Can we therefore consider that the old Batbayar is representative of the milieu to which he belongs when he exchanges with the Russian scholar met on the ruins of Khar Balgas and answers with finesse, albeit in a humble posture, the questions put to him by the famous linguist concerning the peoples who had founded the city that was there? Inevitably, Rinchen must have projected onto Batbayar and Nasanbat his own desires, his own curiosity and his thirst for knowledge. In the same way, Bat’s willingness and energy to establish and advance a school system open to the children of the people bears the imprint of Lodoidamba’s struggle, at another time, to develop a performing arts and film industry that would put the country on a par with other nations of the world in this area.

With these limits in mind, everything in this research suggests that the model of savage virility that tends to be associated with the representations that Mongols make of themselves as much as others make of them needs to be put into perspective and broadly qualified. The problem posed by this stereotype and the exaltation of “nomadism” (we are still talking about representations here, hence the inverted commas) tends to obscure a whole part of the Mongolian identity that has crossed over the centuries while evolving: their relationship to art, to oral and written literature, and to knowledge in general. As history shows, this part of their identity and culture has often been minimised, questioned on the grounds that it was made up of borrowings – but what culture is not constructed in interaction with others? – denied or destroyed, or destroyed in order to be better denied, with the consequence of a paradoxical mixture of pride and self-denigration. These observations invite me to draw parallels with the Breton experience, which presents this same ambivalence, again with great importance attached to the literary tradition. This opens up perspectives for a comparative study focusing on literature and its history in these two cultural spaces.

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Annex

Хүрээний амбасын яамнаа өдөр ирэх тутам Бээжийнгээс улам урагшгүй мэдээ ирэх болов.

Эзэрхэг манж амбан сайд, Ар Монголыг дарлан захирах ёстой, энэрэн тохинуулах бодлого явуулбал, халхчууд толгой дээр гарахад хүрнэ гэж урьд бодож байсан хүн байжээ. Гэтэл Их Дайчин улсын нэр алдар өдөр ирэх тутам Монголчуудын дунд буурч, Их Хүрээнээ суух зарлигийн сайд, үхсэн буурын толгойноос амьд ат айдаг гэгчийн үлгэрээр, гагцхүү, ихэмсгийг үзүүлж, дэмий л хоосон сүр бадруулахаас өөр чадалгүй болсон цаг байжээ.

Хүрээнд суулгасан манжийн дарангуй цэргийн, цэрэг дарагч амбас сайдаас Монголчуудын хорыг битгий малтаад бай, хүн амьтныг битгий дэмий дарлаж, олны анал алдагдуул гэж эчнээгээд чандлан тушаасан учир, Хүрээний зах зээлийн газар урьдын адил нь сүр бадруулж, цээжээ түрэн явах боловч, рьдын адил хөдлөх бүр хүн амьтныг занчих зодохыг хэдий нь байжээ.

Хүнтэй үг хэлэлцэхдээ манж үг хутгач хэлэлцдэгээ нэг их эрдэм болгн гайхуулж байсан зусарч монгол ноёд түшмэд, манж сайд надаас тийм юм асууж, би тийм үг айлгав гэж амбаны ганц нэг ялимгүй үг, санамсаргүй асуусныг хэдэн долоо хоног гайхуулан ярьж байдгаа байж харин, Монгол улс, Монголын ард олон гэж ярих болж, урьдын сайн буян ерөөлөөр бид богд гэгээний шавь боол болж төрсөн хувьтай улс гэж, богдыг амнаас ховхлохгүй дурдан хэлэлцэх болж билээ. Т Тэгээд зарим нэгэн нь цаг хааш болохыг болзошгүй хэрэг, ер, эвэртэнд сүүлтэнд нүүртэй талтай байх нь дээр гэж бусад ноёд түшмэдийн хэлэлцсэн үгийг оригдуулалгүй, амбасын яамны манж галдаа нараар уламжлан, амбан сайдын сонорт толилуулдаг байжээ.

Гэвч, тэмээ хариулдаг хүн буурынхаа занг андахгүй гэгч хуучны цэцэн үгээр, тэрхүү Монголчуудыг хардаж байсан манж сайдын чих тавин сонсох үг гарч болзошгүй гээд, ноёд, амь насандаа осолтой үгийг дэмий л задруулахгүй, ер, юм хэлэлцэвч, дотно хүнтэй хэлэлцэн, өөр зуураа бас болгоомжилдог байжээ.

Хятадаас салж тусгаарлах бодлоготой байсан ноёд хаад, манж нарын сүр хүчний бууруулж байсан Хятадын бошгыг халах намын урагштайд баярлавч, нөгөөтэйгүүр бас ардын эрхт ёс суртлаас нь хиртхийн эмээж билээ. түмэн газрын уртцагаан хэрмийн цаанаас тийм аюул гарч ирэхийн сэдэв цухуйхад, Чингисийн угсааны язгууртан ноёд хаад, байгуулагдаагүй төрийн ширээнд сууна гэж булаалдан маргахаа байж, харилцан найр бавихаас өөр аргагүй болоод, Дундад улсад Бүгд Найрамдах засаг явуулах хөдөлгөөн өрнөхөд айн ширвээдэж, Монгол улсын хаан ширээнд их хүрээний Жавзандамба хутагтын 8 дугаар дүрийг өргөн залахаар үг санал нийлжээ. Тэр нь угаас төвд хүн бөгөөд анхдугаар дүрийн Өндөр гэгээн гэгчийг Халхын хаадын ахмад Очрай Бат, Түшээт хааны гэрт төрсөн учир, Чингисийн угсаатай гэж үздэг байжээ.

Ар монголын сурвалжит ноёд хаад, босгон байгуулах төрийн эзэн хаанд хэнийг өргөмлөх вэ гэдэг, тэдний их чухал болгож байсан зүйлийг ингэж нэгэн тийш таслан тогтоод хоёрдугаар Екатерин хуанхүүгийн үеэс эхлэн, Цагаан дар эхийн хувилгаан гэж лам арын үзэж байсан оросын цагаан хааны зүг, умар тийш хандаж, хятадын түмэн газрын уртцагаан хэрмийн цаанаас Бүгд Найрамдах засгийн хий үзэгдэн

сүрдүүлэн босож байгаагаас бидний үе улиран залгамжилсан эрх ямбыг, гагцхүү, Оросын баатар цагаан хаан хамгаалан чадна гэж горьдож билээ.

Оросын баатар цагаан хааны догшин сүлд хоёр толгойт гарид шувууны дүртэй бөгөөд манж хятадын эрэхэг төрийн лууг жадалж байгаа баатар эрийн хөрөгтэй толийг элгэндээ зүүсэн байдаг нь эрхбиш учиртай гэж феодалууд боддог байжээ.

Дундад улсад болж байгаа явдлыг үзвэл, манж ханы засгийн эрх баригчид, бошгыг халах хөдөлгөөний хүчийг хэдийгээр уравсан хулгай гэж өнгөндөө тоомсорлохгүй байгаа хэвээр боловч, чухамдаа түүний өөдөөс хэрхэвч эсэргүүцэж хүч хүрэхгүй байдал илэрхий болжээ. Бас, Монголын ард түмэн, манж хятад түшмэл цэгийн дур зориг мэдэн дарлаж, мөн мөнгө хүүлэх шунахай худалдаачны мөлжих нь тэсхүеэ бэрх болж, сүүлийн хэдэн жил албан татварыг гувчин татах нь нэн нэмэгдсэн учир, улам ч тачьядан хорсож байгаа энэ бүх байдлыг үзээд, манж амбаныг хөөн зайлуулж, Монгол улсыг Хятадаас тусгаарлан салгах гэж сэм үг нийлж байсан ноёд зүрх оржээ.

Монголыг Манж дайчин улсаас салж, өөрсдөө засах болтугай гэдэг санаа өвөрлөгчдийн дотроос богд гэгээнд учрыг мэдэгдэж, монгол улсын тусгаарлан тогтох явдлыг удирдах төв болж ар монголын дөрвөн засаг, нэгэн үлэмжхэн нөлөө бүхий лам нэгдсэн нь Орос улсыг өмөг түшиг болгоно гэж манж хятадад маш дургүй Түшээт хан аймнийн жанжин Ханд ван, Их Хүрээний Жавзандамба хутагтын Их Шавийн да лам Цэрэнчимэд, үүний урьд Ханд вангийн хамт сэм Санктпетербург хот ороод ирсэн хүн бөгөөд оросын гараар могой бариулах гэж боддог хүн ажээ. Бусад гурвыг өгүүлбэл, Хүрээний Жавзандамба хутагт мандвал миний бие мөн мандана гэж боддог, богдын архины нөхөр гэж олны хэлэлцдэг Намсрай ван, мөн Хан уулын чуулганы дарга Чагдаржав ван, Цэцэн хан аймнийн жанжин Далай ван Гөмбосүрэн, энэ таван хүн нийлж, ерөнхийлөн шийтгэх газрыг байгуулан эхэлжээ. Манжийн Хэвт Ёсны гурайдугаар он, арван сарын шинийн есөнд, эл монголын төрийг босгох явдлыг ерөнхийлөн шийтгэх газрын таван эрхэм гишүүн сэм нийлж, хүрээнээс манж амбанг хэрхэн хөөж зайлуулахыг хэлэлцжээ.

Чийрэг зузаан биетэй Ханд ван, гансаа үнэсний модон саванд тогшоод, луувангийн хэлбэртэй улаан лааны сүүмэлзсэн гэрэлд нөхдийн зүг харж өөрин үг чагнах мэт, нам талбиун дуугаар өгүүллүүн:

– Сүс ихэт Жамба тойн гуайгаар уламжилж 423 бидний Сандоо амбанд сэм мэдэгдсэн бичиг, одоохон дээр, түүний хэлмэгдүүлсэн шинж мэдэгдэхгүй ажээ.

Амбаныг үзвэл, ер айн ширвээдэж, Хүрээнээс зайлах санаахгүй. Үүнд бид, бас арга хэрэглэж, маргааш өглөө дөрвөн аймгийн бүх засаг ноёдын нэр хамтлаж бичиг явуулан, тус дөрвөн аймгаас Бээжин одуулж, хааны биеийг самуун тэрслүү этгээдээс хамгаалах дөрвөн мянган цэрэгт хэрэглэх хэрэглэл зэвсэг яаравлан олгоно уу? Гэж нэг сүрдүүлье. Амбан, бидэнд ийм их цэрэг байна гэж айг гэхэд, д лам, сайхан үнэртэй агар зандан эрхээ татаж,

– Засаг ноёдын өмнөөс төлөөлөх хүнээр амбанд төр захидлыг бариулж, хариуг гурван цагийн дотор өг гэж хугацаа тавивал зохино гэв.

– Тэгээд, тэр хугацаанд хариу эс өгвөл, бидэнд амбаныг үлдэн хөөх шалтгаан бий болно. Тр цагт бид, Богдын зарлигаар аливаа хэргийг ерөнхийлөн шийтгэх түр

⁴²³ Үнэн хэрэг (True fact) note by the Author

засгийн газар болж, эрхийг баривал зохино. Эс тэгвэл, ард олон гар хөдөлж, самуун үүсгэвэл, удирдахын оронд бид, харин, сүүл барьж хоцроход хүрч болзошгүй гэж Ханд ванг хэлтэл, Намсрай ван архи ханхлан,

– Бидний чухам хэн маань, Сандоод очдог билээ? Гэв.

– Да лам бид хор, энэ удаа хэрхэвч очиж болохгүй, Амбан бид хоёрыг Санктетербург хот орсон гэж заргалдах гээд, чуулганы газар тулгах баримтгүй тул бид хоёрыг дотроо их л хорсон занажээ гэхэд нь Намсрай ван яаран тосож аваад,

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