BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Tsogt-Ochirin Lookhuuz (1923–)

Early Life and Schooling

Tsogt-Ochir Lookhuuz is the quintessential Mongolian pragmatist. As an official in the Gov-Altai aimag (or province) and Director of the State Farms of Mongolia, he focused on results. Although he had studied and then taught at Communist Party Schools and was well informed about Marxism-Leninism, he did not believe in rigid implementation of ideology and repeatedly scorned ideologues who failed to examine real conditions before devising policy. He argued that practical considerations, rather than slavish adherence to Marxism-Leninism, ought to be paramount in economic decision-making. His oral interview is replete with criticisms of indolent, dictatorial, and ineffective leaders who brooked no dissent. Lookhuuz remains a contentious figure with strong opinions, not a characteristic which would endear him to colleagues and especially leaders in an authoritarian system. He was almost bound to clash with the authorities.

He was born in Gov-Altai in 1923, two years after the socialist revolution which gave rise to a new Mongolia. In 1921, following ten years of turbulence after the collapse of Qing China (1644–1911), which ruled Mongolia from 1691 on, and the ensuing failed opportunity for the Mongolians to achieve independence, patriotic Mongolians, with the assistance of the USSR, founded the world’s second socialist State. Lookhuuz had not lived in the old society and had not experienced what older leaders of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (hereafter MPRP, the socialist and only political party in the country from 1924 to 1990) had described as a Mongolia subjugated by Qing China, Chinese merchants and banks, Mongolian noblemen, and Buddhist monasteries. He had not witnessed the chaos of the period from 1911 to 1921, when disunity and avarice among the Mongolian princes and the Bogdo Gegen, the Mongolian equivalent of the Tibetan Dalai Lama, prevailed.1 White Russian forces seeking sanctuary from the Bolshevik Revolution, Chinese warlords, the mad Baron
Roman Nicolaus Ungern-Sternberg (1887–1921), and Japanese-supported forces fought over the country and contributed to instability. Because Lookhuuz had not seen, with his own eyes, the oppressive conditions prior to 1911, he did not share the older generation’s animosity toward the Mongolian nobility and the Buddhist monks.

Indeed his father had been a taij or nobleman, and his grandfather had been a lama. In interviews, he adamantly insists that his father, despite his noble status, did not own serfs. Lookhuuz has a jaundiced view of developments in the 1920s and 1930s, years before he could have personally observed conditions. His perception of that era runs counter to the official ideology that prevailed until 1990. First, he questions whether D. Sükhbaatar (1893–1923), the leader of the 1921 Revolution, died of natural causes. He implies that the demise of the national leader offered the USSR and its Comintern agents greater leverage over Mongolia. Second, he asserts that it permitted these agents to initiate purges against those whom they labeled counterrevolutionaries, many of whom had been nationalists and questioned overly close ties with the USSR, thus antagonizing Comintern agents. Lookhuuz challenges the charges made against these individuals, including the former lama D. Bodoo (1885–1922) and the former customs officials Kh. Danzan (1873–1924), and states that they were wrongly executed.

He describes in a disparaging manner the sudden policy shifts from 1928 to 1932. The MPRP had, at first, enthusiastically supported a specific policy and then would turn against it, leading to dismissals and purges. In October of 1928, the Seventh Khural (or Parliament) condemned so-called Rightists who reputedly controlled the government. It sponsored much more radical policies, starting by confiscating the property of the taijs and lamas. Shortly thereafter, it initiated a forced collectivization of the herds and sought a monopoly on foreign trade. These radical policies met considerable herder resistance. Chaos plagued the countryside, as many herdsmen slaughtered their animals rather than turning them over to collectives. The government suppressed several violent protests, led by lamas or herdsmen, but it recognized that continuance of this policy could prove disastrous. Blaming so-called Leftist Deviationists for wrong-headed policies and dismissing or jailing these officials, in 1932 the government ended the effort at collectivization.

In 1937, it initiated still another shift in policy, which led to more disruptions and violence. Part of the explanation for this shift was fear of Japan, which from its base in Manchukuo, sought greater sway over Inner