



## Interview Transcript

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**Interview Location:** Ulaanbaatar City, Mongolia

**Interviewers:** Students from School 18 of Ulaanbaatar City

**STUDENT:** Where were you in 1989 and 1990?

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**KS:** Well, the question of where was I around 1989 and 1990 is a very important question. At that time, Mongolia was undergoing a democratic revolution. But I think only considering 1989 and 1990 does not tell us everything. After 1987 and 1988, people became aware that Mongolia's existing communist system and communist structure is not positive for the country. People began to think that having a democratic system is Mongolia's right. Such changes began to enter the country. In other words, it has been in our country since 1988. At that time, there was the Soviet Union. Soviet Russia was beginning a renewal called "perestroika," in all the western socialist countries there was a wind of change spreading. In 1989, democratic processes began to spread quickly and started democratic revolution in 1990. At that time, I was in Ulaanbaatar city and I was considered to be well-educated because of my graduation in the north [Russia]. My graduation was especially well-respected because it was from Ural University, which I graduated majoring in electrical engineering. Unfortunately, I was struck with a serious illness in 1987, 1988, 1989, and was on disability support. Exactly at this time, the democratic revolution began, but I did not lie in bed at home or sit idle, but participated in the revolutions. Actually, I was among the first ones to participate in democracy. At that time, our Songinokhairkhan District was called Oktyabr district. Ulaanbaatar city had only four districts. The old building of Bayangol district was called 1<sup>st</sup> khoroo of Oktyabr district. The apartment that I am living in now is 1<sup>st</sup> khoroo of Songinokhairkhan district and there was also a 2<sup>nd</sup> khoroo before the canal. Then the current 2<sup>nd</sup> Khoroo was 1<sup>st</sup> Khoroo. At that time, I was in "group." In other words, I was disabled and had left my work. My employer told me that I could not do my work because of my poor health. Therefore, I began working as the second secretary of the Oktyabr district Disabled People's Association. I worked in 1989 and 1990. At that time, Mr. Shagdarsuren, the ex-MP [member of parliament] and owner of Nomin Electronics company, now group's owner, was working as a Secretary of Oktyabr district and we used to work as partners. There were a lot of gatherings and demonstrations and I used to go to all the demonstrations and meetings. I was also present right there during the hunger strike. But I did not have the possibility of joining the hunger strike because of my poor health. My health was very bad. I had liver cirrhosis, which required strict dietary control from me. However, I participated in all the events except in the hunger strike. During the hunger strike in our Songinokhairkhan district, which was 1<sup>st</sup> Democratic Federation period, we also established District Democratic Federation. You know some of them, but some of them I lost contact with, for example, school principal Batkhoo. I don't know where he is. There was also a person called Battsengel, I don't know whether that person is alive or not. Approximately ten of us had gathered with a loudspeaker right in front of them and talked. There were not any teachers present. Five or six people from our district had called us enemies and said we should be arrested. Democracy began from here.

**STUDENT:** How was a social situation and people's lives, at that time?

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**KS:** Well, 1989 to 1990 was a period when Mongolia had completed “building socialism” and was in the stage of entering Communism. But there was no private property and those with higher education used to earn 800 tugriks using his brain and those with middle education earned 500 tugriks but there was not anyone earning below that amount and there were no businesses. Shops used to have meat, rice, flour, and bread. Various candies costing 24 tugriks and chocolates were very rare. Different kinds of nice dresses were not there. Mongolia had mainly European, especially Russian products. At that time, however, the country had manufacturing. We used to make our own shoes, suits, sportswear, processed rawhides and sew rugs. Sadly, however, at that time there were no private properties. For instance, if I wanted to do business by buying a profitable property and doing business after graduating in Russia, it was impossible. And if someone was caught doing business, he would either go to jail or be sacked from work. As for schools, cultural places and hospitals worked well. The most important thing was we were constrained by one system, and if someone was a professional teacher he or she would do only teaching or if he or she was an electrician he or she would only do an electrician’s job and there were not any other jobs to do. There was not any need to think further than receiving a salary. We received our salary every month and in some places every 15 months. There was nothing else to think about, nothing more to wish for. The period was one in which we did not think about “I have this, or I do not have that.”

**STUDENT:** What is democracy in your opinion?

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**KS:** I think democracy is an individual person’s destiny. Democracy is first of all human freedom and individual’s responsibility; these two things constitute democracy. If we explain it further as an issue of society and economy, it is a different thing. First, a person living in a democratic society has to have private property. Similarly to having private property, people have to earn what they can or produce what they can, using their own heads, and represent all their issues. The most important issue of democracy is human rights. Before the democratic revolution of 1989 and 1990, human rights were breached. You could not own private property, do business or trade, earn a lot of money and talk to the mass media, everything was like this. You could not go abroad, at that time nobody went abroad. We had around ten ministers and only they went abroad. Going abroad was prohibited and people who wanted to go abroad were required to study their history and get tested. My grandfather was a Lama and aristocrat, for which he was shot and repressed. That is why my father was considered as an “enemy’s leftover” and as a child, I was also considered to be “enemy’s leftover”. Then after graduating from high school 2, I was the only student to get excellent mark in all classes and was considered by the Party Committee of Govi-Altai Province three or four times. I had option to go to any school of my choice and chose to go north to study at Ural University. The committee met and met and after four meetings, they allowed me to go. During the meeting, some used to say that they should allow this excellent student to go, but some said “oh, he is a son of enemies” because my grandfather was a nobleman. They talked about whether they should allow me to study in Russia or not. The society was such discriminatory society - it was a socialist, communist society. Now it is a democratic society, where human rights are an important thing. The most important thing is human rights.

**STUDENT:** What did democracy bring to you?

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**KS:** Democracy was not a great thing only to me, it gave every Mongolian freedom, gave them rights and gave them private property. When we first came, we told people that we would give livestock to herders. But briefly thereafter, people were going abroad and doing a lot of business and some even became millionaires. Communists did not like this and used to say that we were talking crazy stuff. However, democracy gave people their properties, including their apartments, rights and everything. Moreover, rights to go

abroad and live and study there etc. Therefore, I think that democracy gave all the important things to us.

**STUDENT:** What stage of democracy is the current society at?

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**KS:** Everyone has a different opinion. I think, that if someone asks me if there is democracy in Mongolia, I would say that there is democracy. Why? Because Mongolians are enjoying their rights, albeit small. There are private enterprises. And if we look at it: there is private property, there is business, which has become a permissible thing to have. But there are some things that need to be addressed. If you ask how Mongolia is doing in democracy, I would say we are unsuccessful. And I sometimes question whether this is the thing we wanted 20 years ago. Is it becoming something different? Or is it becoming a completely different, awkward thing? For instance, the most important thing in democracy is that people must know their rights and also understand their duties and responsibilities more than their rights. Rights, duties and responsibilities – these are the three main things that must be there. But, if we take a look at this period, it looks like right is higher than responsibility. Responsibility seems to be at the far bottom, or at the top, which makes it very difficult to understand. Therefore, the question of which stage of democracy we are in makes me wonder if democracy is going in a wrong direction. To say it in political terms, today only a few people have come to power in Mongolia, using democracy as a cover and using their political powers to make money. I would say that these are the exact people who have taken people hostage and made them victims. People call it differently—oligarch, the international name for such a society is an oligarchic society. This is the name of the people who came to power and did business using the state name and bought the government. They did not make money doing honest business, they are just people who made money through the state. If Mongolia is becoming such a society, it is a terrible society, I would say the most terrible society.

**STUDENT:** What was the situation of your family at that time?

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**KS:** Well, during 1987, 1988, 1989 I used to earn an 800 tugrik salary. I was an experienced worker. My wife was a teacher at secondary school. We had 4 children, who all were studying at secondary school. The youngest child was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Our home was at the north side of the 1<sup>st</sup> khoroo. As for private property, we had a ger and one house. We did not have land, but had some livestock.

**STUDENT:** What was your profession at that time?

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**KS:** Until getting on disability support on December 27, 1989, I used to work as an electrical engineer. My disability resulted from liver cirrhosis. One month after that, I was working as a Secretary of Disabled Person's Society of Oktyabr district, at which time I began to participate in the democratic struggle. Then after 1990—in 1991, 1992—Mongolia became very terrible. What was going on? I am not saying it should have been terrific, and a revolution is a bad thing. But there are people who were working or are currently working in the state and from Revolutionary Party who try to say that democracy is a bad thing and a useless thing. State institutions are full of Revolutionary Party members, so all of us cannot be doing things against them. And Democrats said all kinds of different things when they came to power, after which they gave herds to herdsman, in other words when they privatized livestock. But heads of rural government collectives or party chairpersons took most of the livestock in their names. Therefore, collectives were broken up. There was no other choice than to break up collectives, because this “terrible monster” called a collective was not giving up the livestock, after which livestock was distributed to the people and families of six. People who had worked their whole lives in a collective were left with only 22 livestock. The remaining livestock was distributed by people above, and at the same time, the shops were empty: the only thing that was sold in supermarkets was salt. This was a very difficult time when people used to get food rationing tickets, which were a awful

thing. But our northern and southern borders were opened, people were issued foreign passports. Young people used to do “suitcase business,” called “pigs” from China and I think if I had been healthy I would have started this business too. When the “pig” business began, shops began to offer wide choices. What will happen during such time to disabled persons? They literally were beginning to die out because there was no work, no medical treatment, and no food. In order to keep them alive, they needed medical treatment and special food. I established the Free Federation of Mongolian Disabled Persons on my own in May 1991 and went to the state and told them that people with bad livers should eat such food, but we do not have money. I also visited ministries and explained to them what bedridden people need, etc. I started this way and I was proud of protecting disabled person’s interests.

**STUDENT:** What do you think Mongolia would look like if it did not undergo Democracy?  
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**KS:** Let’s put it this way, I think that the chance of democracy not happening in Mongolia is almost zero. For example, dispersing and crushing the demonstrators like in Tian An Men Square [1989-1990, China] is impossible to imagine. First, Mongolian people have intellectual potential, second Mongolians had a high educational level at that time. In the 90’s, Mongolia had a very high educational; everyone was literate. And we had planned what to do if the leader of the democracy movement—Zorig or Bat-Uul and Elbegdorj or others who were on hunger strike—were arrested and sent to prison or if they were shot dead. The situation was like this: if they got harmed, we would have been harmed; if we got harmed, they would have been harmed. During that time, everyone in Mongolia except for some Revolutionary Party members was supportive of democracy. Therefore, democracy was inevitable or unavoidable, which makes the question of, “what would have happened if it did not begin in Mongolia,” irrelevant. I cannot imagine the case if it did not happen. But just for the argument sake, if it did not happen, there would have been some law governing real estate or some sort of related laws. In other words, we would have gone without private property. This democratic wave was a worldwide thing; the whole world was experiencing it, including Mongolia, and some young groups carried it out in Mongolia.

**STUDENT:** Which people helped you in participating in the democracy movement? Also, did your family members respond to this?  
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**KS:** At that time, nobody helped me in participating in the democracy movement, I participated in it on my own, despite having with poor health—ignoring my illness. I demonstrated where there were demonstrations, or any event that supported democracy. I was always there, participating in every event, and there wasn’t anyone asking me to do these things. But, I used to call as many people as possible to this cause. I told them that democracy is the right thing, the condition we were living in was wrong and that we must go another way and enjoy our freedom. If we cannot enjoy it ourselves, we must leave this wonderful thing to our future , etc. Also, I told them that we should be in contact with foreign countries, visit abroad, have our own private property and be the owners of our livestock, which persuaded people to follow us. There were a lot of people who opposed these ideas. But, my family members used to support me. My relatives and brothers and sisters who were in the countryside all supported me. They all supported a democratic revolution. However, there were a lot of incidents where, for example, my neighbors or classmates opposed it, and there were even cases of me being chased out and them throwing stones at me.

**STUDENT:** Can you tell me about the people who were called “golden martins of democracy” at that time?  
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KS: I said before that by 1987 to 1988, the wind of democracy had already arrived in Mongolia. But educated young people who lived at that time received it with great understanding. Here and there, clubs appeared. They used to meet secretly in some place and talk: "let's do this in such a way," "this way is right," and "this way is wrong," so on, which made up people's minds. I knew all of them, including Zorig, who has passed away since; current President Elbegdorj; Bat-Uul; "Maliish" Enkhtuvshin. Also, there was Dariin Sukhbaatar, who played a leading role in organizing people and participating in negotiations with the communist structure of that time. I would say, yes, they are "golden martins of democracy." But Mongolian people in general are "golden martins of democracy" more than them, because they also supported the democracy movement. For instance, there was an old woman in our 1<sup>st</sup> Khoroo who used to herd cattle. Instead of staying at home, she came to the demonstrations with her walking stick and was shouting there. Let's say that these 13 people have a million and three hundred thousand people behind them. If there was not anyone backing them, these 13 would have been destroyed. Therefore, I consider the Mongolian people who lived in '87-'90, who participated actively in every event of the democracy movement, as well as undertook it and bore all the harshness of it, by all means to be true "martins of democracy." Bat-Uul could not have done anything without them, he would have been sent to jail. The same is true with Elbegdorj, who would have disappeared. The Mongolian people created a condition in which they could not have been arrested. People who were backing them are really "golden martins of democracy". The most important thing is we cannot forget these people, and we should be caring for them. I have many friends who I knew in 1989, 1990 democratic change period, but sadly, people who participated in the hunger strike at Sukhbaatar square or those who brought them food and helped them or those who participated in gatherings and demonstrations are wearing the same clothes they used to wear at that time. Isn't it sad? A wrestling competition was organized during the recent 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of democracy at the Wrestling Palace, during which I met with my former acquaintances who participated in the democratic revolution and there were people who looked really poor, or those who wore really bad clothes. Therefore, I think that, even though their great democracy is still in place, we have left out those "golden martins," ignored them and left them without anything. This is the most important thing. Many of the participants have now passed away, many have become alcoholics and "drowned" in alcohol or some even became victimized. Democracy is a democratic revolution. You could be asking whether it is democracy or just an ordinary thing and get confused. This revolution was a huge revolution. The 90s democratic revolution was a big "bloodless revolution," therefore it is admired in the world and known as a bloodless revolution, which is a thing to be very proud of. This revolution had big support from the Mongolian people and it is a revolution to be proud of. Even without blood, it was still a revolution. Some people say it was not a revolution because it was bloodless, but some say it was a revolution. I also argue with them and say that because it changed our society—it was a revolution.

**STUDENT:** How many people participated in the hunger strike and how many days did it last?

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**KS:** The hunger strike took place not only in Sukhbaatar square, it happened in Khuvsgul and Khovd provinces. I was even with Battengel, who was running around and shouting, claiming that we would announce a hunger strike at our 1<sup>st</sup> Khoroo. I don't know generally how many people participated in the hunger strike. Some of the 10 people who participated in hunger strike got ill. At that time, no one knew how many people are going on hunger strike, if it was announced that there would be a hunger strike. Doctors did not come to check how people's health was. Basically, it was a primitive time, when doctors did not check if dozens of people went on hunger strike and tell people, "you can," or "you cannot." Moreover, there was no media. At that time, the Party was closed, we had only one television and only 2-3 journalists. The hunger strike did not last long because Bat-Uul,

Elbegdorj and Zorig made an agreement that solved the problem. Secondly, there was a person called J.Batmunkh, who was a leader during the communist time. Because of him, the change in the country went on smoothly. The change was a truly wonderful, nice thing. J.Batmunkh was really a nice person. If there had been some other bad person, there would have been blood on the street. There was also once or twice change of democracy being delayed by some period. Let me tell you what really happened there. There was a tactic in planning to crush the demonstration by soldiers and weapons. From this side, tanks, on the other side, artillery. Afterward, encircling soldiers would attack and remove the demonstrators from the face of the earth, etc. Five or six members of the Politburo had such an idea and Batmunkh had a different idea. During that time, my friend was a policeman. He used to warn me about what was going on around Sukhbaatar square. Rulers had called key people from Darkhan and Erdenet cities and formed a battalion; in short, everything was organized. I knew about what was going on. In other words, we had been in contact. Democracy began in 1990, but there was a chance of it being delayed until '91, '92, '93, '94, '95, and it becoming bloody. Therefore, J.Batmunkh was a very good and clever person. He did not listen any of the nine members of the Politburo, and made his own decision to sack the Politburo and announced his resignation from his post, secretary of the party, after which the hunger strike ended.

**STUDENT:** Would you name honors and medals you received during the democracy movement?

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**KS:** During the democratic revolution there were no serious medals and honors. Democracy, though, is a very interesting subject if we talk about what went into it, and a lot happened during the past 20 years. Democracy consists of a lot of different changes and democracy is a pluralism of different opinions: many parties, many federations, etc. When the Democratic Party formed on the 18<sup>th</sup>—the same day National Progressive Union, Social Democratic Party was also formed—when Social Democratic party was formed I became its member. I have three medals of honor: a Golden Star medal from the Social Democratic Party, a Freedom medal from the Democratic party as well as this Medal of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Democracy. I don't beg the State for any medals and think I have received what I had to get from Democracy.

**STUDENT:** Did you lose certain things because you participated in the democracy movement?

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**KS:** Yes I did, I had poor health and I was disabled. After establishing democracy, I wanted to help disabled people and formed the National Free Federation of Disabled Persons, which I ran for some time. I did not get any salary. This meant first, I was working for the cause of people, and second, I was enjoying my rights. I overcame a time of bad treatment, where they told me I could not work because I had bad health and gave me a little money and left me to die with it. It was nice to work for the other people's rights and my rights using my own head. My work consisted of working without a salary for the people and of contacting abroad. First of all, I had contact with the American Labor party of that time, now it is called an institute. I contacted them and brought people and we talked about a project. I also made contacts with Japanese. Eventually, our organization became not only of disabled person's—it was created as a Free Trade Union working on a national stage in Mongolia. At that time, Mongolia was a country where no one was protecting the interests of employees. Working people were sacked from their employment at any and their salaries were being paid whenever the employers wanted. Therefore, the Free Trade Union was established throughout Mongolia and began protecting the interests of working people in a true sense. Then it began making tripartite Agreements consisting of government, employers and trade unions. Also, there were minor losses. Revolutionary party members treated me badly because they used to consider me as an irritating person, talking about Democracy etc. Also people who were fighting for democracy were left empty handed in general. I should not be wearing the same clothes that I wore 20 years ago, because we

established a true democracy and supported democracy. The “pioneer hawks” of democracy were also victims and there was a time where I considered giving up. Now when I go to my Khoroo [Precinct] all their staff are from the Revolutionary Party. When I go to the district, there are Revolutionary party chairmen there, too. They don’t look or listen to me and my requests usually fail. Now it is all the same; if we say that we support the Democratic Party, our business will never be successful. Maybe there are two or three people whom I know that are doing well. I would say that I made the right choice and always supported democracy. Democracy gave something to the people and my children will be left with it.

**STUDENT:** Do you have any other information about democracy?

00:40:27

**KS:** What else is there to say about democracy? Democracy looks nice from the surface in Mongolia and our country looks democratic. But inside our country, we did not fully understand democracy. What is a true democracy? Democracy is real when people have truly understood what a democracy is. But there are some people today who use democracy to steal something. This is a problematic question. Therefore, the best thing is to take an example from foreign countries in how we should develop our own country. Today, the four of you recording this conversation is a great thing. Sometimes, when I want to give an interview to magazines or journals, I cannot. It is hopeless. Especially when I want to talk about how democracy is going, the influence of democracy, and how the state is doing. I do not have opportunity to talk about these three things. Despite the fact that there are a lot of TV shows and correspondents, there is no possibility. The only way to go on TV is to pay them money. One station asks 140,000 to 250,000 tugriks per minute for an interview. Where would I get that much money? I don’t have it. We don’t have such rights—this is not a democracy. They first read our interview, and they only publish it if they like it. They might even pay me if I have praised them. When we say that democracy is not going right, the state is not doing right or this or that is not right, they do not get interviews from us. Everywhere it is the same, therefore it is not democracy. And the most important thing is Mongolia’s real owners are not some leaders, but the real people of our country. You are the people who should be engaging in democracy and competing in elections to get elected from, let’s say from 1<sup>st</sup> Khoroo or 2<sup>nd</sup> Khoroo. Should we be looking at such opportunities? But there is not such opportunity. In 20 years, Songinokhairkhan district has not gotten a Member of Parliament who actually lived in Songinokhairkhan district. They all came from other districts or places. We should be choosing, electing, and sending up someone from among those who live in our own 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> Khoroo and those who are certain to keep in contact with us and work for us and for the country. But things do not go this way. But, of course, that is life and democracy will have its mistakes. From among all the things, we have our rights and we have private property. This is also a great thing. We should also be keeping the great heritage of Mongolia—the religion, the national deal. Are they Mongolian things? Yes, they are Mongolian. What are these paintings that have not been registered into world heritage? If a Mongolian has painted them it is a Mongolian thing and we should show them as such. We should also register the mineral wealth of Oyu Tolgoi and Tavan Tolgoi to the world heritage, if French coal was registered into world heritage. This is one of the most valuable things of the democracy. I have a thing to say to you: please live for your motherland and dedicate your lie to Mongolia. There is democracy in Mongolia today, but it is not perfect, and young and old alike but work to make it more developed and perfect.

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**STUDENT:** Well thank you for giving us information about democracy.

**KS:** Thank you.