The moral force of labor in Mongolia's Late-stalinist literature

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> The Mongolian people expect to see in art and culture the true situation in this new era, and to feel the greatest satisfaction. They want literature and art, in the broadest possible terms, to express the ideology and culture which they so value. As Comrade Zhdanov has said, "Our people's spiritual wealth is no less important than their material wealth." In addition to the important changes which have altered the face of our nation, we have also continued to change ourselves, and it is important that literature portrays these new qualities of our people. Literature should show our people not only as they are today, but also how they will be tomorrow, thus illuminating their path ahead. This is the honorable role of Mongolian writers. Writers are not dragged along by what might happen, but rather they lead the people, and show them the path of progress.
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> S.Dashdendev (Dashdendev, 1949, 16-17)[1]

1. Stalin's famous line, that writers are the "engineers of human souls",[2] reveals the central role played by literature in the development of socialism and, in particular, of socialist realism. To engineer the human soul, we may assume, is a kind of alchemy, a process related to what we today frame as "social engineering," albeit a process which touches the heart through its creativity as much as it touches the head through its practical logic. The quotation above, from an essay on revolutionary literature by the Mongolian writer S.Dashdendev (1912-1997), builds on Stalin's aphorism to suggest that an explicit presentation of what is expected of socialism *as though it was already real* could effect a transformation of individuals such that socialism might thereby become real. The "honorable role" described by Dashdendev of "lead[ing] the people, and show[ing] them the path of progress" implies an ideal vision, a truthfulness and purity of spirit which, in the words of Evgeny Dobrenko was "a labor deprived of all material motives." (Dobrenko, 2007, 168) Yet this idealism brought to the act of labor the physical act of (industrial, economic, artistic) creation, a sense that the laborer performing the labor was moral and therefore to be emulated. In this way, the description of labor and, more importantly, of the character of those who are shown to be most committed to their labor and to their contribution to socialism, became central to Mongolia's program for industrial development in the years between the end of the Great patriotic War in 1945 and the death of Josef Stalin in 1953. This period was primarily defined by the first five-year-plan (1948-1952)[3], reflected in the literary community's own five-year-plan, conceived by

[1] The quotation from Zhdanov's 1947 essay "Report on the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*" is found in Zhdanov, 2022, 40-41.

[2] In fact, Stalin acknowledged that this statement - "*pisateli - inzheneri chelovicheskikh dush*" - had been made by the Soviet novelist Yuri Karlovich Olesha (1899-1960).

[3] *History of the Mongolian People's Republic*, p.391. It should, though, be pointed out that there had already been a failed attempt at a five-year-plan which had started in 1931, in direct response to the first Soviet five-year plan (1928-1932). (See Bawden, 1989, 304)

the Party to complement the state's economic, industrial, and political aims, and outlined by L.Dügersüren in his speech to the first Congress of Mongolian Writers the previous April (Wickhamsmith, 2020, 307-309) . It was in response to these developments that Dashdendev wrote his essay, which was the lead article in the autumn 1949 edition of *Tsog*, arguably Mongolia's most influential literary publication at that time.

By the early 1940s, with the national effort to support the Soviet Union in the war, one of the primary focuses of the Mongolian government had been to encourage the population to work, not for their individual benefit, as had been the practise for centuries among the nomadic herders who made up the large majority, but for the benefit of the nation as a whole. The importance of productivity, both in the countryside and in Ulaanbaatar and other local centers, meant that no longer was the Soviet ideal of the heroic laborer for Mongolians merely an ideal, but rather an explicit and deliberate aim to which they were expected to devote themselves wholeheartedly and with patriotic enthusiasm. This push led also to the Labor Law of 1941, which stipulated limits on working hours, workers' holidays and salaries, and other measures to protect workers and increase productivity (Natsagdorj, 1986, 203), and it was in this atmosphere that writers began to consider how they might enhance the people's understanding of socialist labor while framing their own literary contribution in that same light.

In her analysis of Stalinist writing in the Soviet Union, Katerina Clark says that during the five-year-plans, "the blueprint for society was of a host of little men performing little, everyday tasks, but united as brothers to usher in the new day with their modest efforts. No man could be marked as being superior to any other except by virtue of superior service, and even that had to be integrated into the collective effort." (Clark, 1997, 183) The context of labor in Mongolia, as I have already indicated, was somewhat different, but nonetheless the way in which labor was defined closely resembled the Soviet system, with "Hero of Labor" (*hödölmöriin baatar*) medals, Stakhanovite shock-workers (called by the Russian term *udarnik*) and, albeit two decades in arrears, a system of five-year plans and their associated quotas and their inevitable success.

Mongolia's response to socialist realism had coincided with the start of this turn towards collective, rather than individual, effort. At this point, moreover, the literary community was still recovering from the effects of the Great Repression (September 1937-April 1939), during which many of the leading writers - among them S.Buyannemeh (1902-1937), M.Yadamsüren (1904-1937), Sh.Ayuush (1903-1938), and Sh.Sodnomdorj (1912-1938) - had been arrested and executed[4], and now writers were seeking new and creative ways of responding to Mongolia's closer economic and ideological relationship with the Soviet Union. In Soviet society, the organic relationship between socialist realism and labor policy was such that the cultural value of labor was defined by how it was processed through the gradually developing mythopoesis of

[4] D.Natsagdorj (1906-1937), notably, had neither been prosecuted nor executed, and this seems to have been the primary reason for his having been named in 1956 (the fiftieth anniversary of his birth) as "father of modern Mongolian literature". In fact, he had become disillusioned by the revolution and by the Party during the early 1930s and for this reason had been pursued by the government. He died of a heart attack, probably caused as much by alcohol as by stress, in July 1937.

"realism" (Dobrenko, 2007, 165-167). What was "realist" - and thereby "real" - depended upon the ideology of the times; yet for Mongolia, as it turned towards its first five-year plan at the end of the 1940s, the twin economic focuses on industry and livestock herding called for clear and specific definitions of "realism" and indications as to how Mongolians were to respond to, and so enhance, this imputed reality. In addition, the largely apolitical idea of "work" (*ajil*) - generally herding work carried out either by and for one's own family or as part of a small group (*ail*) - became politicised "labor" (*hödölmör*), imbued with Soviet ideological rhetoric, and thereby both a politically privileged praxis and a potential source, not so much of survival or starvation, depending upon its success, but rather of social favor or disfavor.

At the first Mongolian Writers' Congress in April 1948, which coincided approximately with the start of the first five-year plan[5], a clear emphasis was given to the previous year's directive on literature from the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. In this directive, '"our people's heroic labor" is described as "strengthen[ing] our nation, the growth of our people's revolutionary understanding, [and] our new education and new sense of morality" (*Mongolyn zohilochdyn anhdugaar ih hural*, 1948, 27). That "morality" is translated by the Russian word *moral'* reveals the influence of Soviet ideology, but also implies that this influence was still, and gradually, being assimilated into Mongolian culture. In this way, we can see how this absorption of Soviet "progressive" thought, with its "new" ideas of education and morality, was placed at a premium in literary production as much as in industrial production.

That said, in the keynote speech at the Congress, delivered by L.Dügersüren,[6] there were very few specifics about how the labor to be undertaken in the Five Year Plan was to be articulated, and aside from the importance of showing labor's "heroic" quality, no clear explication of what this might actually mean was offered. There is a clue, however, in a brief critique of the poems in B.Baast's *Tolbo Nuur* (*Lake Tolbo*), which had been published the previous year. Focusing on the poem "A White Mongol Ger" (*Mongolyn Tsagaan Ger*)[7], Dügersüren says, "Baast does not understand that our people have created their own fine lives through faithful labor, nor that their labor is built and established rather than fluid, nor that labor is for society rather than for money, and he fails to grasp how heroic human ability forms the deep roots of our people's lives."[8] This reveals mainly an uncertain idealism on the part of the Party, while the quality of self-reliance, upon which Mongolian herders had always depended out of necessity, had become, in response to the Soviet concept of the labor of "the masses", a labor which is not only to be taken for granted as an "established" part of human life, but also, somewhat contradictorily, one "created" by the people. Given that this constituted the Party's primary guidance to writers about how they

[5] The five-year plan was formally introduced by the Council of Ministers of the MPRP on December 27th, 1947, with more specific regulations issued by the Council of Ministers and the MPRP Central Committee on January 16th, 1948 (Gruber, [1973], 389).

[6] The historian L.Dügersüren was a last-minute substitute for B.Shirendev, who was a member of the Party's Central Committee. A few days earlier, Shirendev had been involved in a brawl, and so it had been decided that someone else should deliver the speech. (D.Tsedev, personal communication).

[7] Baast 1947, pp.36-38.

[8] *Mongolyn zohiolchdyn anhdugaar ih hural*, 1948, pp.16-17

should treat both the practise and the ideology of labor, such vague language suggests that little time had actually been given to the subject, and that, far from having a clear proposal for how to present whatever directives might have been received from Moscow (whether from the Soviet Party directly or by way of the Soviet Writers' Union), those who had composed Dügersüren's speech had themselves very little idea about what messages about policy and ideology were to be explored in the literature. It was, therefore, left largely to the writers themselves to develop their work in direct response as much to their individual reading of the labor literature emerging from the Soviet Union as to the specifics of the Five Year Plan.

My intention in this paper is to explore the various threads which intertwine the cultural and ideological ideas of labor in Mongolian literature in response to the influence of the Soviet model, in particular how these ideas relate to the "morality" of the new society. As a way to think more deeply about the development of socialist labor (as opposed to regular work) and of the socialist "new person" (as opposed to the regular Mongolian people who were now to embody this concept), I offer a reading of D.Tarva's 1951 novella *Damirangiinhan* (*Damiran's Family*), which is most likely the only example in Mongolian literature of long-form Stakhanovite narrative.[9] *Damirangiinhan* reflects a critical moment in Mongolian socialism's development: it was published half-way through the first five-year-plan, and just before the deaths of Choibalsan (1952) and Stalin (1953), at which point the ideological force it carried - and was thereby intended to foster - began to wane with the gradual relaxing both of narrative and thematic expectations in literature and of cultural censorship.

2. One of the first pieces of literature written in Mongolian to elevate labor beyond the practical activity of work[10] was D.Sengee's poem "*Udarnik*" ("The Shock-Workers", 1941).[11] Although the present paper focuses on prose fiction, it is worth noting that this poem uses descriptions of the physicality of labor as a way of expressing the corporeal power of the "new man" (that is, in relation to the idea of the Soviet New Man) as an indication of his moral and ideological rectitude. Indeed, the importance of shock-workers to the political as well as to the industrial sphere is clear from lines such as the following:

> When those who become visible to the sharp eyes of Choibalsan's Party,
> walk the uphill path of socialism,
> no greater strength to lead exists than that of the working class,
> and you shock-workers, guided by the Party, bring glory to the laborers.

[9] Ch.Dagvadorj confirms that this is "the work that marked the beginning of the depiction of the character of the worker in long-form literature." (Dagvadorj, 1951, 28)

[10] See Mönh, 1961, for a comprehensive overview of the portrayal of the working class in all genres of literature since the 1921 revolution.

[11] See Wickhamsmith, 2020, 306-307. Note also that the title is the Russian term for "shock-workers"; presumably there was not as yet a Mongolian term, or else Sengee wanted, in using Russian, to emphasize the ideological importance of Soviet laborers such as Andrei Stakhanov in Mongolia's developing industrial economy. See also Siegelbaum, 1988 (particularly Chapters 1 and 4) for a discussion of how the terms "shock-worker" (*udarnik*) and "Stakhanovite" (*stakhanovets*) relate to, and differ from one another, both historically and practically. We can only wonder whether Sengee, in using both terms in this poem, recognized the complex interaction of the two in Soviet society, or was simply writing a poem to record and praise labor and to encourage others to follow the example presented in the poem.

Just as Stakhanov[12] had been in the Soviet Union, so these laborers, by substantially over-fulfilling their quotas, became regarded as moral exemplars for their comrades in their loyalty to the Party and the nation, as well as helping practically to advance the development of Mongolia's socialist state.

Notwithstanding the ideological importance of pieces such as "The Shock-Workers", in which the subjects are faceless, almost robotic, state operatives, the fictionalization of labor in Mongolia during the 1940s tended to focus more on individual transformation than on group activity. Work for Mongolia's herding culture had tended to emphasize personal activity carried out for one's own immediate community rather than for the nation, but the focus now began to shift towards herding as a national economic effort, with the introduction of official recognition through the awarding of medals.

If socialist labor was to respond to socialist reality, which had been one of Gorkii's primary concerns in his initial description of Socialist Realism, there existed also a need to express the importance of that relationship, and how individual Mongolians could pool their resources and so develop their nation, within the fabric of day-to-day interactions. Since economic and social development was, at least ideologically, founded upon this relationship, there had also to be an ethics by which a meaningful engagement with the relationship became privileged, and by which failure to engage with it became correspondingly deprivileged.

Thus it was that the moral value of labor became increasingly developed and promoted in the literature published in journals and in books. As if in response to perceived archetypical reactions to the new understanding of labor, and in the hope of connecting with their readers and encouraging them to embrace this new understanding, writers developed variations on a few stock characters.

In Ts.Damdinsüren's "What Changed Soli" (*Soli solisan ni*, 1944; Ts.Damdinsüren, 1956, 206-215)[13], a young man named Bat joins the army, leaving behind his illiterate wife Soli. Over time, Bat loses touch with Soli and turns his mind to a successful herder named Hishigt, whose story is featured in a magazine article. He eventually leaves the army and goes to find Hishigt, who turns out to be Soli, transformed into a literate and successful herder, and honored by the state. In the early part of the story, Bat imagines that Soli has been unfaithful to him with the man who is teaching her to read: the moral impropriety which is associated, albeit implicitly, with illiteracy, offers a parallel to Bat's own lack of emotional fidelity towards his wife. The fact that Soli forgives Bat at the end of the story presumably adds to her own moral rectitude. Soli perhaps represents those who, while not initially convinced by the new system, came to recognize its value, and so became pro-active, successful, and respected - and also, as we see at the end of the story, sensitive and understanding of the faults of others - through their own effort.

[12] An image central to the ideology regarding labor at the time was the legendary (but ultimately fabricated) achievement in 1935 of the Russian coal-miner Aleksei Stakhanov, in mining 102 tons, so fulfilling his daily quota fourteen times over. The importance of Stakhanovite labor, of focusing not on simply fulfilling a quota but on exaggerated over fulfillment of that quota, is reflected in what would seem to be the first direct reference in a Mongolian literary text, in Sengee's "The Shock-Workers".

[13] Translated in Wickhamsmith, 2021, 65-75.

Younger people such as Bat and Soli might have been less skeptical about these changes, having been brought up in a society already focused on social and economic revolution. But there was also the older generation, who had been born during Mongolia's annexation by the Qing (which had ended in 1911) or during the subsequent autonomous rule of the Bogd Han (1911-1919). These individuals might have connected with the experienced herder Tsalmahmid, the protagonist of M.Biziya's "Moving Camp in the Winter" (*Övliin nüüdel*, 1945; *Mongolyn shildeg ögüülegüüd*, 125-128). During a severe winter snowstorm, Tsalmahnid organizes the movement of his *ail* from their encampment in Hüjirt *sum* in Bayan-Ölgii to Hag Nuur in Hovd. Although the emphasis throughout this story is on Tsalmahmid's wise and timely leadership, it also shows the importance of mutuality and cooperation, and of taking care of those in danger. This kind of journey was not uncommon among groups ravaged by winter storms, but in the context of the new society, Tsalmahmid's effort and ability mark him as an older, and more experienced, representative of socialist labor and responsible behavior, whose example herders and other older people could imitate and develop. This cultural reframing of experience as a socialist virtue is mirrored, of course, in a similar reframing of hard work: when carried out for the benefit of the group (that is, for the community, for the co-operative farm, for the nation) it becomes a moral, and even a transcendent, act, as we see in the model of Stakhanov.

As the future of socialist Mongolia, children formed a significant part of the audience for literary works, whether they were themselves reading stories or being read to. In Ts.Ulambayar's "The Morning of the First" (*Negiin öglöö*, 1948; Ulambayar, 1974, 508-510), Bidyalah and her family are portrayed as the perfect family of socialist labor. As Bidyalah awakens on the morning of September 1st, eager to go to school, her father Namsrai is driving his truck through the night, hoping to fulfill (four months early) his quota for the entire year, her mother is finishing her night shift at a factory, and her elder brother is driving a coal train to the nearby district of Nalaikh. The effort and sacrifice implied in the labor of Bidyalah's brother and parents, and her own determination to become educated, reflect Mongolia's present and future in this first, and crucial, year of the country's first five-year-plan. Their story, moreover, encourages family members to support one another, and thereby the greater family of the state, by carrying out their assigned duties to the best of their ability and, following the lead of those like Stakhanov, seeking always to increase their output.

While I have presented these stories - and, by implication, other literary works written during the late 1940s - as explicitly intended as educational, exhortatory narratives written first and foremost for ideological reasons, I would suggest that we might usefully read them with the understanding that their scope is far broader, and reflects how Mongolian society was *not* in fact focused at every turn on ideology. For they are also stories about individuals living their lives within the new society, and involved with co-creating that new society. Soli becomes a successful herder and learns how to read, Tsalmahmid protects his friends and family, and Bidyalah's family does the work it is expected to do: they are all definitely ciphers for the citizens in Mongolia's socialist society, but they are constructed and narrated as real

people doing their best in sometimes difficult situations, and enjoying whatever benefits they might find in the new world which was underway around them.

3. The importance of labor and its concomitant moral focus during the first Five-Year Plan meant that characters who were, for whatever reason, lacking in either or both regards, ended up being mocked or denigrated, whether from other characters within the story or from critics outside it, or else rendered silent by their absence. In an article on the history and meaning of Revolutionary Realism, published just prior to the first Writers Congress, P.Horloo reminded his readers that this ideology "should not ignore the perspectives regarding the negative aspects of our true situation," and points that "we should not forget that, even though the feudalistic view remains in the understanding of the laboring masses, this alone cannot illumine what is special in our contemporary lives, nor the character and quality of our generation." (Horloo, 1948, 44-45) The kind of ideological fragility among some workers which is hinted at here - a fragility that we will soon see portrayed in Tarva's narrative - was obviously something which the Party felt it necessary to address as part of the discussion about the new person from within Revolutionary Realism.

The behavior of anti-heroes in the literature of labor in the late 1940s reveals the traits which are most desired among the best revolutionary workers. The central character of Ts.Tsedenjav's "What Myadagmaa Did" (*Myadagmaagiin yavdal*, 1945; Tsedenjav, 2018, 354-364)[14] is a frivolous and lazy young woman who, having cheated on her loyal and hard-working husband, and having herself been cheated on by her new lover, returns to her husband, only for him to die as she recognizes the depth of her error. Unlike Soli/Hishigt, Myadagmaa remains unchanged until the very end, and her legacy merely her flirtations and her cruelty towards her husband. Unlike Tsalmahmid, she is irresponsible and incapable of caring for herself, let alone for others. And unlike Bidyalah's family, she has no focus and no diligence. Having placed this character at the center of what was framed as a humorous (*shog*) story, and so having it be for amusement and entertainment rather than for improvement and education, Tsedenjav came in for extensive criticism from the Party: indeed, in his speech to the Writers' Congress, L.Dügersüren uses Tsedenjav's writing to address how the perceived morality of writers is reflected in the morality of their characters:

> Instead of condemning such people, Tsedenjav seeks to justify their behavior. These kinds of people are not mere fictions in today's world, rather they closely resemble the disreputable people in Hüree [Ulaanbaatar] prior to the revolution. It makes us wonder why Tsedenjav does not see people today as having revolutionary focus and a high level of morality, but prefers to show the ugliness of people. In this kind of situation, we should preach morality, and not behavior in this way among our people. (*Mongolyn zohiolchdyn anhdugaar ih hural*, 1948, 18)[15]

[14] Note that Tsedenjav based "What Myadagmaa Did" on Anton Chekhov's 1892 story "The Grasshopper" (*Poprygunya*).

[15] Although this critique was directed at Tsedenjav's 1947 book *Shog ögüülelüüd* (*Humoprous Stories*), rather than specifically about "What Myadagmaa Did," is is clear from the wider context that the character of Myadagmaa was a primary focus of Dügersüren's comments.km

Reading this both as a response to Myadagmaa's character and in relation to the contemporaneous stories mentioned above, it would appear that while readers may have been exercised more by how much they might see their own lives (or the lives they wished for) reflected in narrative fiction, the Party wanted all characters to have "revolutionary focus" and for those who were not yet fully committed ideologically to remain unacknowledged in literary works. Transformations such that of Soli into Hishigt replicated transformations in earlier literature, with characters coming, through moments of crisis, to appreciate the benefits of the revolution, yet in the case of Myadagmaa, her ultimate recognition in the final lines of the story of the moral and ethical depths to which she has sunk is obviously not sufficient redemption for the Party to consider her a suitable model for readers.[16] The result of this of course is that other ways of understanding and living in Mongolia's revolutionary society were, when they were written at all, reduced to caricatures.

Seen from the sociopolitical context of the late 1940s, stories such as these show the beginnings of a conceptualization of the interplay between labor and morality defined by the ideas of the revolutionary and the realist, in which a driver such as Bidyalah's father fulfills his work quota many months early, or a wise and experienced herder like Tsalmahmid successfully moves his community to safety in calamitous weather. They also very explicitly show, in Soli's implied backstory and in all but the final lines of Myadagmaa's story, what the alternative looks like. While the heroes and antiheroes of these narratives are focused on doing their best with what they have been given by the Party, though, they have not yet adopted Stakhanovite principles, taking the Party's revolutionary ideas of labor and morality into their own hands and seeking for the greater good to improve upon them.

4. D.Tarva's "Damiran's Family" (*Damirangiinhan*, 1951; Tarva [1951] 2020) stands a little apart from the kind of intense labor-focused literature discussed above, which had been written during the 1940s. As a piece of long-form fiction, a novella rather than a novel, it's a looser narrative, intertwining several subplots with the primary plot about a factory-worker, Dondogmaa, who campaigns to replace her factory's inefficient furnace with a more efficient one, thereby allowing her and her coworkers to exceed their quotas. Dondogmaa's conception of labor is not so much on simply producing more and more smelted iron, as her insistence on the replacement furnace might suggest, but rather on constant improvement of quality as well as production. That there is a clear focus on quality reflects the development of the Stakhanovite vision which had taken place in the late 1940s thanks to the work of Alexander Chutkikh, a worker at the Krasnokholm Worsted Mill in Moscow. Moreover, while the fulfillment of quotas might be easy to measure quantitatively, Dondogmaa's commitment to realizing Chutkikh's vision of "top-quality teams" doing work of the highest standard indicates the significant practical and ideological shift which occurred during the late 1940s.

[16] A similar case is found in M.Yadamsüren's 1936 story "Three Girls" (*Gurvan hüühen*) (Yadamsüren, 1970, 47-75), in which young Has-Erdene finds a way out of prostitution and enters education. Perhaps the Party's real issue with Tsedenjav's story was the fact that he leaves Myadagmaa's life after her moment of transformation open to interpretation and fails thereby to define clearly for the reader a suitable trajectory for a modern revolutionary Mongolian.

The influence of Stakhanovism[17] on Mongolia's laboring class might have been gradual, yet in the first years of the Five-Year Plan, many individuals pushed themselves to emulate Stakhanov, over-fulfilling their annual quota by between 6 and 14 times. Their names are now all but lost to history - "Ts.Tsembel…and G.Puntsag-Endon, workers at the Industrial Combine…T. Kuderbergen and D.Davazhav, timberers in the Nalaikha coal-mine… T.Gelegzhamts, D.Zhamyan, and Tsedev, transport drivers, Sh.Sembreldorzh and M.Sundui, drillers in the Chonogol mine…" - yet these are workers who, like Tarva's hero Dondogmaa, "began to make a thorough study of and to apply the working methods of well-known Soviet innovators." (Gruber, 1973, 393)[18] In the early 1950s, however, the focus shifted from individual quotas, an indication of *personal* heroism and moral probity, to quotas assigned to factories and factory teams. On May 1st 1952, the workers of the Chonogol mine in Sühbaatar *aimag* launched an appeal, encouraging the nation's workers to fulfill the targets of the Five-Year Plan.

The transformation of individual shock-workers into team-players, and the impetus to focus on competition among workers specifically to enhance their team's, rather than their own, efficiency emerged from the theory of labor developed by Chutkikh. In his autobiographical account of the origin and development of his idea, Chitkikh paints a vivid picture of how what he calls "the struggle for high-grade production" was to be achieved by encouraging all workers to hold themselves to the highest standards, not only of labor but also of social responsibility.

> In the various departments and their "Red Corners" as well as in the mill yard, scores of posters and placards were posted up calling upon the staff to increase their emulatory effort for excellent quality. Snappy and concrete in content, they drew the attention of everyone. "Do you know what 1% spoilage costs the mill? 300,000 rubles" one of the placards read. "If you stop spoilage, we can produce thousands of meters extra!" read another. "Who will be the first to win the coveted title of Top-Quality Team?" asked a third. On scores of bulletin boards encased in glass Stakhanovite methods of work were explained, methods which ensured the production of only excellent quality goods. "Study and master these methods!" said the superscription. At the most conspicuous spot in the yard a huge bulletin board daily recorded the work of each team taking part in socialist emulation, and alongside of it an Honor Roll had been put up. The pay-roll commission of the Mill Committee was in charge of the whole thing. (Chutkikh, 1951, 67-68)

The importance of Chutkikh's method, and the success of his book, led to his ideas being adopted widely in the Soviet Union from the late 1940s, and in 1949, he received the Stalin Prize for his contribution to the textile industry. Reading Tarva's description of Dondogmaa, we can see that, as a good socialist worker in 1951, she spends time educating herself in socialist theory, but especially in Stakhanovite theory and its subsequent refinements. The models about whom she reads, and whom she suggests that her friend Tüvshin should also

[17] Less than three months separated Stakhanov's dramatic over-fulfillment of his quota on 31 August 1935 and the first All-Union Stakhanovite Conference, held at the Kremlin between November 14 and 17, which emphasized the central effect of Stakhanovism in the socialist reconstruction of the Soviet economy. In December, the plenum of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee explored how Stakhanovism could be incorporated into the development of the country's transport, infrastructure, and industry.

[18] Although I have retained the transliteration of these names in the original text (which is different from the system which I use), it should be easy for those familiar with Mongolian to provide their own suitable transliteration.

read, are significant: her collection certainly includes Chutkikh and Stakhanov, but also the Leningrad fitter Alexander Ponomarev and others. It is clear, then, that Chutkikh's book - and those by and about other heroes of labor - was available in Mongolia (perhaps in both Russian and Mongolian), and I think we can also assume that Tarva's intention in writing this story was in large part to promote socialist labor competition Mongolia's teams of factory workers. Dondogmaa's moral and social rectitude is reflected in her selfless labor for the Party, her determination always to improve the standard and productivity of her labor and that of her comrades, and her desire to educate herself ideologically. Even having by the end of the story achieved 600% of her quota and having been honored by Marshal Choibalsan as a leading worker (*tergüünii ajilch*), Dondogmaa still intends pushing herself to achieve 1000% of her quota.

But Dondogmaa's character and activity is made explicit only in relation to that of her colleagues at the factory. A model, after all, is useful insofar as it has a meaningful effect, and while Dondogmaa is indeed a model, Tarva presents her as an Everywoman, as unremarkable as any one of Mongolia's factory workers, save for her determination and diligence. As a model, then, perhaps her most notable success is with Damdin, who is not initially, despite his own determined effort, especially productive, but who, by the end of the story, is not only working harder and more effectively, but also educating himself ideologically. From the following conversation, we can see how Dondogmaa both encourages Damdin to have confidence in his work, and expounds the significance of focusing on fulfilling the five-year-plan:

> Damdin sighed imperceptibly.
>
> "Do you think I can actually fulfill my quota? Won't I just carry on like this? When I think about it, it seems odd. Every day, my brigade leader nearly decapitates us with his scolding, and now it's scary not only to talk with him, but even to look him in the face. I'm not someone who lasts a long time like you. I'll last a few months. In a few months, there will be very few days when the brigade leaders won't be scolding and rebuking me, saying that I'm deliberately going slow in order not to fulfill the brigade's plan. How can I deliberately go slow? My enthusiasm is completely broken. When I meet with all of you, it's really nice to talk, with no distinction between young and old. But really, what am I to do now?" And Damdin gave a sigh.
>
> "You'll get better. You'll become a good worker," said Dondogmaa seriously. "I'll help you. All our workers will help you. We'll help you so that your brigade leader's criticisms will get fewer."
>
> She went on, "All the power we expend, all the work that we undertake, and all the production from our work are power, work, and production dedicated to the improvement of our motherland. For this reason, in order that the work we undertake realise the five year plan, we all need to make an effort in our work. If we can broaden the range of our labor as much as we improve its quality, that much more will our motherland become powerful, and in that way we will strengthen and establish peace. Work hard, Damdin! Strive to realize your quota!" (Tarva, [1951] 2020, 46)

While Damdin is struggling even to reach his quota, Ochir is strenuously competing with Dondogmaa to be the most productive worker in the factory. This complicated relationship between personal pride, genuine competition, and ideological purity expands upon Vladimir

Shlapentokh's claim that "[o]ne of the principal goals of the Stakhanovite movement was the creation of a new image of Soviet workers, who, while not indifferent to material rewards, were largely motivated to work by ideological factors, by the desire to serve the cause of socialism and the motherland." (Shlapentokh, 1988, 270) In comparison with the calm and principled determination shown by Dondogmaa, her putative rival Ochir seems to want to outdo her for his own benefit rather than for "serving the cause of socialism". His deferential tone and his team's mismanagement of their time allow space in the narrative for Dondogmaa's wise counsel. Her ideological perspective leads to the purification of their competition, and their rivalry - no longer compromised by Ochir's uncertainty - leads to increased production, a classic example of the revolutionary competition (Gruber, 1973, 392-393) which became increasingly important during the first five-year-plan, and more specifically of Chutkikh's "top-quality" system.

> When Ochir went into the section, Dondogmaa was there to meet him.
> "So, Mr Ochir," she asked, "how are you?"
> "I can't catch up with you."
> "You will, you will. You'll do better than me."
> "That's quite a stretch! I'll never do it. How can I? I was thinking to consult with you about something."
> "It's better to think about how we work."
> Ochir hurried to answer. "I want to know how to work better."
> Dondogmaa was quiet. "You're starting work at 8 o'clock?"
> "Yes, so what?"
> "How many minutes then, before you start?"
> "We properly start working about five or ten minutes after eight."
> "And you finish at five?"
> "Yes, and what's more, we stop about ten minutes early to record our work and some other things."
> "How long are your breaks?"
> "About the same, but when the factory orders come through, we spend time discussing them.
> (Tarva, [1951] 2020, 68-69)

Although the nature of this rivalry might appear unusually collegiate, Chuktikh's ideological blueprint in relation to the later development of Stakhanovism suggests that this was, if not always the reality, then definitely the intended result. In this way, a worker like Ochir would encourage the members of his section to increase their work time and so increase their productivity, which would in turn encourage others, such as Dondogmaa, to do the same.

While there are limits to such human endeavor, the ideological framework within which Tarva composed Dondogmaa's story stands, rather as do the ideals of socialist realism, in an uncertain relationship to what is possible in the physical world. The Stakhanovite congresses in the Soviet Union, the publication of books such as those which Dondogmaa was reading, and the earnest seriousness of Tarva's narrative, all show that what we are reading was to be understood as not only desirable, but achievable, a realistic means of fulfilling the five-year-plan and of advancing Mongolia's developing industrial infrastructure. Like Soli's transformation into the decorated herder Hishigt, such overproduction as Dondogmaa intends for herself may

seem unlikely, but insofar as it is conceivable, by real laborers as much as by fictional ones, it remained within the bounds of possibility. Moreover, the extent to which it was conceivable was in direct relation to the concomitant ideas of truth and morality as defined by a narrative text. Thus, it was through Chutkikh's process of "Socialist emulation" that fictionalized workers such as Dondogmaa became heroes, and their achievements truthful and moral - and therefore imitable - by being aestheticised.[19]

5. In the early revolutionary period, Mongolian writers had composed didactic stories and poems about the naysayers, the elders or monks or nobles who refused to recognize the benefits of the new society, who feared or disparaged the Soviet influence, or who simply yearned for the old order. In these stories, of course, such people eventually either enthusiastically changed their opinion or were revealed as stubborn fools. And yet, we can well imagine that there were many who felt overtaken by events or somehow threatened by the dramatic changes which were taking place. In the same way, Tarva includes two characters, one of whom seeks to prevent Dondogmaa from initiating improvements to the factory, while the other is simply unwilling to exert himself.

These two characters, Pürev and Namsrai, seem not to be mere ciphers for the forces which opposed Mongolia's development. Rather they exhibit human weakness in the face of progress - skepticism and resistance to change, and laziness and a disinclination to engage. There is, moreover, a difference in how these two individuals articulate their opposition. Namsrai is selfish, a low-level worker who is content to do the bare minimum and who, importantly, is as disinterested in any benefit accruing to the factory as he is in listening to Dondogmaa lecturing him about ideology or morality. When Damdin, newly energized by his interactions with Dondogmaa, challenges Namsrai to work harder, Namsrai responds defensively: "You can't tell me what to do. You can't instruct me about anything, either about my life or about my work. You would criticize me for fulfilling 60 or 70 per cent of my quota, but I'll not be criticized. Can you so easily forget that, three days ago, you were last among our workers in transporting the cast-iron? You have no right to lecture me now, nor will you in the future." (Tarva, [1951] 2020, 52) Within the context of Tarva's story, of course, Namsrai's point that Damdin had only a few days before been underperforming backfires, since Damdin's focus here is precisely to encourage Namsrai to improve himself as he himself had done. It is interesting that Namsrai remains unmoved by Damdin's entreaties, and - unlike Pürev, as we shall see - unpunished for his attitude. If Tarva was, through Namsrai's character, acknowledging that some workers were ungovernable, he was also pointing out that socialist ideology - and therefore the society which it defined, and which it sought to build - was flawed in some way, and not in fact a system to which everyone would naturally and inexorably incline. It is unclear from the narrative why Namsrai, whose laziness and antagonism is so directly expressed, was allowed to disappear from sight even as Dondogmaa's plans, which he so denigrates, succeed.

A more insidious attitude, and one with a potentially far more deleterious outcome, is that of the foreman Pürev, who does get his comeuppance, after deliberately seeking to scupper

[19] See, for instance, Dobrenko (2007), pp.35-46 and *passim*.

Dondogmaa's attempts - despite her practical and ideological sense - to improve the factory's turnover. While Namsrai keeps to himself and remains aloof from the other workers, Pürev seems to use his small office as a way of separating himself from the workers for whom he is responsible. Pürev's attitude to the labor undertaken by his underlings is similarly detached and aloof. He rejects first Dondogmaa's suggestion of replacing the factory's furnace -

> "Foreman, I've been thinking about work some more. If it's impossible for us to replace the furnace for smelting cast-iron in the next few days, we need to educate ourselves about how we could do this, to publish a detailed plan, and to study what we will require, and so with these provisions we could achieve something, and…" - and here Pürev interrupted Dondogmaa:
>
> "I've listened to your ideas, and you've explained your plan, and I'll put them before our comrades in positions of leadership. But to my mind, there is no need to replace the cast-iron smelting furnace right now. We could, however, issue a summary, calling for each worker to struggle to surpass their quota, and to realize the plan for the factory."
>
> "But Foreman, I was thinking that we need to show some initiative in order to surpass the plan. How successful are we going to be with empty thoughts of simply working well, if we don't think about this with some initiative?
>
> "For example, if we think that every day we smelt 10 tonnes of cast-iron, the result of replacement will be that we smelt 20 tonnes. So our section, which now is unable to realize 100 per cent of the plan, will be able to realize 200 per cent.
>
> "If the cast-iron smelting section can, in total, realize 100 per cent of the plan, how will you, as the foreman in charge of the section, be considered?" Pürev leant forward and rose from his seat.
>
> "The ideas you're considering are very pure and excellent ideas, they are valuable words, and irrefutable, an understanding which every worker has, but there is no case for doing this now. I would prefer to say that we have no need for it. If you have any other issues, though, we could talk about them." (Tarva, [1951] 2020, 41-42)

And then, when he refuses to consider replacing the transportation method for the smelted iron, it is Dondogmaa's thoughts which we hear:

> *Refuse, refuse, refuse again*, thought Dondogmaa, disgusted by the foreman's narrow-minded attitude. *But what I'm thinking about won't simply remain an idea, but we'll put it into practise. Today, the section foreman refuses, but tomorrow it is certain that we'll be able to serve the administration of the factory and the organization of the Party, and so will we not want to alter the containers for transporting cast-iron and replace the furnaces for smelting the cast-iron? So what do you want to do? That's some thought you've had!* (Tarva, [1951] 2020, 44)

These two perspectives on how labor production might be improved are, in the style of most ideological writing of the time, presented without nuance. Indeed, given that Mongolia's industrial infrastructure was largely underwritten by the Soviet Union, Pürev's reticence might be seen as fiscally responsible. But he is portrayed as distant and resistant, both through Tarva's narrative and in Dondogmaa's inner dialogue (and as the audience, we are expected to agree and sympathize with both), and as far more problematic than Namsrai (although we must

assume that Namsrai represents dissenters like him) in that he is responsible for the factory's production. It is as though Pürev reveals himself, in his fraught interactions with Dondogmaa, as questioning the industrial and ideological potency of Chitkikh's brand of Stakhanovism which drives Dondogmaa and which lies at the heart of the Chonogol workers' appeal, and the Party's emphasis on increased production, so as to fulfill the quotas of the first five-year plan.

When the director Chuluun questions him about Dondogmaa's ideas for improving the factory production, Pürev claims to be in favor of them, but backs down, embarrassed, when challenged about his earlier opinions. In his congratulatory speech, Chuluun lays out the specific virtues of Stakhanovite morality and labor: "Dondogmaa has continually improved her performance, and her thinking comes from her constant innovation and how she has learnt from the leading Soviet workers. We should value in every way thinking like this from our workers." At the same time he condemns Pürev, saying that people like him are "scared of innovation, they try to involve themselves in old-fashioned practices." (Tarva, [1951] 2020, 95) It is clear from Chuluun's speech, which voices the official Party position, that the optimal approach for a worker is to embrace innovative practises enthusiastically, and not to be cautious or questioning. This encompasses a worker's engagement with, and the implicit morality and social rectitude of, Stakhanovite thinking (and Chutkikh's refinement of it), and identifies a worker such as Dondogmaa as a "new person", and thereby a moral person according to socialist ideology, in Mongolia's new society.

6. It is clear from the descriptions of the characters in *Damirangiinhan*, and from their interactions, not only who is to be considered moral, but more importantly how this behavior is to be expressed. Although Namsrai and Pürev are shown as loners - the description especially of how Pürev disappears into his small office emphasizes this - they are largely overshadowed by Dondogmaa's proactivity as the story progresses, and all but forgotten. That neither sees the error of their ways might suggest either that for literature repentance and conversion was no longer regarded as particularly crucial (as it had been during the early revolutionary period), or that the focus should be solely on emphasizing the social and national rewards of Chutkikh's new approach to Stakhanovism.

Moral and social privilege, then, was to be given to those who aim at a constant increase in production. It should be noted that, despite key references to Chutkikh, nowhere in the story is any mention made of the quality of the smelted iron which the factory produces, but only of the quantity. The numerical percentage of the quota fulfilled becomes like a badge, an easily-determined, simplistic, yet socially vital, indicator of personal worth, giving exceptionally (and often unrealistically) productive labor (in Dondogmaa's case) and earnest improvement in labor (in Damdin's case) the patina of ethical and moral goodness. However, we can see the beginnings of the shift towards Chutkikh's "shock brigades" and "top-quality teams" in the mention of the factory's "Youth" brigade, and its leader Sodnom, who are also finally recognized with an award for labor.

7. Tarva brings the threads of his story together in his final scene, which takes place at the May 1st celebrations in Ulaanbaatar to mark International Workers' Day. Choibalsan presided at

this May 1st celebration in 1951, but died the following February, before that year's festivities. His death and the death of Stalin a year later changed the ideological perspective in Mongolia, as Stalin's did in the Soviet Union. *Damirangiinhan* is, then, a rare snapshot of a signal moment in Mongolian history when a literary work could create a socialist reality in which a "new person" such as Dondogmaa might through hard work, education, and determination, transform an act of labor into something to inspire, advance, and unify Mongolian society, and so become a true hero of labor.

8. And yet, though we might call Dondogmaa a "new woman", one who embodies the Socialist principles of equality and hard work and Party spirit, if we compare her with some of her Soviet counterparts, or if we examine her attitude and activity critically with regard to the Party's expectations for such a character, we can perhaps see cracks in her apparent perfection. As the ideological lodestar of Soviet literature, it was to Maksim Gorkii that Mongolian writers looked to guide their treatment of socialist life in general, and of socialist heroes in particular. In his address to the Writers' Congress, Dügersüren had offered the following advice:

> [T]he heroes in our literature should, in all literary genres, be the leaders of our generation, the herders, intellectuals, and revolutionary fighters, and they should show their honorable character, and their striving to advance quickly at the head of the Party. Comrade Zhdanov said, in a speech, that "it is not the aim of literature to follow the people's demands to the letter, but rather to enrich the people by way of their hearts, and so to advance them. It fulfills their demands, although it cannot stand shoulder to shoulder with them, and inevitably leaves behind those who are unable to complete the task of advancing Soviet culture." (*Mongolyn zohiolchdyn anhdugaar ih hural,* 1948, 27)

Zhdanov's characteristically hardline rhetoric here has echoes in some of the critiques which were later[20] leveled at Tarva's portrayal of Dondogmaa. According to Ch.Dorjdagva, writing in 1980,

> D.Tarva, who wrote the first novella on the subject of the laboring class, in pointing out the characteristics of the leading workers, was unable, in creating a principal character to be imitated, to show his principal character as having a positive outlook [sain talyn baatar], which is a central requirement of Socialist Realism. The requirement of Socialist Realism is to show the true situation as it pertains within revolution and development. But in aligning his main character with this, because of the nature of the final result, Tarva abandons the conflicts which the hero experiences, and instead shows the hero as taking the easy way out. (Dagvadorj, 1983, 114-115)

Although Dagvadorj was writing in a somewhat different ideological atmosphere than pertained during the final years of Stalin's life, the continuity of praxis and outlook flowing from the 1934 speech in which Gorkii presented Socialist Realism remains. We could read

[20] Such critiques came much later. Indeed, Stalinism - and so the ideological basis upon which Stalinist literature was composed - ended so soon after the publication of *Damirangiinhan* that very little criticism of the novella was ever published. In D.Sengee's address to the second Writers' Congress in 1958, his only comment about *Damirangiinhan* was to use Tarva's treatment of Dondogmaa as an example of how good female leads "capture the affection of everyone they meet or engage with, they are utterly without blemish, 'their eyebrows fluttering, and cheeks red as berries'," (Sengee, 1978, 485) which comment ignores entirely the nature of Dondogmaa's contribution and, presumably, Tarva's intention in constructing her character.

Dagvadorj's complaint as suggesting that Tarva drew Dondogmaa as insufficiently proactive,[21] unwilling to challenge Namsrai's lack of commitment and Party spirit and to push him to change his mind, and unwilling also perhaps to push back against Pürev when his resistance threatens to stymie her plans. It seems that Dagvadorj is claiming that, despite Dondogmaa's achievements, they came in spite of her nature, and not because of it.[22]

The timely ideological message of *Damirangiinhan*, focused on instilling in Mongolian industrial workers the ideas of Stakhanov and Chutkikh, did not last however. Within a couple of years, with the deaths of Choibalsan and Stalin, Mongolian culture began a turn away from the transcendent ideas of Socialist Realism and towards a more nuanced perspective of life. The fact that the poems of the praise-singer (*yeröölch*) Ch.Jigmed (1896-1965; Jigmed 1978) composed in traditional Mongolian forms (albeit still with largely political themes), became popular during this time suggests a broader understanding of what Mongolian literature could encompass. Moreover, works of fiction such as S.Udval's (1921-1981) 1957 novella *Odgerel* (Udval, 2001, 93-164) and O.Tsend's (1929-1981) short story "A Great Mystery" (*Mash nuuts*, 1956; *Mongolyn shildeg ögüülegüüd*, 1961, 491-498)[23] present a view of Mongolia's modern society which is at once psychologically more complex and less ideologically focused, exploring interwoven relationships rather than promoting trajectories already defined by the State.

During the 1950s, *Damirangiinhan* was also used in school literature textbooks to help form the characters of young workers. In a 1956 textbook, which included the final section of the novella, recounting the successful replacement of the factory's furnace and the May 1st celebrations (including Dondogmaa's award), the young readers are asked to consider the following two questions: "In this text, how is the new initiative of new, young workers shown through Dondogmaa's character?" and "What situations bring Dondogmaa to such success?"(*Uran zohiolyn unshih bichig* 1956, 43-55). These questions encourage their readers to think about labor within the context of society, rather than within the simple, and more readily defined, context of the workplace. The influence, then, of both Tarva's narrative and his portrayal of Dondogmaa's principled and determined character continued to exercise an effect on Mongolia's post-Stalinist culture and the revolutionary workers which it was tasked to produce.

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[21] Perhaps he was comparing Dondogmaa with a more aggressive female lead such as Dasha in Fyodor Gladkov's 1925 novel *Cement* (*Tsement*). Although written before the instigation of Socialist Realism, and written too in a period of tremendous social change in the Soviet Union, Dasha's character is that of a "new woman" *par excellence*, a strong, independent woman whose resolve wins round her skeptical husband Gleb, making of him a "new man". Regarding the portrayal of Soviet new women in literature, particularly in *Cement*, see *inter alia* Veselá, 2003.

[22] Like Dagvadorj thirty years later, in his review of *Damirangiinhan*, published soon after the book appeared, D.Darjaa likewise critiques Tarva's portrayal of labor, and makes a point of reminding his readers about the importance of "portray[ing] in a realist way our happy lives, and to express the characters of proud workers." (Darjaa, 1951)

[23] Translated in Wickhamsmith, 2021, 93-102.

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